

its actions, Firestone also disregarded basic principles of business ethics that advocate public safety, customer service, and strong relationships with other companies.

Critics and public relations experts agree that Firestone reacted to the situation in the worst way possible by ignoring the problem, delaying the recall, and trying to place blame elsewhere. Even though Ono publicly apologized to accident victims' families, Firestone never seemed to take responsibility, or admit fault, for the tire defects. Meanwhile, for business and public relations students, this event became a case study of how not to handle a recall.

—*Sherri Ward Massey*

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RUSSIAN SUBMARINE SINKS, KILLING 118 CREW MEMBERS

August 12, 2000

After the Russian submarine Kursk sank in the Barents Sea, the Russian government hesitated to accept British and Norwegian rescue offers. The entire crew of 118 died.

LOCALE: Barents Sea

CATEGORIES: Military; Tragedies

KEY FIGURES

Vladimir Putin (b. 1952), acting president of Russia, 1999-May 7, 2000; president May 7, 2000-2008 and after 2012

Vyacheslav Popov (b. 1946), admiral who commanded the Russian Northern Fleet

SUMMARY OF EVENT

The K-141 *Kursk*, the pride of the Russian fleet, sank on August 12, 2000, with the loss of all hands. The ship had been commissioned in 1994 at a cost of \$1 billion. At 18 meters wide, 154 meters long, 5 stories high, and 18,000 tons, the guided-missile nuclear submarine was the size of two jumbo jets laid end to end. Described

as the most effective multipurpose submarine in the world, the submarine was designed to operate against aircraft carriers and their battle groups close to Russian waters.

The *Kursk* crew consisted of eighty-six commissioned and warrant officers, thirty-one noncommissioned officers and sailors, and one civilian. After loading up with eighteen torpedoes and twenty-three Granit cruise missiles at the Bolshaya Lopatka naval facility at the Zapadnaya Litsa submarine base, the *Kursk* had traveled to Vidyayev, where most of the crew lived. With a full crew, it had proceeded to the Barents Sea.

On August 12, 2000, the Russian Northern Fleet began its annual military exercises in the Barents Sea. The maneuvers were the largest Russian naval training exercise since the collapse of the Soviet Union. More than thirty warships and seventy-eight hundred naval personnel took part, including cruisers, antisubmarine ships, three nuclear submarines, auxiliary vessels, ten shore-based army units, two airborne armies, and elements of the Ukrainian air force. As usual, the Russians' Barents Sea exercises were being closely watched by

members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). One of the Russian submarines was the *Kursk*.

On August 12, the *Kursk*, under Captain Gennady Lyachin, successfully test-fired a Granit cruise missile with a dummy warhead. The ship then went to a point about 85 miles east of Severomorsk and Russia's Arctic coast. It planned to fire a 650-millimeter-diameter, two-ton, ten-meter-long practice torpedo with a dummy warhead at a battle group of ships.

During the years since the end of the Cold War, Russia had lacked the money to provide the armed forces with the best technology. As a result, torpedoes used in exercises were collected from the seabed later. The torpedo—more than twenty-five years old and from a 1953 design—that the *Kursk* crew planned to fire had been recycled. The Russians still used the highly volatile hydrogen peroxide fluid as an oxidant for propellant fuel. The British had abandoned hydrogen peroxide torpedoes following the 1955 sinking of a submarine after a torpedo's casing had exploded while it was being loaded. At 8:51 a.m., the *Kursk* contacted the Northern Fleet's headquarters to confirm its current position and its intention to launch a torpedo. The test-firing was scheduled for 11:30 a.m. Admiral Vyacheslav Popov, leader of the training exercise, remained nearby on another ship and awaited further contact from the *Kursk*.

The torpedo exploded as it was being slid into its firing tube on the *Kursk*. A mechanical breakdown inside the old torpedo, perhaps the result of a faulty component, such as an O-ring or sealant, had led to an internal leak. The inside of the torpedo had become a volatile mix of superheated water, pure oxygen, kerosene, and hydrogen peroxide. A physicochemical reaction ensued, resulting in increased pressure and temperature, and the torpedo's casing exploded, creating a massive fireball of more than 8,000 degrees Celsius in the submarine's first compartment. Everyone in the torpedo compartment died instantly. The torpedo tube's door blew into the second compartment. The hatch between the torpedo compartment and the central command post remained open, against regulations, to lower the pressure at the time of a torpedo firing. As a result, the fireball killed the captain and the other senior officers in the second compartment.

