

WHAT'S LEFT OF AMERICA'S AMBITIOUS ABM PROGRAM

All that remains of the 5-billion-dollar system that was supposed to defend the U.S. against Russian missiles can be found in the farmlands of North Dakota: one site, now nearing completion, out of 12 originally planned.

By October—if all goes well—radars, computers and some nuclear-tipped missiles for the Safeguard anti-ballistic-missile system will be in place near Grand Forks and ready for testing of the ground equipment.

Missile troops who have been in training at Fort Bliss, Tex., will begin arriving late this summer. Most of the 705 civilians who will be employed already are at the site.

By next June, experts believe, enough tests will have been completed and enough additional missiles will have been installed for the ABM complex to do its job.

What is its job? To shoot down Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles before they can knock out American ICBM's at Grand Forks Air Force Base. Then, according to strategists, the 150 Minuteman III missiles, each carrying three atomic warheads, could be launched in retaliation. Theoretically, this second-strike capability will deter Russia from a sneak attack.

The original concept. The single North Dakota site is a far cry from what was originally conceived for Safeguard when it was proposed to Congress in 1969. As planned then:

Twelve Safeguard sites were to be built around the country to guard strategic nuclear bases and Washington, D. C. Earlier plans for ABM defenses of major population centers were scrapped.

Full-scale work got under way only at Grand Forks and at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Mont. Then,

in 1972, the U. S. and Russia agreed to limit their ABM systems to two sites each, one of which was to guard the national capital. This year, President Nixon and Russian Communist Party leader Leonid Brezhnev limited ABM sites to one each.

In the U. S., that's the complex at Grand Forks. All construction at Malmstrom has been halted. Plans to protect Washington are dead.

When Safeguard is completed in North Dakota, the Defense Department will have spent 5.4 billion dollars on research, testing, construction and equipment since ABM work began on Safeguard's predecessors in 1955. The Grand Forks complex will have cost 907 million.

Going into action. The system is designed to work this way:

Long-range radar—called Perimeter Acquisition Radar, or PAR—will detect and track an enemy missile from 1,500 miles away. Short-range radars then pick up the missile and guide Spartan ABM's to destroy it 400 miles out.

If an enemy warhead should elude the Spartans, Sprint missiles would intercept it 25 miles away.

At Grand Forks, the multistory PAR installation already is tracking space satellites for practice. All equipment is in place for the shorter-range radars.

Two high-speed computers, the "brains" of the system, have been installed but must be programmed.

Fewer than half of the 30 Spartan missiles and 70 Sprint missiles are in their silos.

Will the system work? The Pentagon says it will. Officials point out that, of 52 test shots made in the Pacific, 45 were declared successful, five were partial successes. Two more tests are set for this summer.

Heart of Safeguard missile complex near Grand Forks, N. D.

