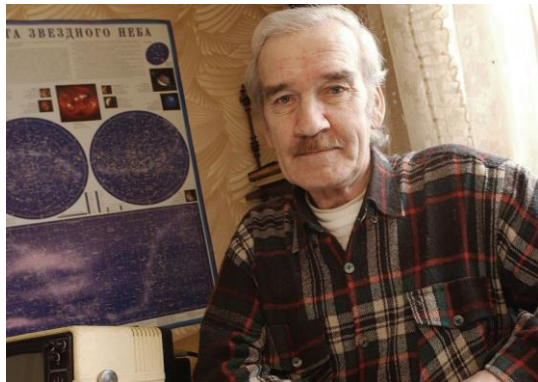# personal english

Trivia

The Man Who Saved the World… By Doing Nothing!

Stanislav Yevgrafovich Petrov (1939-2017) was a lieutenant colonel of the **Soviet Air Defense Forces** who became known as 'the man who single-handedly saved the world from nuclear war' for his role in the **1983 Soviet nuclear false alarm incident**. On 26 September 1983, just three weeks after the Soviet military had shot **down Korean Air Lines Flight 007**, Petrov was the duty officer at the command center for the **Oko nuclear early-warning system** when the system reported that a missile had been launched from the United States, followed by up to five more. Petrov judged the reports to be a **false alarm**, and his decision is credited with having prevented an erroneous retaliatory nuclear attack on the United States and its NATO allies that could have resulted in a **world-scale nuclear war**. Investigation later confirmed that the Soviet satellite warning system had indeed malfunctioned. According to the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the UN – on **19 January 2006**, over 22 years after the incident – nuclear retaliation requires that **multiple sources confirm an attack**. In any case, the incident exposed a serious flaw in the Soviet early warning system. Late in his life, Petrov stated that he had been neither rewarded nor punished for his actions. Petrov also explained that, among the reasons behind his decision, were the facts that five missiles seemed an illogical start, that the launch detection system was new and (in his opinion) not yet wholly trustworthy, that the message had passed through 30 layers of verification too quickly, and that ground radar had failed to pick up corroborative evidence, even after minutes of delay. With no certainty about the erroneity of the alarm, though, Petrov went out on a limb when he decided to **break the military protocol** – a risky decision which serendipitously resulted in rescuing the world.

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