

## **How did the Cuban Missile Crisis almost lead to nuclear war?**

27th of October, 1962. Under attack from US forces, a Soviet submarine prepared a nuclear torpedo for launch. But how did the USA and the USSR get so close to nuclear war?

The Cuban Missile Crisis began two weeks earlier, when U.S. spy planes photographed missile sites in Cuba and inbound nuclear missiles on Soviet ships. The US saw this as a massive threat.

A missile would take minutes to reach their mainland. But the USSR saw their aims as defensive: One, to match US missiles in Turkey. Two, to protect Cuba after the Bay of Pigs attack. And three, to show Khrushchev's strength to rivals at home.

In response Kennedy set up a naval blockade on the 24th October to prevent more missiles arriving.

He also raised Defcon, which meant putting US bombers and troops on alert. Khrushchev continued construction in Cuba and vowed to push through this blockade, but Soviet ships slowed down or turned back, showing their wariness of open conflict.

On October 27th, a US spy plane was shot down and a Soviet submarine nearly launched a nuclear torpedo, while Hawks in Washington pressed for strikes.

But by then, Khrushchev and Kennedy were negotiating, both well aware of mutually assured destruction. Khrushchev agreed to remove Soviet missiles from Cuba in exchange for a US pledge not to invade.

Secretly, the US also agreed to withdraw its nuclear weapons from Turkey. Both leaders could claim success. The crisis nearly caused war, but it also had positive outcomes. A direct phone line was set up between the White House and the Kremlin, and a Test Ban Treaty was signed in 1963.