

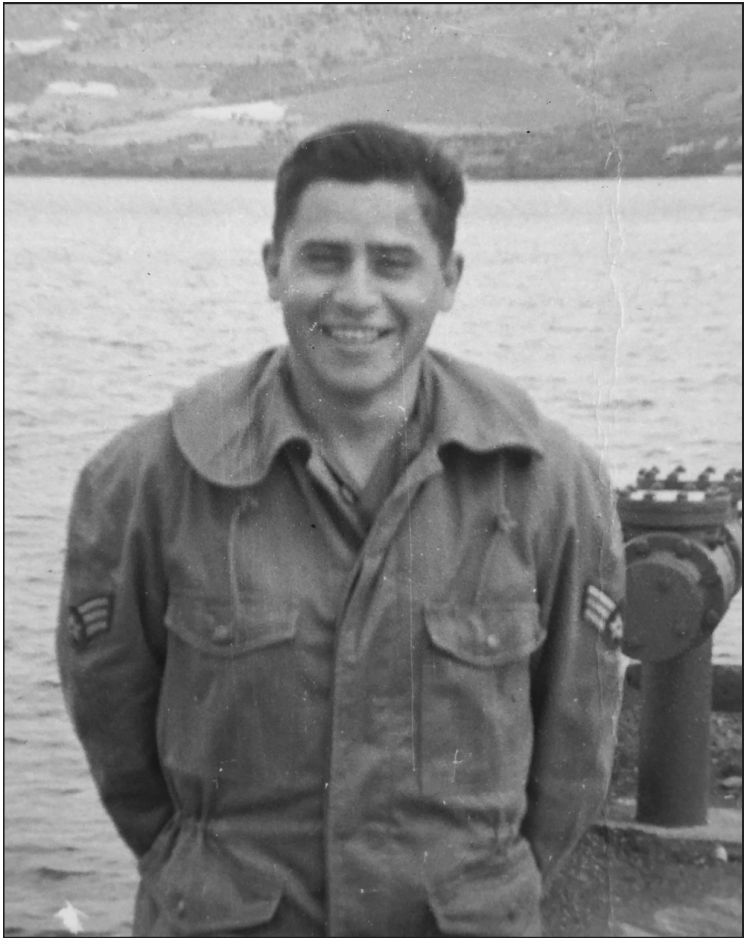
Local plays part in US History

Few people under the age of 65 realize just how close the world came to a full-on nuclear war during October 1962. Immediate events surrounding the “Cuban Missile Crisis” began on October 14, 1962, and the extreme danger lessened considerably on October 28, 1962. (See *timeline*.) Even fewer people realize that one of our own Coke County citizens, Luis Charles, was right in the middle of this tense time.

Luis Charles wasn’t born and raised in Coke County, but moved his family to Bronte in 1974. He was born in San Angelo and raised in Northwest Colorado. Charles joined the Air Force in 1956 and served as Airman 1st Class working as a Communication Repairman (Teletype and Cryptograph equipment) at Hamilton Field in San Francisco. After his discharge in 1960, he moved back to Texas. During this time, he helped his dad working on a ranch near Fort Stockton. In July of 1961, he came to San Angelo to find a job. He stopped in to a barber shop in the old Naylor Hotel for a haircut, but was refused service due to his race. Angered by this treatment, he went straight to the recruiting office and joined the Army.

Life began moving at a very rapid pace after this decision. He was sent to Missouri for his second round of basic training. Charles was able to “test out” on a Spanish course and received a certificate giving him a Military Occupational Skill (MOS) as a Spanish Linguist. He was assigned to Morse Code school on a base near Peabody, Massachusetts, and given \$85 to get there. He and his wife, Nina, arrived in style in his British-made Morris Minor convertible. The car got 31 miles to the gallon and gas was only 31 cents per gallon. He was in Massachusetts only five days before he was given only 24 hours to report to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to use his experience with communication equipment. Due to the Cuban revolution and tensions following the “Bay of Pigs”,

Charles and his family once again moved - this time to Homestead Air Base in southern Florida. As a Spanish linguist, he was tasked with monitoring the minute-by-minute location and communications of Cuban President Fidel Castro, code name “El Caballo” (the horse). He and his co-workers listened to all intercepted telephone communications. All strategic communication was recorded and transcribed and if important, sent immediately to the Pentagon. They were listening to a war in real time



Luis Charles shown in Turkey on the shores of the Sea of Izmit.

and knew if mistakes were made, war for the U.S. could result.

As a member of the 18th Airborne and the Army Intelligence Service, Charles was also one of those who would parachute into Cuba if President Kennedy chose that route of action. For the tense two weeks in October 1962, these men stayed with their aircraft, armed and ready to invade Cuba at Kennedy’s command. Charles, as a communications specialist, would parachute with a portable

telephone on his back. Under unbelievable stress, Charles hit the deck one night and began belly crawling to shelter after mistaking a blown transformer for a bomb. Luis left instructions with Nina that if he didn’t come home, she needed to get a bus ticket to San Angelo.

