

SMDC History

The First ABM Site in the Free World

1956

October 1956 – NIKE-II Feasibility study defined the threat and concludes that “it was feasible to provide an anti-ICBM defense with the NIKE-ZEUS system”

1957

January 1957 - Research and Development (R&D) initiated on the NIKE-ZEUS program, a terminal defense system. The name NIKE-ZEUS was chosen “to indicate a continuity with the older anti-aircraft systems NIKE AJAK and NIKE HERCULES,” also developed and produced by Bell Telephone Laboratories.

February 1957 – Army Ballistic Missile Agency awards contract to explore feasibility of defense against strategic ballistic missiles

March 1957 – Final NIKE-II report recommends development of defenses against air-breathing and intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) targets

December 1957 – Gaither report credits Soviet Union with substantial lead in long-range ballistic missiles – leads to suggestions of a “missile gap”

1958

January 1958 – Secretary of Defense issues guidance on Ballistic Missile Defense. Army is directed to continue with ZEUS system components. Air Force is to discontinue WIZARD missile program but continue developing early warning radars, tracking and acquisition radars and communications links, ensuring compatibility with NIKE-ZEUS

January 1958 – National Security Council assigns highest national priority to the NIKE-ZEUS anti-missile missile development program

February 1958 – National Security Council Directive 5802/1, U.S. Policy on Continental Defense published. Directive recognizes need for continental defense system, the importance of satellite defense and the need for vigorous R&D in these areas.

1959

August 1959 – First NIKE-ZEUS missile tested at White Sands Missile

September 1959 – U.S. Navy and U.S. Army sign an MOU for the use of Kwajalein as a test range for the NIKE-ZEUS

1960

January 1960 – Soviet Union claims to have fired an ICBM to within 1.24 miles of its target

1961

January 1961 – ARGMA submitted “NIKE-ZEUS Defense Production Plan” to the Chief of Ordnance. The plan provided for the production and deployment, over an eight-year period, of 29 defense centers, 70 batteries and supporting equipment and 3,160 missiles. Plan approved by Secretary of the Army and forwarded to Secretary of Defense. NIKE ZEUS system is composed of a ZEUS Acquisition Radar, two Target Track Radars, one Discrimination Radar, three Missile Track Radars, battery control equipment, target interceptor computer and four ZEUS launch cells.

June 1961 – Entire NIKE-ZEUS system (4 launch cells, 7 radars and battery control equipment and target intercept computer) installed on Kwajalein Missile Range (KMR)

July 1961 – ZEUS Acquisition Radar operates for first time

December 1961 – Three NIKE-ZEUS tests conducted in single day (14 December) at Pt. Mugu, White Sands Missile Range, and KMR

1962

January 1962 – Secretary of Defense returns NIKE-ZEUS to R&D status

January 1962 – ZEUS Acquisition Radar completes initial tests against a real target

April 1962 – Secretary of Defense adds new mission for NIKE-ZEUS – satellite interception – Operation MUDFLAP

August 1962 – NIKE-ZEUS Project Office established

December 1962 – NIKE-ZEUS completes first ICBM intercept

1963

January 1963 – NIKE program redirected to address 1970s ICBM threat. NIKE-X program would consist of Multifunction Array Radar, Missile Site Radar, SPRINT and ZEUS missiles

February 1963 – Office of the NIKE-ZEUS Project Manager established as a Class II activity assigned to the Headquarters, U.S. Army Materiel Command.

May 1963 – NIKE-ZEUS successfully intercepts Agena D earth satellite

August 1963 - Army deploys MUDFLAP ASAT defense system on Kwajalein Atoll

1964

January 1964 – NIKE-X program replaces NIKE-ZEUS to address threat anticipated in the 1970s

July 1964 – Kwajalein Test Site (later renamed Kwajalein Missile Range) transfers to the Army from the Navy

September 1964 – MAR I successfully tracks real target

October 1964 – China detonates first nuclear device

1965

October 1965 – Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations Study entitled Deployment of NIKE-X (DEPEX) released. Recommending a 25-city deployment, it seeks to provide defense against Nth country attack and provide a capability against a light or unsophisticated attack from the Soviet Union

1966

July 1966 – Kwajalein Test Site assumes control over the FPS-20 radar on Roi-Namur from Project PRESS

September 1966 – NIKE-X Studies for 1966 Report to the SECDEF concluded that “there is adequate assurance that the probable effective of NIKE-X justifies the cost of deployment at DEPEX-II.”

September 1966 – Chief of Staff of the Army selects the NIKE-X program for exceptional management techniques. NIKE-X System Manager established to serve as single POC for all pertinent activities, setting the format for future organizations.

