

Nekoma, ND - Safeguard, or the ABM (antiballistic missile) system as most North Dakotans know it, will become fully operationally "as originally designed" October 1.

And, the original design of the system, despite rumors that they may not be emplaced, calls for the installation of 30 Spartan and 70 Sprint intercept missiles.

The Army and its spokesmen at the Stanley R. Mickelsen Safeguard Complex here will neither confirm nor deny that the missiles are being emplaced. To do either, they say, would be in violation of US Department of Defense policy.

But, they do say there have been no major changes in the design or capability of the Safeguard system, the only one in the United States. And, they report that the complex was allotted up to 100 missiles - as designed - in the recent SALT (Strategic Arms Limitations Talks).

The timetable for completion of the system, which reached "initial operational capability" on April 1, called for the emplacement of the intercept missiles at the Mickelsen Complex and at four remote sites as a part of the requirements leading up to the final operational capability date now only several weeks away.

Rumors and reports that the system would be closed down, scaled down in its operations, not be armed with the intercept missiles or not armed to the full extent of the original design, have circulated freely during the past year or more. Also at controversy has been a report that the missiles could not be counted on to effectively shoot down incoming enemy missiles.

Spokesmen at the Mickelsen Complex report that area residents and farmers working the fields near the missile fields "would not be able to see the installation of missiles."

They report that observers could not tell the difference between a truck hauling in security equipment and one that may be hauling in missile components, or, for that matter, the difference between a truck carrying missile components and a general maintenance truck.

Those farmers and area residents, however, do know that the missile silos were constructed and are there.

The design of Safeguard calls for the installation of 30 Spartan missiles, all on the missile site radar grounds near Nekoma and a co-located Sprint missile field of 16 on the same grounds. The four remote sites were designed with fields of 16, 14, 12, and 12 silos, all for the Sprint missile.

Spartan missiles are the long-range defense against enemy warheads and the Sprints, the faster, short-range protection. Safeguard also includes two radars, the perimeter acquisition radar (PAR) site near Concrete, ND, and the missile site radar (MSR) on the Nekoma site, and the supporting automatic data processing equipment which controls and conducts the system's complex engagement, planning, and execution functions.

The initial operational readiness date reached in April also marked the system's integration into the nation's defense system under the operational control of the Continental Air Defense Command (CONAD). That integration involved the netting together electronically of the safeguard system with the Ballistic Missile Defense Command at Colorado Springs, CO.

Spokesmen here report that a great portion of operations "have become routine" since April and that with the passing of the final operational readiness date in October, the Mickelsen Complex will become "just another operational unit" in the nation's defense command.

The present workforce of the complex numbers 1,887 persons, including 479 military people. The greatest single group of those Army personnel is in the area of security. Most civilians are involved with the maintenance and support of the complex.

"The people here now are permanent and they can and do get involved in the community," Capt. Paul Wrightsman, information officer, reports. "We have a representative on the Nekoma School Board and children in both the Nekoma and Langdon schools. The communities have adjusted well to us and many of us are on a first-name basis with a segment of the area population."

"My family and I were only in Langdon for about three days before we considered ourselves Langdonites," Wrightsman says, crediting the hospitality and friendliness of North Dakota people for the cooperative relationship between military and civilian communities. "I can't visualize a civilian-military relationship superior to what we enjoy here," he says.