



Meanwhile, a Soviet submarine designated B-59 had been dispatched from the USSR with three other submarines, as part of the top-secret effort to install ballistic nuclear missiles in Cuba. By the time President Kennedy learned of the plan, these subs were halfway across the Atlantic. As part of Stevenson's suggested peaceful solution, Kennedy announced the quarantine of Cuba by the United States Navy. Cuba would be sealed off to prevent any Russian ships from getting through.

The submarines were nearing the island when they were ordered by the Soviet naval command to change course and take up positions in the Sargasso Sea. Conditions in the submarines, which were designed for the icy waters of the North, were hellish. American destroyers were practically on top of the sub - this prevented it from surfacing to recharge its batteries and use its antenna to receive instructions from Moscow. After 5 days of waiting underwater, conditions on B-59 were so bad that men were passing out. In the words of one, 'they were falling like dominoes'. The boat's captain, Valentin Savitsky, knew from previous days' communications that a crisis was unfolding above the waves but, unable to receive radio signals, he had no way of learning about recent developments.

To avoid any escalation to armed conflict, American warships were supposed to follow a careful protocol when they came across Russian submarines. They were to drop harmless depth charges and instruct the subs to surface. But that day, someone on the American warship decided to drop hand grenades into the water. The suffering Soviet submarine was suddenly rocked by a series of explosions.

Vadim Orlov, a communications specialist on board the sub, later described it thus: 'It felt like you are sitting in a metal barrel which somebody is constantly blasting with a sledgehammer.' The captain ordered the crew to get ready to fire back. 'Maybe the war has

already started up there, while we are doing somersaults here,' he shrieked. 'We are going to blast them now!'

What the grenade throwers did not know - what almost no one knew until quite recently

radiation. Within days, eight of the crewmembers who had volunteered for the task were dead.

Archipov had been on board and had seen the horror of radiation. It was he who talked the sub's captain down from firing B-59's nuclear torpedo and potentially starting the Third World War. If it hadn't been for Archipov's experience off Greenland, he might not have stepped in. But that was not the only piece of luck required to avoid war. Things might have been very different. Archipov could have been aboard a different submarine. Kennedy might not have met Stevenson and been persuaded to try a peaceful solution. The message from

violent, desperate conclusion, a single man stepped forward and did what he thought was right.

Everyone in this room owes their life to a man whose name you had never heard. Vasily Archipov has no statues. He is almost completely forgotten. But what he did on October 27,