October 1966 – Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) elevated to Chief of Staff of the Army level

November 1966 – Secretary of Defense announces the deployment of an ABM system by the Soviet Union

1967

January 1967 – ZEUS DM 15X-2 renamed SPARTAN

January 1967 – President Lyndon Johnson announced improvements in the Soviet Union’s long-range missile capabilities and the deployment of a limited antimissile defense system (Galosh) near Moscow

June 1967 – People's Republic of China explodes its first thermonuclear bomb

September 1967 – SENTINEL deployment decision made based on report by the Montgomery Committee

October 1967 – U.S. Army Engineer Division – NIKE-X established

November 1967 – NIKE-X System Office redesignated the SENTINEL System Organization

November 1967 – TRADEX and ALTAIR radars transferred from ARPA to the Kwajalein Test Site

1968

March 1968 – Secretary of Defense transfers ARPA's advanced BMD research, Project Defender and the Project PRESS complex to the command

March 1968 – First launch of the SPARTAN missile, a modified NIKE-ZEUS

May 1968 – Three additional sites added to the original ten deployment locations announced for the SENTINEL system

October 1968 – Secretary of Defense approves Sentinel Deployment Model

1969

January 1969 – Missile Site Radar transmitter on Meck Island becomes operational

March 1969 – Nixon administration announces new missile defense deployment plan - SAFEGUARD – to defend land-based ICBM sites, defend against possible attack from China and protect against an accidental launch. SAFEGUARD replaces the SENTINEL system.

August 1969 – Senate endorses President Nixon's proposal to deploy SAFEGUARD by two votes.

1970

January 1970 – President Nixon extends SAFEGUARD deployment beyond the initial two-site Phase I program recommending a third site at Whiteman AFB, Missouri and site preparation at five additional locations across the nation

January 1970 – ALCOR became operational

April 1970 – ALTAIR became fully operational

July and August 1970 – SAFEGUARD Site Activation Commands established at Grand Forks, North Dakota, and Conrad, Montana

December 1970 – First live target intercept of an ICBM by a short-range SPRINT missile

1971

January 1971 – Secretary of Defense orders new facet of BMD development – Hardsite Defense (later known as Site Defense) – a follow-on to Safeguard

January 1971 – BMD Site Activation Command BMDC, Colorado Springs, Colorado, organized

1972

January 1972 – Missile Site Radar successfully guided a SPRINT missile to a space-point intercept

May 1972 – U.S. Senate ratified the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty

1973

January 1973 – U.S. Army SAFEGUARD Logistics Command merged with the U.S. Army SAFEGUARD System Command

1974

February 1974 – Last operational NIKE-ZEUS facility, Target Track Radar-4, ceased operations

February 1974 – First launch of the ATHENA from Wake Island as part of the Army Special Targets Program

March 1974 – U.S. Surveillance Battalion Grand Forks Site and the U.S. Army SAFEGUARD Command, Grand Forks Site were reorganized and assigned to the U.S. Army Air Defense Command (ARADCOM)

May 1974 – SAFEGUARD System Organization re-designated the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization

May 1974 – Ballistic Missile Defense Advanced Technology Center established as a field operating agency under the Ballistic Missile Defense Program Manager

July 1974 – ABM Treaty Protocol further limits ABM deployment

September 1974 – All BMD elements consolidated into single organization, under the BMD Program Manager. U.S. Army SAFEGUARD Command (Nekoma, ND), U.S. Army Surveillance Battalion (PAR), and the U.S. Army Ballistic Missile Defense Center assigned as elements of the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization. U.S. Army Ballistic Missile Defense Operations Activity (Colorado Springs) established

October 1974 – Command dedicates Stanley R. Mickelsen SAFEGUARD Complex near Grand Forks, North Dakota

1975

January 1975 – Perimeter Acquisition Radar completed first tracking of two live targets

April 1975 – SAFEGUARD system achieves Initial Operating Capability (with 28 Sprint and 8 Spartan missiles) and is turned over to the Commander-in-Chief Continental Air Defense Command

September 1975 – SAFEGUARD Complex - the first ABM site in the western world - reaches full operational capability, three days ahead of schedule. Complex encompasses Perimeter Acquisition Radar site near Concrete, North Dakota; Missile Site Radar site near Nekoma, four remote Sprint launch sites and a total of 100 Spartan and Sprint interceptors.

1976

February 1976 – As directed by Congress, Joint Chiefs of Staff order deactivation of Stanley R. Mickelsen SAFEGUARD Complex

August 1976 – U.S. Army SAFEGUARD Command inactivated

1977

January 1977 - Secretary of Defense approves addition of Spacetrack (SPADATS) capability for PAR

May 1977 – Ballistic Missile Defense Operations Activity discontinued

September 1977 – SAFEGUARD Complex placed in caretaker status

October 1977 – Perimeter Acquisition Radar transfers to the Air Force