

The Cuban Missile Crisis, On the Verge of World War III: A Man You've Never Heard of Saved Your Life

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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On October 27, 1962, a man you've never heard of saved your life ...

It was at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, when the U.S. and Soviet Union were on hair trigger alert for World War Three.

And an order to launch a nuclear missile against Americans was *actually given* by the commander and political officer of a Soviet nuclear submarine.

One man stopped global nuclear war.

Edward Wilson [explains](#) in the Guardian:

An American spy plane had been shot down over Cuba while another U2 had got lost and strayed into Soviet airspace. As these dramas ratcheted tensions beyond breaking point, an American destroyer, the USS Beale, began to drop depth charges on the B-59, a Soviet submarine armed with a nuclear weapon.

The captain of the B-59, Valentin Savitsky, had no way of knowing that the depth charges were non-lethal "practice" rounds intended as warning shots to force the B-59 to surface. The Beale was joined by other US destroyers who piled in to pummel the submerged B-59 with more explosives. The exhausted Savitsky assumed that his submarine was doomed and that world war three had broken out. He ordered the B-59's ten kiloton nuclear torpedo to be prepared for firing. Its target was the USS Randolph, the giant aircraft carrier leading the task force.

If the B-59's torpedo had vaporised the Randolph, the nuclear clouds would quickly have spread from sea to land. The first targets would have been Moscow, London, the airbases of East Anglia and troop concentrations in Germany. The next wave of bombs would have wiped out "economic targets", a euphemism for civilian populations - more than half the UK population would have died. Meanwhile, the Pentagon's SIOP, [Single Integrated Operational Plan](#) - a doomsday scenario that echoed [Dr Strangelove's](#) orgiastic Götterdämmerung - would have hurled 5,500 nuclear weapons against a thousand targets, including ones in non-belligerent states such as Albania and China.

The decision not to start world war three was not taken in the Kremlin or the White House, but in the sweltering control room of a submarine. The launch of the B-59's nuclear torpedo required the consent of all three senior officers aboard. Arkhipov was alone in refusing permission. It is certain that Arkhipov's

reputation was a key factor in the control room debate. The previous year the young officer had exposed himself to severe radiation in order to save a submarine with an overheating reactor. That radiation dose eventually contributed to his death in 1998.

PBS' *The Man Who Saved the World* adds details:

Just how close the world came to complete destruction during those dark October days has only recently come to light.

"I now believe that it could have meant the end of humanity."

"I saw Defence Secretary McNamara, take Dean Rusk to the side and said, 'The sun is setting, it could be the last sunset we will ever see.' And that's when I got scared."

"There is a specific signal that we have, and that is 3 explosions, grenade explosions, which means you have to surface.

I don't know what the Americans were doing, but it wasn't three..."

The American signal to surface is different from the Russians ...

[The commander and political officer of the Russian nuclear sub both command the launch of a nuclear weapon against the Americans. But Arkhipov said:]

"We don't know that this is an attack - for all we know they are trying to surface us..."

The future of the world now rests on Vasili Arkhipov's shoulders...

[Gary Slaughter, signalman aboard the American destroyer USS Cony:] "God only bless the man because err, what would have happened after that? We would have been a nuclear war with Soviet Russia, and there would maybe perhaps not be a world."

We only avoided a nuclear war because one man - Arkhipov - put down his foot and said no.

Postscript: We are also grateful to American military heroes - many of them anonymous - who have blown the whistle on things [which could also have led](#) to nuclear war.

Unfortunately, Michel Chossudovsky documents In [Towards a World War III Scenario](#) that the U.S. is *currently* so enamored with nuclear weapons that it has authorized low-level field

commanders to use them in the heat of battle in their sole discretion ... without any approval from civilian leaders.

Given that top Russians, Americans and Poles say that [we're once again drifting towards a nuclear confrontation with Russia](#), cool-headed, ethical commanders may be our best chance of preventing catastrophe.

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