

Memoirs: ABM Sites and Sounds

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Deputy Division Engineer, 1968-1969

In May 1968 the Chief of Engineers selected me for the specific purpose of supervising construction of the one Anti-Ballistic Missile site allowed by the ABM treaty, existing yet today, between the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union. This appointment was based on my considerable experience in such construction for NASA and the Army.

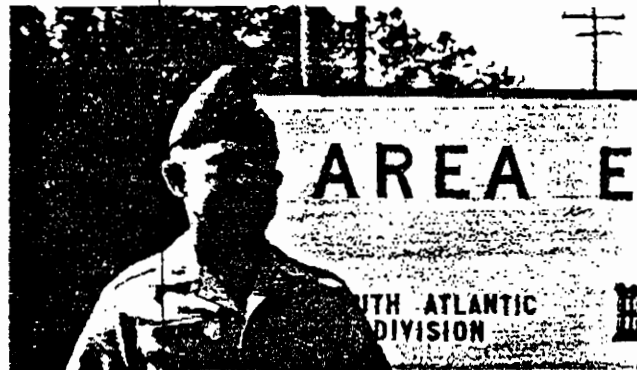
The Soviets were constructing their system around and about Moscow, and our strategists decided that our system should protect Washington, D.C. The placements of the two major complexes turned out to be a few miles south of North Andover for the Perimeter Acquisition Radar and on Camp Curtis Guild in Reading just outside the North Boston Beltway, for the Missile Site Radar Complex and launch facilities.

I arrived at NED subsequent to these decisions to construct the installations armed with very big dollars, experience and little else. Another early decision was that I would be a second Deputy Division Engineer in NED, even though I worked directly as an Area Engineer for Huntsville Division, Redstone Arsenal, Ala. It was somebody's idea to give me a smooth working relationship with NED personnel whom it could be assumed might be somewhat indifferent, since they had no part in the decisions or dollar actions.

I had trepidation, not about our ability to construct the job, but rather about my complete unfamiliarity with "New Englanders," and the obviously built-in probability for "Murphy's Law" to work quickly and frequently. Here is what I found: an old friend of mine, Dick Day, was Deputy Division Engineer; and COL Remi O. Renier was Division Engineer and a real gentleman.

Maybe they turned some switches; more likely it was just the super NED personnel, but I never had a problem within the Division. However, problems did abound. The ABM treaty was a political animal from its initiation, and although the President was implementing the treaty, it had never been accepted in Massachusetts as a viable installation, complete with numerous nuclear warheads, in Boston backyards. More especially they were rather expensive backyards sometimes inhabited by well spoken intellectuals from the local renowned colleges and universities who were morally, politically and even ecologically opposed.

In contemporary comparables, it was as though I arrived today to install a nuclear waste dump in both of the above-mentioned areas. There were meetings, public hearings, editorials, speeches and marches, all generating public rela-



COL Roy P. Beatty

tions nightmares.

My superiors in Huntsville recognized the futility of examining hot horse shoes and advised me generally by telephone, grieving that the wires were strung. As an example, I was instructed to call on a lady on Christmas Eve to ameliorate her concern over the fact that I intended to emplace a missile silo (small, though) within 50 yards of her fence line. An unsuccessful adventure for both our Christmases.

A contract was let; construction began at the North Andover site, and the decibel level of argument ascended. In the meantime and with much generosity, I obtained the services of Connie Morin as my Chief of Construction, Sue Douglas as my secretary, and a couple of mobile homes (converted) for our business address in the Andover woods. Connie and Sue were stalwart aides, may even have believed in the cause, and are to this day great friends of mine.

We excavated a very large hole in solid granite, paved about a mile and one-half very high class roadway, but the steady arguments of New Englanders, political pressures and perhaps a reasonable justness to their positions prevailed.

The decision was made to build the site in North Dakota to protect our intercontinental Ballistic Missile sites, and after one year in NED, I displaced to Langdon, N.D., where the site was ultimately constructed. (The problems there were equally trying but of a different nature.)

I was probably the only "No. 2" Deputy Division Engineer NED ever had. The experiences and more especially the friendships made are unforgettable. I read the YANKEE ENGINEER, searching for names, and found Sue and Walter Mackie hanging in there. I only did one year out of 50 with you, but it was great fun!