

Cuban Missile Crisis

By Jim Corcoleotes

I was in the Navy for three years after high school. They were drafting back then and my brother-in-law, Ron, told me that to avoid getting drafted, he joined the Navy before he turned 18, and then they let him out the day before he turned 21. So I decided that three years in the Navy has got to be better than two years in the Army. After signing up I was sent to boot camp in San Diego and then I went to sonar school became a sonar man. After graduating I was assigned to the destroyer, U.S.S. Beale in Norfolk on the East Coast.

One day we were sailing around in the Atlantic, when suddenly we turned and started going full speed. I thought this was weird and wondered what was going on. Then the captain announced over the PA that we were going to Cuba. It was the start of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

When we got to the area near Cuba, there were a whole lot of ships sailing around. We cruised in the area for a while we suddenly picked up a contact on sonar. We determined right away it was definitely a submarine. We notified the captain of our ship who called higher ups and found that we didn't have any subs in the area. So we knew this *had* to be a Russian sub.

We tracked the sub for several days. He tried to give us the slip but we had a really good sonar crew and we stayed right on him. While I was on the "stack", the sub sent out decoys and a smokescreen but I stayed right on his butt.

Then one night the captain got on the PA and announced that the sub had surfaced off our port side. I ran up on deck to see it. It was dark out but a US helicopter was overhead shining floodlights on the sub. It was only about 75 yards away from us. The hatch opened up and a Russian officer came up and raised the Russian flag. We had 'em dead to rights. There was no escape and a little while later the sub went back down and left the area.

Several years ago there was an article about the Cuban Missile Crisis in the newspaper. It said that when we picked up the sub on sonar, the captain of the Russian sub called Khrushchev and Khrushchev told him to fire a torpedo at us. The captain of the sub refused to do so. I can't imagine the trouble he got into by refusing an order from Khrushchev!

We could have easily avoided a torpedo, but the thing is, their torpedoes had nuclear warheads on them and with so many ships in the Gulf, I am sure a torpedo would have hit one of the ships pretty close to us and blown up half of the Gulf. I could've died that day! I wish I could've met the sub's captain to thank him for what he did. He actually saved my life, not to mention the lives that would have been lost had he fired that torpedo and World War III had broken out!