

Impact Statement

Truman Terrell, Grade 12.

T Minus, 2017.

Acrylic, charcoal, ink, spray paint on paper, 20 x 10 Inches.

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Unsung Hero: Vasili Arkhipov

On October 27th, 1962, during the climax of the Cuban Missile Crisis, fourteen U.S. destroyers located a Foxtrot-class Soviet submarine in the Caribbean Sea and began dropping depth charges. Onboard the submarine, the B-59, three officers commanded the operations of the massive machine. Radio contact from Moscow had ceased once the sub dove to sufficient depths to evade U.S. pursuers, leaving the officers completely isolated from the outside world. In the lack of radio traffic, members of the crew were left to individually speculate whether or not war had broken out in the world above. Functions of the ship began to deteriorate, as air conditioning failed and the temperature soared. The captain, Valentin Grigorievitch Savitsky, decided that nuclear war had begun, and desired to fire the submarine's nuclear payload in retaliation. Unlike other submarines in the Soviet fleet, B-59 required all three commanding officers on board to unanimously agree on the launch of a nuclear weapon. Generally, subs only required the top two commanders to agree, but the flotilla commander was also on board, a man named Vasili Arkhipov. An argument broke out on the submarine, amongst the stifling heat and intense crampedness, with only Arkhipov opposing the launch.

As the sole dissenter of the three men controlling the fate of nuclear missiles aboard the Soviet B-59 submarine, Vasili Arkhipov single handedly averted a devastating nuclear crisis. Under pressure from extreme temperatures, failing systems, and complete isolation, Vasili stood firm in denying his fellow officers a chance to launch a "retaliatory strike" on the United States (leading to potentially catastrophic firestorm). The courageous aspects displayed in Vasili's actions mirror traditional heroes. Standing against adversity, firm conviction in one's beliefs, and successful de-escalation all fit American ideals of heroic actions, yet Arkhipov's contributions are unrecognized not only by the majority of Americans, but citizens across the world. I chose to highlight Vasili Arkhipov's due to the far-reaching implications of his actions. His choice to surface the armed submarine may very well be the reason the world we know today exists. Suffice it to say, the extent of his anonymity is surprising and not the least bit acceptable. The artwork I created for the Unsung Heroes Project attempts to convey the magnitude of his actions and inspire respect for the Russian commander's actions. His prevalence in the piece is emphasized by his restrained gesture, gently attempting to dissuade an approaching co-commander (seen in the foreground with a nuclear launch key). Furthermore, Arkhipov is confined to the mid-right of the piece, comparing his suitably smaller stature to the menacing nuclear missile behind him. He is also confined by a dark shadow, utilized to emphasize the cramped, uncomfortable conditions aboard the submarine. His figure is the only major source of color throughout the work, drawing the eye despite its relatively muted color scheme. The rigid, mechanical nature of his surroundings bring Arkhipov forward even more, signifying that humans are capable of mastering their creations.