

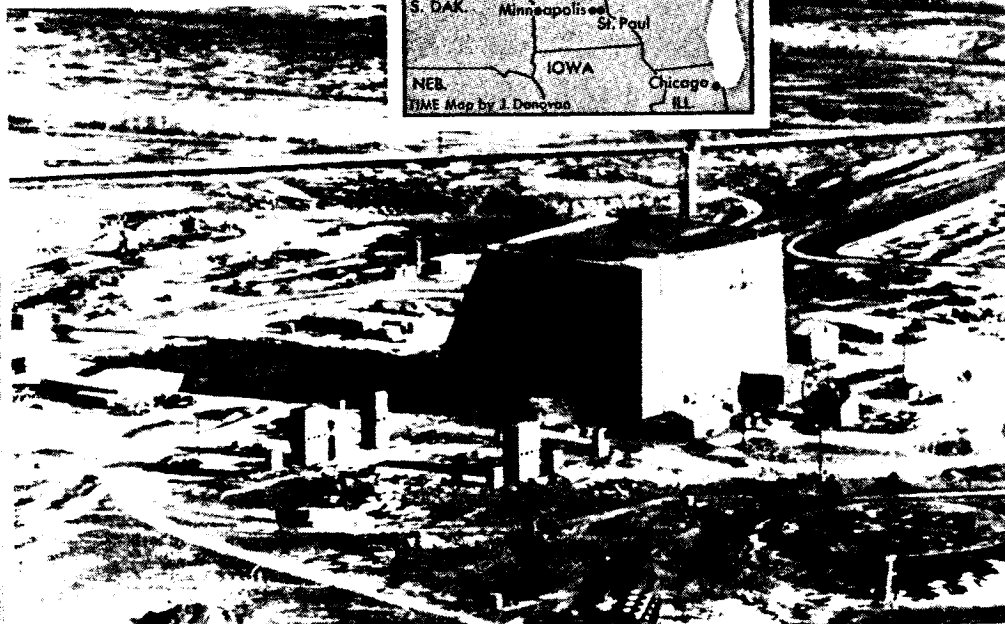
## The ABM Temple at Grand Forks

**A**LTHOUGH no device of war has caused more debate in recent years than the anti-ballistic missile system, few Americans have any notion of what it looks like. Nor are they likely to. Thanks to the SALT agreement signed with the Soviet Union, only two ABM sites would be constructed in the U.S.: one near Washington, D.C., to protect the nation's decision-making center; and the other near the remote town of Grand Forks, N. Dak., to defend the retaliatory might of 150 Minuteman ICBMs targeted at the Soviet Union and China. Only the site in North Dakota is under construction. TIME Correspondent John Mulliken visited Grand Forks and sent this report:

The way rolls west out of Grand Forks, on

the only U.S. ABM site. Suddenly it looms above the featureless landscape like some huge, misplaced Mayan temple, a 21st century monster squatting on the 19th century rural countryside of northeast North Dakota.

A monster it is. The missile-site radar's concrete housing is 231 ft. square at the base and 125 ft. deep; 50 of those feet, including the living level, are underground. Next to the MSR is its own power plant, all underground, containing six huge generators with 17-ton flywheels. The construction, 90% completed, will be finished by the end of 1974. The 7-ft.-thick steel reinforced concrete walls are complete on the outside. Wooden stairs run up on top of the pyramid, out of which



CONSTRUCTION AT PERIMETER ACQUISITION RADAR SITE NEAR GRAND FORKS, N. DAK.  
A 21st century monster in a 19th century countryside.

and on down a highway seeming to go nowhere. The soil is deep black, rich for the yellow durum wheat that grows on it. The farmhouses with their freshly painted white barns are few and far between. The towns marked on the maps are almost nonexistent when whooshed through: what few cars there are move at 80 m.p.h. to 90 m.p.h. They have to; otherwise, they too would never get anyplace.

It is a lonely area. The bleakness of the long winters, the wind coming out of Canada, and the snow and the cold —35° below zero—have provided natives with the saying: "We have three seasons here—July, August and winter." Finally, at Lakota, you turn right off Route 2 and head north on Route 1 toward Nekoma, once a town of "84 old people" and now the headquarters of

stare, one to a side, four empty radar eyes. These "radar support rings," as they are called, are 30 ft. in diameter, and will be able to track hundreds of incoming warheads from several hundred miles out. At their direction, the MSR will launch both long-range missiles and fast little Sprint missiles, which have a range of 25 miles and can climb to 50,000 ft. in two heartbeats. There is a "farm" of 30 Spartans just to the west of the MSR. Scattered round are smaller farms containing 68 Sprints. "They are just tin cans in the ground," explained an official, "and they pop up 25 miles on release."

Inside the MSR, a scene unfolds out of a James Bond movie. Squads of construction workers in different colored hardhats move about, climbing the red metal stairs to the four different levels,

squirring behind green generators, entering and exiting from foot-thick bomb-blast entrance doors. Everywhere arc welders light up side rooms and tunnels. On the top level, some workers are eating from their lunch boxes. "When the French Defense Minister Michel Debré was here, we set up a little restaurant for him," remarked an official. "It wasn't French cooking, but we did give him a little California Almadén."

To make up the walls and floors of the MSR, 22,000 tons of reinforced steel have gone into 180,000 cu. yds. of concrete. It is designed to survive a near miss of a Soviet warhead, even an SS-9. The electronics within belong to an arcane world. It is staggering to think what they are going to be required to do. "This is the peak in technology," says an observer. "Compared with the MSR, an aircraft carrier is a junior high school toy." Summing up, a scientist wryly boasts: "It is self-contained. Fuel, water... we have enough for the whole war—even if it lasts an hour."

Outside the MSR site, work is progressing on the barracks, the administration office and the individual housing units. All are low, single-story buildings that look as though they are built to hunker down under those Canadian winter gales coming across the border only 28 miles to the north. Canada is so close that many of the workers, who live in a hundred small towns around Nekoma, go up to Manitoba for dinner. What's 50 miles for a steak and a beer in North Dakota? In nearby Langdon, the population has doubled to 5,000. But many of the recent arrivals are not all that good for business. Richard Norvold, who runs the Langdon Motor Co., complains: "Most of the construction workers are so in debt when they come that they can't buy new cars. By the time they get caught up, they go back home."

**Great Box.** The drive from the MSR to the Perimeter Acquisition Radar, the other major unit in the ABM complex, is 36 miles. PAR is even more massive and towering than MSR, though its job is much simpler. Shaped like a great box—200 ft. square at the base and towering up 120 ft. high—it contains only one mammoth radar eye staring northward at a 120° angle. This tracks incoming warheads from more than 1,000 miles away, passes them off when they get near enough to MSR, which then sends aloft the Spartans and Sprints.

Both PAR and MSR are so huge and out of place that once beyond the horizon, it is hard to believe they really exist. They may be one of a kind. Though allowed by the treaty, the second site near Washington will probably be scrapped by Congress as unnecessary. The feeling now is that no Mayan temples are going to rise 100 ft. into the air above the Maryland or Virginia countryside just beyond the White House, the Pentagon and the Capitol. North Dakota alone will own that spectacle.