The men in the other seven compartments of the submarine began emergency procedures. Some men fought to contain the fire and heavy smoke. Meanwhile, the *Kursk* began to drop from its position 16 to 18 meters below the surface. The second explosion,

one hundred times greater than the first, occurred when the submarine had descended to about 100 meters. The fire and intense heat in the torpedo magazine prompted the torpedo warheads to explode. Compartments one through four were completely obliterated as the bow of the ship blew into more than fifteen separate segments. Three of the reinforced bulkheads were completely blown in by the massive explosion, which was accompanied by a flash fire of intense heat, reaching almost a third of the boat. Fewer than forty men remained alive as the *Kursk* struck the seabed, four minutes after the first explosion.

Meanwhile, a Norwegian seismological group recorded a disturbance in the Barents Sea that measured about 1.5 on the Richter scale. A second disturbance in the same area that measured 3.5 on the Richter scale was detected by seismographs in Finland, Scotland, Alaska, and the Central African Republic. The explosions were detected by American, British, and Norwegian ships in the vicinity. Admiral Popov received notification that the *Kursk* had blown up and flooded. He doubted that anyone had survived.

Popov did nothing, perhaps out of fear of delivering bad news to his superiors. He also knew that Russia did not have the resources to rescue the submariners. In August, 2000, no Russian deep-sea divers had been trained to go below one hundred meters, and the Russian navy had no functioning diving bells. The only two deep-sea submarines were away, transporting Russian Defense Ministry officials to visit the wreck of the *Titanic* in the North Sea. Additionally, Russia did not want NATO forces to obtain access to a top secret ship. Russia, therefore, refused British and Norwegian offers of assistance. Meanwhile, the survivors on the *Kursk* died in a fire caused by attempts to regenerate oxygen on the evening of August 12.

SIGNIFICANCE

The *Kursk* disaster highlighted indifference to suffering and ineptitude among the Russian authorities. The Russian navy initially indicated that the accident occurred on Sunday, not Saturday. It did not begin rescue efforts until Sunday, when it announced that gale-force winds blocked attempts to reach the *Kursk*. Western sailors in the area detected no such winds. The Russians subsequently insisted that knocking noises from the submarine's hull indicated that some sailors remained alive, and the media distributed this story. When it became generally known that the Russian government had refused offers of assistance from the West, it appeared

to many Russians that the navy had simply abandoned the *Kursk* crew to their doom. Further, the Russian navy did not contact a single relative of *Kursk* personnel in the immediate wake of the disaster. The navy also did not provide a list of the crew members, when it was known to cobble together crews at the last minute.

Russian president Vladimir Putin remained silent for four days after the accident, while continuing his vacation on the Black Sea. Meanwhile, domestic and international pressure to rescue the *Kursk* crew was building. Four days after the accident, Putin overruled his admirals and accepted Western assistance. The British rescue received no official cooperation or coordination from the Russians, not even a map of the *Kursk*. British divers reached the ship within six hours, determined that the crew had died, and declined to disturb the remains of the sailors.

Anger and a sense of betrayal filled many Russians. Ordinary citizens blamed Putin for betraying the armed forces. The furor about the treatment accorded the *Kursk* had not been expected by the Russian government because no similar outcry had ever occurred under the Soviets. In an attempt to salvage his political career, Putin announced that the families of the *Kursk*'s victims would receive a lump sum equivalent to ten years of an officer's salary, free housing in any Russian city, free college education for the victims' sixty-five children, and free counseling. The compensation was unprecedented in Russian history. A number of admirals, including Popov, were dismissed.

On September 19, 2000, Putin announced that the *Kursk* would be raised to recover the bodies of the submariners. On October 25, 2001, the *Kursk* emerged from the sea. On March 23, 2002, a funeral service was held for the captain of the *Kursk* and six crew members. Hundreds of mourners paid their respects, and hundreds of thousands watched the national broadcast of this last ceremony for the *Kursk* departed. Only three of the crew members remained unidentified. Autopsies revealed that most of the crew died by drowning and many had also been badly burned.

—Caryn E. Neumann

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- Flynn, Ramsey. *Cry from the Deep: The Submarine Disaster That Riveted the World and Put the New Russia to the Ultimate Test*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004. Flynn uses interviews, forensic data, and recovered tapes to describe the disaster and Putin's response to it.
- Higgins, Chris. *Nuclear Submarine Disasters*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Pub., 2002. Provides an historical context for the topic.
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- Weir, Gary E., and Walter J. Boyne. *Rising Tide: The Untold Story of the Russian Submarines That Fought the Cold War*. New York: Basic Books, 2003. Thorough history of the Russian submarine program. Sets the *Kursk* in a broader military context.