Following his discharge in 1965, Charles brought his family home to Texas. Luis and Nina’s little family had grown to four with the additions of son Terry in November 1962 and daughter Yvonne in December 1963. He

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Cuban Missile Crisis Timeline

Preceding Events - Fulgencio Batista seized power as dictator over Cuba in 1952. Batista is overthrown in late 1958 by the Cuban Revolution. The revolution’s leader Fidel Castro became Prime Minister of Cuba and served in that capacity until 1976 when his title changed to President. He was ideologically a Marxist-Leninist and Cuban nationalist who also served as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba from 1961 until 2011. During his reign, Cuba became a communist state where industry and businesses of all sizes were nationalized and state socialist reforms were implemented.

In April 1961, U.S. sponsored Cuban exiles unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow Castro in what is now known as the Bay of Pigs. Concerned about a U.S. invasion of Cuba, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, in May 1962, asked Cuban President Fidel Castro if the Soviets could help defend Cuba by placing missile installations in Cuba.

October 14 - U. S. Air Force Pilot Richard Heyser flies a U2 spyplane over Cuba and takes photos of Russian SS-4 medium-range missiles capable of delivering nuclear warheads within a 1,200 mile radius.

October 16 - President John F. Kennedy convenes ExComm, a group of senior advisors, to discuss the Soviet missiles and U. S. options.

October 17 - More photos of the missile sites are analyzed and show that Cuba also has long-range Soviet SS-5 missiles. These missiles are capable of traveling 2,200 miles.

October 18 - ExComm is told that the installation of the SS-4 missiles is nearly complete. Attorney General Robert Kennedy keeps a previously scheduled meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, but does not mention the missiles. Gromyko tells Kennedy that the only help the Soviet Union is giving to Cuba is assistance growing crops and missiles that are only for defense.

October 19 - Ex-Comm meets and discusses sending U.S. ships to Cuba to prevent Soviet ships from reaching the island. They are careful to call it a quarantine since a blockade is considered an act of war.

October 20 - After meeting all day the previous day, Robert Kennedy tells the president that Ex-Comm recommends a quarantine. President Kennedy has been keeping all appointments on his schedule to avoid speculation. He travels to Chicago for meetings with/for Mayor Daley, but after the first day announces he has a cold so that he can return to Washington to deal with the crisis.

October 21 - Attorney and advisor to the president, Ted Sorenson, writes the speech that Kennedy will give to the nation. Informing Americans that the Soviets have missiles in Cuba that are pointed at the U.S. will be an important moment in American history and one of the most frightening speeches a president ever gives.

October 22 - President Kennedy addresses the nation live on television stations across the country to inform Americans that missiles have been discovered in Cuba. He tells Americans that he has ordered a Navy quarantine around Cuba and orders the Soviets to remove the missiles. He warns the U.S. will retaliate if any Soviet missile is launched from Cuba. All U.S. military forces worldwide ordered to go to DEFCON 3, a heightened state of nuclear alert.

October 23 - Soviet ships carrying military equipment to Cuba reverse course as they near the quarantine zone.

October 24 - Saying that the U.S. will not intimidate the Soviets, Khrushchev refuses to remove the missiles from Cuba. He declares the blockade is an act of aggression and accuses Kennedy of putting the world at risk of a nuclear war by ordering the quarantine. U.S. forces go to DEFCON 2 - the highest alert status short of war.

October 25 - CIA reports SS-4 missiles are ready to fire and President Kennedy considers invasion of Cuba. Making no progress with his communications with Khrushchev, Kennedy orders flights over Cuba to be increased from once to twice per day. Pilots also prepare to begin night flights as the U.S. monitors the Cuban missiles.

October 26 - A letter from Khrushchev offers to dismantle sites if U.S. pledges not to invade Cuba. Concerned that the Soviets may not remove the missiles from Cuba, Ex-Comm begins to discuss plans to invade Cuba to take control of the missiles. Doing this would most likely result in war.

October 27 - Khrushchev now demands removal of U.S. missile sites in Turkey. An American reconnaissance plane was shot down over Cuba, and a U.S. invasion force was readied in Florida. The 35-year-old pilot of the downed plane, Major Rudolf Anderson, is considered the sole U.S. combat casualty of the Cuban missile crisis. To make matters more precarious, American pilot Charles Maultsby gets lost flying a mission to Alaska and ends up in Soviet airspace. An American jet rescues him and leads him back to the U.S. before the Soviets can shoot his plane down. Kennedy publicly offers to end blockade and not invade Cuba if Soviets withdraw missiles. Privately, Kennedy also agrees to remove U.S. missiles from Turkey.

October 28 - Khrushchev gives a speech on Radio Moscow and says that he has agreed to Kennedy’s arrangement. The missiles will be removed, Cuba will not be invaded, and the crisis comes to an end.



The uniforms Charles wore during his military career. The different patches include Army Intelligence Service, 18th Airborne, Specialist 5th Class, and Air Force.