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## AIR DEFENDERS OF MORRIS COUNTY: NIKE MISSILE BATTERY NY-80, 1954-1974

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During the 19th Century -- and as recently as the 1940s -- a series of massive, fixed seacoast fortifications were constructed in order to defend the approaches to New York Harbor. During the mid-1950s, plans to construct additional fixed defense installations to protect the New York metropolitan area were made. However, unlike the seacoast fortifications which preceded them, these new installations were oriented to defend against potential adversaries which would strike, not from the sea, but from the skies.

These mid-20th Century additions to the defenses of the New York metropolitan area were the "Nike" missile bases of the U.S. Army. Nike missiles were two-stage, supersonic, guided surface-to-air missiles. Deployed at fixed installations throughout the New York metro area (and at strategic locations all across the nation), they were designed to defend against the possibility of an air attack by long-range, nuclear-armed bombers of the Soviet Air Force.

Plans for the defense of the New York region called for the construction of nearly two dozen Nike missile sites within the adjacent states of New York and New Jersey. The sites were to be located approximately twenty-five miles from the geographic center of the New York metropolitan area, forming a defensive "ring" which would encircle the area with overlapping fields of fire.

During 1954, East Hanover officials were both surprised and alarmed to learn that the Army intended to construct a Nike missile site within that small and quiet township. The site chosen by the Army was on the west side of River Road, roughly two tenths of a mile from the intersection with State Highway 10. The East Hanover site was to be a Nike missile "launcher" facility. It would operate in conjunction with a separate "battery control" facility located approximately three miles distant, within adjacent Livingston Township.

When it was completed in 1955, the East Hanover Nike launcher area (known as Nike site "NY-80L") contained the following elements: two multi-purpose barracks buildings; a diesel generator building for emergency electrical supply; a missile test building; a missile fueling area and missile assembly building, both surrounded by high, earthen berms to deflect the force of a blast in the event of an accident; internal roadways; a basketball court; sentry posts; and, a special railroad siding.

The entire facility was surrounded by tall steel "cyclone" type fences topped with barbed wire. Armed sentries patrolled the site day and night, and warning signs indicated that taking pictures or making drawings of the site was not allowed.

At the launcher area, Nike missiles were stored horizontally within six, individual, underground missile "magazines". Each magazine measured roughly 50'x60' and was connected to a blast-resistant underground control room.

Ten Nike "Ajax" missiles (or six of the larger, more powerful, second-generation Nike "Hercules" missiles) could be stored within a magazine, each of which was equipped with a large elevator for lifting missiles to the surface of the site. There, the missiles were attached to launchers before being raised to a near-vertical position for firing. With six missile magazines (rather than the usual three) Nike site NY-80 was one of a relatively small number of so-called "double" Nike sites.

Directly adjacent to the fenced in base was a family housing area consisting of approximately thirty, small, houses of identical design, and a playground for children.

The actions of the East Hanover site were directed by the separate "battery control" area (Nike site "NY-80C") located high atop the basaltic ridge of Riker Hill in adjacent Livingston Township. This facility contained several radar systems for locating and tracking hostile aircraft and for controlling the flight of Nike missiles launched from the East Hanover facility. An analog "intercept computer" located at the control area coordinated these activities.

During 1959, an additional radar site known as Nike site "NY-80R" was established on Hanover Avenue (West) atop a mountain ridge on the border of Morris and Randolph Townships. This site operated for only about one year. It was probably closed due to the opening of a "Missile Master" facility at the Highlands Army Air Defense Base near Sandy Hook in 1960. With its powerful radar and computer systems, the Highlands site was capable of coordinating the actions of all New York area Nike missile sites, including site NY-80. However, individual Nike sites remained capable of independent operation.

Nike site NY-80 was first manned by units of the regular Army. During 1963, full time responsibility for the site was transferred to elements of the New Jersey Army National Guard. Approximately two-hundred men were required to operate both the launcher and control areas. Although the site was put on a heightened state of alert during times of great tension (for example, during the Cuban missile crisis), it never fired a missile in anger. Instead, each year, crews trained by firing live Nikes at missile ranges in New Mexico.

In order to establish and maintain good relations with the local communities, for several years, NY-80 hosted an "open house" each month. During these events, residents were able to tour portions of both the launcher and control areas, viewing both the missiles and the radar systems which guided them.

After operating for more than two decades, the entire nationwide Nike air defense system, including Nike site NY-80, was inactivated during 1974. At this time, the potential threat posed by long-range bomber aircraft had become greatly diminished, and the Nike system was no longer considered a necessity.

Subsequently, the control area in Livingston Township became a county park. Most of the original Cold War-era buildings and radar towers still can be seen at that location today. Some of the Army's buildings have been transformed to serve as studios for area artists.

By contrast, much of the East Hanover launcher area was demolished, including all of the underground missile facilities. However, the following original elements can still be seen: one barracks building; a portion of the original external perimeter fencing; a paint shed; a basketball court; and, the raised mound which once provided the "launch control trailer" with a clear view of the adjacent missile launchers. The houses of the adjacent family housing area are intact, although they are currently abandoned.

Nike site NY-80 is historically significant for the vital role it once played in defending both Morris County and the New York metropolitan region during the tense and confrontational years of the Cold War. It is also historically significant on a national scale, for it was an important component of an integrated, nationwide air defense system. Although we often tend to more fully appreciate our Revolutionary War battlefields, and impressive seacoast fortifications, we should not neglect the historical significance of Cold War-era sites such as Nike site NY-80 which for two decades guarded the skies above Morris County.

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About the Author ...

Donald E. Bender is the founder of the New Jersey Nike Missile Site Survey, a self-sponsored historical project designed to document the history and present condition of former Nike missile sites located in the New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia areas. He has assisted governmental, military, academic and historical organizations with research related to former Nike missile sites and other Cold War era military installations across the nation and internationally. He is presently completing a book about New Jersey during the Cold War. He can be reached via e-mail at [cwresearch2@yahoo.com](mailto:cwresearch2@yahoo.com)

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