

SARASOTA

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Photographer's work helped defuse the Cuban Missile Crisis

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PUNTA GORDA

Tensions were high between the United States and the Soviet Union in 1962 when Navy pilot William B. Ecker was asked to verify reports that the Soviets were positioning their nuclear missiles in Fidel Castro's Cuba.

Capt. Ecker's lonely flight produced a famous series of missile pictures that were used by ambassador Adlai Stevenson to confront the Soviets on the floor of the United Nations.

The photographic evidence helped the U.S. defuse what came to be known as the Cuban Mis-

sile Crisis. President John F. Kennedy later pinned the Distinguished Flying Cross on Ecker during a ceremony in Key West.

Ecker, 85, died Thursday at his home in Punta Gorda.

The Omaha, Neb., native "loved to fly" and was proud to have served the nation during a pivotal time, said Kit, his wife of 62 years.

"He was thrilled to do something important for this country," she said Monday.

Ecker's picture now hangs in the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

His historic flight was incorporated into the 2000 Kevin Costner movie "Thir-

teen Days" about the confrontation over the missiles in Cuba. Ecker was portrayed by actor Christopher Lawford.

The production company flew Ecker to Hollywood for the movie's premiere and he had dinner with Costner.

"He got a kick out of that," said Kit Ecker.

Ecker retired from the Navy in 1974 after 32 years of service and moved to Punta Gorda full time in 2000.

He is survived by his wife and two sons, Richard and David.

Inurnment will be in the columbarium at Arlington National Cemetery.

ly poor," with losses in 2008 in the "low six-figure

PILOT TOOK PHOTOS OF MISSILES

Navy pilot who provided evidence that helped defuse the Cuban Missile Crisis dies. 2B

