

# 40 Years After Missile Crisis, Players Swap Stories in Cuba

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HAVANA, Oct. 12—There was pandemonium on the Soviet B-59 submarine. A U.S. destroyer was lobbing depth charges into the water as a warning: Surface or you will be attacked. The explosions pounded the sub's hull like blasts from a sledgehammer. Oxygen was running out. Crewmen were fainting.

Tensions were extreme: It was Oct. 27, 1962, the height of the Cuban missile crisis.

Officers on the Soviet were screaming for the captain to sink the U.S. ship. What the Americans did not know nearly blew up the world: The Soviet sub, and three others in the waters off Cuba, each carried one torpedo tipped with a nuclear warhead.

Vadim Orlov, a crewman on the Soviet sub, recounted the little-known story here this weekend during a conference marking the 40th anniversary of the missile crisis.

Historians have long noted that the United States and the Soviet Union came within a whisper of nuclear war during the 13-day stand-off, after the United States discovered that Moscow had secretly installed nuclear missiles in Cuba.

The account, from Orlov and J.W. Peterson, a crewman from the U.S. destroyer, made it clear that the Cold War enemies came far closer than anyone ever realized to stumbling into a nuclear holocaust.

Former defense secretary Robert S. McNamara said he could easily have escalated into a full-scale nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Orlov, who described the episode in a book published earlier this year, said that came within one word of happening: The sub was authorized to fire its nuclear torpedo with the approval of three officers aboard; two wanted to shoot, the third said no.

"A guy named Arkhipov saved the world," said Thomas S. Blanton, director of the National Security Archive, a research group at George Washington University that organized this week's conference with the Cuban government, and arranged the declassification of thousands of new documents that the participants are reviewing.

It has been a weekend of casual nuclear annihilation. The



BY JOSE GONIA—ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cuban President Fidel Castro listens to former defense secretary Robert McNamara at a conference in Havana on the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

tion were lined up like a living page from a history book. McNamara sat in a blue and white polo shirt. Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. looked out through thick glasses, wearing his trademark bow tie, addressing his old adversaries with sharp logic and perfect diction.

Ethel Kennedy, widow of Robert F. Kennedy, sat behind McNamara with fine posture and fashion, a living reminder of other prices paid during a tumultuous era.

Kennedy speechwriter Theodore C. Sorensen was remarkably youthful and trim in a black polo shirt. Fellow Kennedy aide Richard Goodwin, his hair wild and curly, sat alongside him and told Castro a story, at a party in Uruguay in August 1961.

Castro laughed as Goodwin spoke of sitting cross-legged on the floor talking to Guevara about hemispheric tensions. He said Guevara gave him a mahogany box filled with Cuban cigars, which Goodwin delivered to President Kennedy. He said Kennedy immediately grabbed one and lit it up. Then, in an echo of the CIA's attempts to kill Castro with poisoned cigars, Kennedy joked that he probably ought to have made Goodwin test a cigar first, just in case.

William Ecker, 78, a retired U.S. Navy captain, was a pilot who flew low-level sorties in an F-8 fighter jet to photograph Soviet missile installations in Cuba. His close-up pictures taken on Oct. 23, proved beyond doubt the existence of the missiles. On Sunday, the conference

spinning out of control.

On that day, new surveillance photos showed that the missile sites were now fully operational. He said the missiles could be fueled and launched on six to eight hours' notice. A U.S. U-2 spy plane had been shot down over Cuba. On the other side of the world, another U-2 strayed into Soviet airspace and Soviet MiG fighter jets scrambled to intercept it, adding to already white-hot tensions. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev had not been seen in three days, adding to speculation that he had been overthrown by hard-liners.

Brugioni's said his boss at the CIA returned from briefing Kennedy, said he replied. "The president is very concerned."

"I called my wife and I said, 'If you get another call from me, put the kids in the car and head for Missouri,'" said Brugioni, who brought his 22-year-old grandson to the conference. "October 27 is a day I'll never forget. The planet could have been destroyed."