

Vasili Arkhipov, The Man Who Stopped Nuclear War

He was the man who saved the world by single-handedly averting World War Three five decades ago, yet he died humiliated, outcast and an unknown. Only now has his story has come to light.

For 13 days during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, the world held its breath as the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. stood on the brink of nuclear war.

At the height of the Cold War, when paranoia on both sides meant the slightest provocation could spark nuclear war, four submarines secretly set sail from Russia to communist Cuba. Only a handful of the submariners on board knew that their ships carried nuclear weapons, each with the strength of the bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945.

Vasili Arkhipov, aboard the sub B59, was one of them. As his craft neared Cuba, U.S. helicopters, airplanes and battleships were scouring the ocean for Russian subs.

'At that period of time it was called "special weapon", not "nuclear torpedo";' said Viktor Mikhailov, junior navigator on Sub B-59. 'At that time we couldn't even imagine a nuclear torpedo.'

In a game of high stakes cat and mouse it wasn't long before the Russians were spotted. Arkhipov's sub was forced to make an emergency dive.

As the submariners tried to stay hidden from their US hunters, conditions in the sub deteriorated. For a week they stayed underwater, in sweltering 140 degree heat, rationed to just one glass of water a day.

Above them, the U.S. navy were 'hunting by exhaustion' - trying to force the Soviet sub to come to the surface to recharge its batteries. They had no idea that on board the submarines were weapons capable of destroying the entire American fleet.

Gary Slaughter, a signalman on board the USS Cony battleship, said: 'We knew they were probably having trouble breathing. It was hot as hell in there, they were miserable.'

'They were cramped together and they had been under great stress for a long time. Basically what we were trying to do was apply passive torture.'

'Frankly I don't think we felt any sympathy for them at all. They were the enemy.'
The Americans decided to ratchet up the pressure, and dropped warning grenades into the sea. Inside the sub, the Soviet submariners thought they were under attack.
Valentin Savitsky, the captain of B59, was convinced the nuclear war had already started.

He demanded that the submariners launch their torpedo to save some of Russia's pride.

A recent PBS documentary revealed how in any normal circumstances Savitsky's orders would have been followed, and World War Three would have been unleashed.

Ryurik Ketov, commander of another sub, Sub B-4, said: 'Vasili Arkhipov was a submariner and a close friend of mine. He was a family friend. He stood out for being cool-headed. He was in control.'

Savitsky hadn't counted on Arkhipov. As commander of the fleet, Arkhipov had the last veto. And although his men were against him, he insisted that they must not fire - and instead surrender.

It was a humiliating move - but one that saved the world. The Soviet submariners were forced to return to their native Russia, where they were given the opposite of a hero's welcome.
Historian Thomas Blanton told the Sun: 'What heroism, what duty, they fulfilled to go halfway across the world and come back, and survive.'

'But in fact, one of the Russian admirals told the submariners; "It would have been better if you'd gone down with your ship."
Extraordinary.'

Four decades passed before the story of what really happened on the B59 sub was discovered. It was after Arkhipov had died in 1998 from radiation poisoning.

But to his widow Olga, he was always a hero. She said: 'He knew that it was madness to fire the nuclear torpedo. In Cuba, in honor of the 40th anniversary of the crisis, people gathered. They said that the person who prevented a nuclear war was the Russian submariner Vasili Arkhipov. I was proud and I am proud of my husband always.'



- Which of the following best describes the structure of the article?
 - The author hooks the reader, provides additional background information in sequential order, then concludes the article by giving a specific cause and effect
 - The author hooks the reader, provides detailed, scientific information and finally concludes the article by comparing and contrasting emotions
 - The author hooks the reader, compares differing viewpoints of the story, then contrasts the effects of the cold war from several different perspectives.
 - The author hooks the reader, provides historical information in sequential order, and concludes the article by comparing and presenting a solution to a problem.
- Which word could replace "deteriorated" and mean nearly the same thing?

"As the submariners tried to stay hidden from their US hunters, conditions in the sub deteriorated."

 - Debunked
 - Defunct
 - Declined
 - Debriefed
- What is the effect of the personal quotes and statements scattered throughout the article?
 - It makes the reader see Arkhipov on a more personal level. It adds a sense of appreciation and triumph. Rather than viewing him as a man who did not comply, he is seen as a man who accepted his role as a scapegoat in order to save many.
 - It makes the reader identify with those who were on the submarine. One can truly feel the anguish, fear, and "passive torture" that the men must have endured.
 - It makes the reader view Arkhipov as a man who was not only disloyal to his country, but somewhat responsible for the downfall and backlash received by those who had no choice but to follow his treasonous orders.
 - It makes the reader feel a sense of anger toward those who blindly followed a man so consumed by his own personal agenda and fear of failure.
- What is implied by the following statement: 'But in fact, one of the Russian admirals told the submariners; "it would have been better if you'd gone down with your ship."
 - The men in charge were relieved with Arkhipov's decision
 - The world applauded Arkhipov's decision to not follow orders, but to save many
 - Many people in high positions were not pleased with Arkhipov's decision and thought it made their country appear weak.
 - Many people in high positions were pleased with Arkhipov's decision and thought it made their country appear to be compassionate.
- What is an objective summary of the selection?
 - Arkhipov made valiant and crucial decisions during The Cuban Missile Crisis which could have possibly saved many lives.
 - Arkhipov saved many lives by his controversial decision not to follow orders and fire nuclear weapons during the Cuban Missile Crisis.
 - During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Arkhipov made the best decision possible for his country, and, in the end, the rest of the world.
 - During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Arkhipov decided not to launch nuclear weapons which, in return, was the worst move the country could have made toward establishing their dominance