The reason we haven't had nuclear disasters isn't careful planning. It's luck.

The alarming role of good fortune in the history of nuclear weapons

The United States tests a thermonuclear bomb on Nov. 1, 1952, in the Marshall Islands. (Los Alamos National Laboratory/AP) (AP)

By **Benoît Pelopidas** and **Alex Wellerstein**

August 10, 2020 at 12:00 p.m. GMT+2

On the morning of Aug. 9, 1945, the city of Nagasaki, Japan, was devastated by a single atomic bomb detonated over it by U.S. military. Nagasaki wasn't the original target for the bomb that morning — that was Kokura, a city to its north, which was spared only because mishaps led the Bockscar airplane to arrive at its target several hours late. When it got there, Kokura was covered in clouds and a smoky haze. Due to Kokura's luck, it was spared — but Nagasaki's luck had run out.

WORLD WAR THREE, BY MISTAKE

Harsh political rhetoric, combined with the vulnerability of the nuclear command-and-control system, has made the risk of global catastrophe greater than ever.

By Eric Schlosser

December 23, 2016

A dilemma has haunted nuclear strategy since the first detonation of an atomic bomb: How do you prevent a nuclear attack while preserving the ability to launch one? **PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDY CROSS / THE DENVER POST VIA GETTY**

On June 3, 1980, at about two-thirty in the morning, computers at the National Military Command Center, beneath the Pentagon, at the headquarters of the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD), deep within Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado, and at Site R, the Pentagon's alternate command post center hidden inside

Stanislav Petrov, Soviet Officer Who Helped Avert Nuclear War, Is Dead at 77

Stanislav Petrov in Dresden, Germany, in 2013. Oliver Killig/European Pressphoto Agency

By **Sewell Chan**

Sept. 18, 2017

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Early on the morning of Sept. 26, 1983, Stanislav Petrov helped prevent the outbreak of nuclear war.

A 44-year-old lieutenant colonel in the Soviet Air Defense Forces, he was a few hours into his shift as the duty officer at Serpukhov-15, the secret command center outside Moscow where the Soviet military monitored its early-warning satellites over the United States, when alarms went off.