See Also: August 7, 2008: Russia's Invasion of South Ossetia Begins the Five-Day Russo-Georgian War; March 15, 2011: Syrian Civil War Kills Over 250,000 People and Displaces More Than Six Million; March 15, 2011-ongoing: Syrian Civil War Kills Over 250,000 People And Displaces More Than Six Million; March 18, 2014: Russia Annexes Crimea And Supports Military Incursions Into Ukrainian Territory; July 14, 2015: International Agreement Reached On Iran's Nuclear Program; April 2-5, 2016: Armenians And Azerbaijanis Fight A Four-Day War In Nagorno-Karabakh

UNITED NATIONS HOLDS THE MILLENNIUM SUMMIT

September 6-8, 2000

The Millennium Summit brought together representatives of many nations to discuss the needs of the world's peoples and the role of the United Nations for the twenty-first century and beyond.

LOCALE: New York, New York

CATEGORIES: United Nations; International relations and diplomacy

KEY FIGURES

Kofi Annan (b. 1938), secretary-general of the United Nations, 1997-2006

Tarja Holonen (b. 1943), co-chair of the Millennium Summit and president of Finland, 2000-2012

Sam Nujoma (b. 1929), co-chair of the Millennium Summit and president of Namibia, 1990-2005

SUMMARY OF EVENT

In an attempt to assess the state of global affairs, the United Nations gathered representatives from all over the world in September, 2000, for the Millennium Summit in New York City. Planning for the summit began in December, 1998, under the leadership of Secretary-General Kofi Annan. With the overall theme "The United Nations in the Twenty-First Century," the summit was intended to address several fundamental developmental objectives of the United Nations, including the promotion of peace and security, poverty eradication, and improvement of human rights around the world. These objectives were later formalized in the Millennium Declaration, which was jointly ratified by 189 U.N. member nations. In essence, the Millennium Summit was a brainstorming session at which representatives from U.N. member nations attempted to address some of the world's burning issues of socioeconomic development, poverty, and the future of the United Nations itself.

The Millennium Summit was preceded by some of the most elaborate planning for a summit in the history of the United Nations. In August, 2000, co-chairs from the five continents were selected to head various discussion panels at the summit. These included the prime minister of Singapore and the presidents of Poland, Venezuela, and Algeria. To ensure that intergovernmental organizations were fully represented, the United Nations invited several prominent institutions to participate in the summit, including the League of Arab States, the Organization of African Unity, the European Commission, the

Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the Conference of Presiding Officers of National Parliaments.

Plans were also made to ensure that the summit would be one of the most technologically advanced media events in history. The delegates' speeches and other events during the three days of the summit would be available on the Internet through streaming audio and video. In addition, the government of Japan provided assistance in installing fifteen high-definition television monitors in the U.N. General Assembly Hall to enable delegates to follow all the summit's events.

As the summit approached, the United Nations faced some daunting diplomatic events. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or North Korea, was the only U.N. member nation that did not attend the summit. North Korean diplomats had planned to attend, but while they were in transit, they were checked through security in Frankfurt, Germany, in the same manner as civilian passengers. According to diplomatic protocol, such screening formalities are waived for ambassadors and national representatives. The North Korean delegates saw their treatment as an insult; they expressed displeasure over the incident and refused to attend the summit. In another event, on September 6, 2000, the day the summit was to open, three U.N. staff members were killed in militia-led violence in West Timor, a province of Indonesia.

On September 6, 2000, the Millennium Summit was inaugurated by Secretary-General Kofi Annan. In his preliminary speech, after welcoming the world leaders, Annan cautioned them to be pragmatic in their efforts at the summit. On the second day of the summit, for the first time in U.N. history, women representatives of the member nations convened to discuss the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century and the role of women in peacekeeping missions. The future of peacekeeping missions was the continuing theme on the second day, with Annan proposing the "Freedom from Fear" agenda, which included issues such as complete revamping of peacekeeping operations and reexamination of their effectiveness. Discussions on the second day of the summit also highlighted the emerging importance of information and communications technology. In this regard, Annan announced the launching of the U.N. Information Technology Service and Health Inter-Network initiatives as channels to provide the United Nations and other relief organizations with access to up-to-date information.