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Process Paper

Stanislav Petrov: An Unlikely Hero of the Cold War

I initially stumbled upon Stanislav Petrov's story while surfing the web roughly a year ago. I was astonished at how I had never heard of this man before, given that he may legitimately be the only man that can say he saved the world. It was apparent that none of my peers knew about him beforehand as well. To me, the whole situation was quite comical: Stanislav Petrov, after saving the world, retired into relative obscurity and just became a regular grumpy old man that nobody would suspect of being one of humanity's greatest heroes. His story made a memorable impression on me, and when my teacher announced the theme of "taking a stand" in class, my mind instinctively jumped to his story.

We started our research by looking at the Wikipedia page for the False Alarm Incident to refresh my memory and gain a broad understanding of the event. We realized that the event itself covered only one short night, so our next step in conducting research was to look at the context and historical events preceding the False Alarm Incident. We began with getting a deeper understanding of the Cold War through its webpage on History.com. From there, we chose the events or things that we deemed the most relevant to understanding the circumstances of the False Alarm Incident. Next, we looked for further information and quote-worthy material on National Security Archive and Wilson Center Digital Archive. Other trustworthy secondary sources were referenced as well. Through our research, we hope to help the viewer comprehend all the sources of tension, how they relate to the False Alarm Incident, and how Petrov resisted and stood up to them.

We chose to use website as the medium because it was the one we were most comfortable with. Weebly's UI was particularly easy to work with. We decided on using the black and white color scheme to convey a sense of tension and danger while representing the duality of Petrov's decision. Most of our images were taken from articles on the Internet, with some screenshots of primary documents. Quotes were primarily used to provide different perspectives of the event. The False Alarm Incident page, however, was focused on Petrov and his own feelings during the incident. We included a short "Choose your own adventure" section on the home page

to function as a hook and put the viewer in Stanislav Petrov's shoes at the time of the incident.

We interpreted "taking a stand" as making a critical decision in the face of adversities. In this case, although it seems that he did not stand against an obvious physical manifestation, he took a stand for world peace through resisting the rampant paranoia that characterized the Cold War, the irrationality often paired with it, and the strict protocol of the Soviet military. His success in maintaining his rationality and individuality in the Soviet military where compliance is rewarded may have allowed for the world to continue peacefully into the present.