

Woodrow Wilson Center Presentation
*Continental Defense in the Eisenhower Era:
Nuclear Antiaircraft Arms and the Cold War*

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November 17, 2010

Christopher Bright takes us back to a time when the Cold War was in full swing. The Russians had set off an atomic bomb in 1949, the Korean War broke out the next year, atomic spies (Klaus Fuchs and the Rosenbergs) seemed everywhere and now worse soon after the Eisenhower administration took office in August 1953 the Russians apparently exploded a hydrogen bomb. In Red Square there were bomber flyovers (and flyovers) during parades posing new threats to the U.S., with projections of increasing numbers in the years ahead. Christopher captures well the anxiety of the era. Unimaginable destruction could result if those bombers got through and bombed American cities. The U.S. was now faced with a ruthless global foe – Communism had replaced Fascism and Stalin replaced Hitler.

One response was continental air defense and Chris' book is superb in filling in the heretofore missing chapters of the early nuclear era. The research is through. He has read everything – official histories, archival documents, the entire secondary literature, PhD dissertations and even a Masters Thesis here and there.

The Eisenhower years are ones of enormous growth in the nuclear stockpile. The numbers are dramatic. We now have official figures for

the entire period from 1945 to 2010, the numbers from 1962 to the present were supplied by the Pentagon on May 3rd.

This growth was the result of several factors: enormous enthusiasm for nuclear weapons by each of the armed services, the air force, navy, army and marines. Each service sought a nuclear weapon for almost every military mission, whether it made much sense or not. Just as an aside when the co-authors of the Brookings book that came to be Atomic Audit were trying to find a good title, one of my choices was, "It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time."

Also fueling the growth was a new design laboratory, Lawrence Livermore which set off a competition and stimulus with Los Alamos beyond the inter-service rivalry in the Pentagon. There were technological advances in designing smaller diameter, lighter weight warheads and bombs. All of this peaked at the end of the Eisenhower administration with over 7,000 new warheads produced in 1959 and again in 1960 – 20 warheads a day.

Chris covers all of the issues from safety to pre-delegation and introduces some interesting characters – He rescues Robert Sprague from obscurity. I wonder why his Papers are still closed – I enjoyed Barney Oldfield's role and am sorry the TV series was never made. One interesting theme that he follows is the Public Relations campaigns that surround the introduction of these weapons into the lives of the American public. Films, briefings displays, trading cards in Nabisco Shredded Wheat, plastic models – I guess you only have the box and not the plastic missile. And Press Releases to calm the public's fears. My favorite was describing tests at Nevada as, "friendly blasts offering comforting protection" language worthy of the Mad Men of the time.

That was a double entendre for those of you who are not watching the series on cable.

There are significant new findings such as detailed descriptions of
*Operation Snodgrass/Opera Hat.

*Espionage cases surrounding the Nike Hercules.

*Procedures during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I should add that my colleague at NRDC was in the Army Reserve in October 1973 during the Yom Kippur War (and the Watergate crisis) when President Nixon ordered a worldwide alert in response to a threat that the Soviet Union might intervene. My friend was hauled out of bed and went to his site north of Baltimore where the doors opened and the Nike Hercules missile were raised to a vertical position.

* Blue Straw – a 1962 proposal by the AF to conduct live-fire tests of Genie and Falcon in the South Pacific.

As he says the entire panoply of continental defense is not covered in the book. There is room for other articles and books to be written to include the history of the Pinetree line at the 49th parallel, the Mid-Canada line at the 55th parallel and the DEW Line at the 70th parallel. Also there are the Navy picket ships, civil defense for the population, and “continuity of government exercises for the leadership. Chris describes four of the Operation Alert exercises.

Just to fill out the picture the U.S, under took an extensive air defense mission in the Pacific and in Europe. The Nike Hercules was deployed to Hawaii, Alaska, Okinawa, Guam and Korea and to NATO for Greek, Italian forces and Dutch, Belgian and U.S. units in West Germany. The Falcon was deployed to Alaska, Hawaii, Canada,

Okinawa, the Philippines and to Spain and West Germany. The BOMARC and Genie of course went to Canada.

