

ABM site crumbles into N.D. prairie

NEKOMA, N.D. (AP) — Without fanfare or ceremony, salvage workers have administered final rites with a welding torch to what briefly was the nation's only anti-ballistic missile defense site.

Left at the partly gutted \$5.5 billion complex, which operated less than a year, is a pyramid-shaped radar control building, empty missile silos and the intake and exhaust columns from an underground power plant.

"A couple hundred years from now, a farmer will be plowing and think he hit an Egyptian pyramid," said Major Fred Wegner, Army officer who supervised salvage work on the complex and

who now runs a Young Adult Conservation Corps program in remaining administrative buildings.

After witnessing over a two-year period the removal of 100 missiles nestled in launchers across the surrounding countryside, to the salvaging of tiny copper tubing, Wegner took a nostalgic walk through the main radar building last week.

"I took a last walk through the building to make sure nobody was in there before they sealed the door shut," he said. "It was almost unbelievable, like there had been an explosion. In what once was a plush, sophisticated build-

ing, there were burn marks from cutting torches, loose wires and pipe and a huge gaping hole where there had been an elevator."

Though the last chapter of Safeguard, as the ABM program was called, may have been written when the welder sealed the steel doors of the massive radar building, the complex died Feb. 10, 1976.

That's when the plug was pulled on a computer system which monitored the site's operations and controlled the radar responsible for firing the system's defense missiles — guardians of nearby Minuteman missiles and bombers

at the Grand Forks, N.D. Air Force base.

The complex, which cost about \$5.5 billion to build, had been in operation less than a year when Congress voted in late 1975 to deactivate it.

In fact, the ABM base became fully operational only the day before the House voted to mothball it as obsolete in the face of new weapons developed by the Soviet Union.

The Senate followed suit several months later.

It was the first and last of what was originally planned as 12 Safeguard sites around the nation.

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