Mention of the Kansas City construction firm of Black and Veatch jumped out at me. They were contracted by the Army Corps of Engineers to build Genie storage facilities.

The original atomic weapons storage program, under the code name “Water Supply,” was planned and begun under the Manhattan Engineer District (MED)—commanded by Major General Leslie R. Groves of the Army Corps of Engineers. General Groves initiated the project early in 1946, and prospective sites were surveyed. He chose Black and Veatch to oversee the building of the facilities. Three initial locations were designated: Site A, Site B, and Site C; each a separate area of an existing military installation. Manzano Base, at Kirtland AFB, was the first storage site to be built (Site A), due to its proximity to the Los Alamos Laboratory where nuclear warheads were initially produced. Construction began in 1946 at Killeen Base (known as West Fort Hood, TX today), the second site (Site B). Site C was Clarksville Base at Fort Campbell, KY.

When three additional locations were added, the six initial facilities were labeled National Stockpile Sites (NSS). These were later supplemented by seven sites called Operational Storage Sites (OSS). National Stockpile Sites were Armed Forces Special Weapons Project (AFSWP) sites built for the AEC. Operational Storage Sites were under one or another of the military services.

Original U.S. Nuclear Deployment Sites

<i>Codename</i>	<i>Site</i>	<i>Base</i>	<i>Years Operational</i>	<i>Service</i>
<i>National Stockpile Sites</i>				

Able	Manzano Base	Kirtland AFB, NM	1949-present*	Army/AF
Baker	Killeen Base	Fort Hood, TX#	1948-1969	Army/AF
Charlie	Clarksville Base	Fort Campbell, KY##	1949-1965	Navy
Dog	Bossier Base	Barksdale AFB, LA	1951-present	AF
Love	Lake Mead Base	Nellis AFB, NV	1954-present	Navy/AF
King	Medina Base	Lackland AFB, TX	1955-1965	AF

Operational Storage Sites

Easy	Caribou AFS	Limestone** AFB, ME	1952-1988	AF
Fox	Rushmore AFS	Ellsworth AFB, SD	1952-1993	AF
George	Deep Creek AFS	Fairchild AFB, WA	1952-present	AF
How	Fairfield AFS	Travis AFB, CA	1953-1970	AF
Item	Stony Brook AFS	Westover AFS, MA	1955-1971	AF
Jig	Skiffes Creek Annex	Yorktown NWS, VA	1954-present	Navy
Yoke	North Ordnance Area	Seneca Army Depot	1957-1992	Army

* Manzano Base was closed and the nuclear weapons are currently stored at the Kirtland Underground Munitions Complex (KUMSC) on Kirtland AFB.

Ten miles to the west was Gray AFB

Nine miles to the southwest was Campbell AFB

** After 1954 Loring AFB

One reason why I liked the book so much is that the research methodology is like my own. Using Bob Woodward’s advice “to follow the money” my approach has always been “to follow the bomb” and I have found it pays dividends. Ask basic questions. Where are they – trace their deployment, how many are there, what are their yields, what is the testing record? Uncovering FRD has been my research agenda and it is not surprising that Chris has followed this path with a dissertation committee that included Jim Hershberg, and Bill Burr. I would just add that the Public Interest Declassification Board held a public hearing in July to decide whether to declassify, “historically significant” FRD. Steve Aftergood, Bill Burr and I testified and you can probably guess what we recommended. In that same spirit Chris extensively used Chuck Hansen’s papers at the NSA and I am sure that Chuck would be pleased that he helped in producing such a fine book.

A couple of things in closing.

*You say there were Genies in Greenland. Appendix D to the DOD Custody and Deployment History does not show that.

*I would have like an Appendix with a list of where the weapons were deployed, especially the Nike Hercules units.

* Would like to know more about Blue Straw

* Stockpile could have been larger – read paragraphs from Atomic Audit “What Might Have Been,” pp. 189-190.