



The Shoulders of Atlas: Rural Communities and Nuclear Missile Base Construction in Nebraska, 1958-1962

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Article Summary: Base construction for America's first intercontinental ballistic missile, the Atlas, pushed several rural Nebraska communities to the front lines of the Cold War. The project brought needed jobs to residents struggling through a sharp economic recession, but it also drew protestors who questioned the wisdom and morality of the nuclear program.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Dwight D Eisenhower, Renald Barrett, Everett Barrett, Tom Gerrity, Bob Kerry, A J Muste, Bradford Lyttle, Ralph Burnett, Walter Gormly, Bill Osick, John Newman, Milford Johnson, Kenneth Johnson, Ailene Rauer

Nebraska Place Names: Mead (Saunders County), Lincoln, Omaha

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Photographs / Images: workers preparing an Atlas missile for a suborbital test launch at Cape Canaveral, Florida, September 17, 1959; maiden flight of the Atlas 8 prototype, July 19, 1958; an Atlas missile passing the State Capitol on its way to a silo near Tecumseh, March 1962; artist's conception of the Atlas F silo; Atlas F service tunnel; map of Atlas F missile sites assigned to the 551st Strategic Missile Squadron, Lincoln AFB; rebar used in concrete surfaces to protect facilities against an enemy nuclear blast; Atlas F silo construction; launch sequence at an Atlas D missile base, Vandenberg AFB, California; members of Omaha Action at their campsite near Mead, Nebraska, 1959; "'Pacifist' Group Wants Peace At Any Cost," (article) and "We Believe In Peace Power" (advertisement), *Wahoo Newspaper*, July 2, 1959; inside an Airborne Launch Control Center for Atlas D missiles, Vandenberg AFB, California; sign at entrance to an abandoned Atlas missile site



THE SHOULDERS OF ATLAS: Rural Communities and Nuclear Missile Base Construction in Nebraska, 1958-1962

BY NICK BATTER

On a Friday afternoon in October 1958, more than a thousand people gathered in Mead, Nebraska, for the opening of the Farmers Union Co-op Grain Elevator. Flyers distributed throughout the county invited everyone to an open house to marvel at “Saunders County’s Newest Largest Most Modern Landmark of Progress.”¹ The four-story structure towered over the town. Built along the railroad tracks, the new grain silos could hold more than three hundred thousand bushels, and the temperature within the bins was monitored and maintained by state-of-the-art electronics. To celebrate the achievement, cigars were passed out to men; women who attended were given flowers.² The local newspaper reported that the commotion of the event caused the town’s first traffic jam.³ All told, the project boasted a price tag of \$200,000.⁴

But the enormity of Mead’s new grain elevator would be dwarfed within months by a project with a budget a hundred-fold greater.⁵ Located about an hour’s drive west of Strategic Air Command headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base, the federal land on the outskirts of Mead was selected to host one of three launch complexes of the first Atlas ICBM missile squadron in Nebraska.⁶ The construction of these bases would have an enormous impact on Mead and dozens of other communities across the

state where Atlas bases were built. Over the course of just a few months, rural agricultural communities became the front lines of the Cold War.

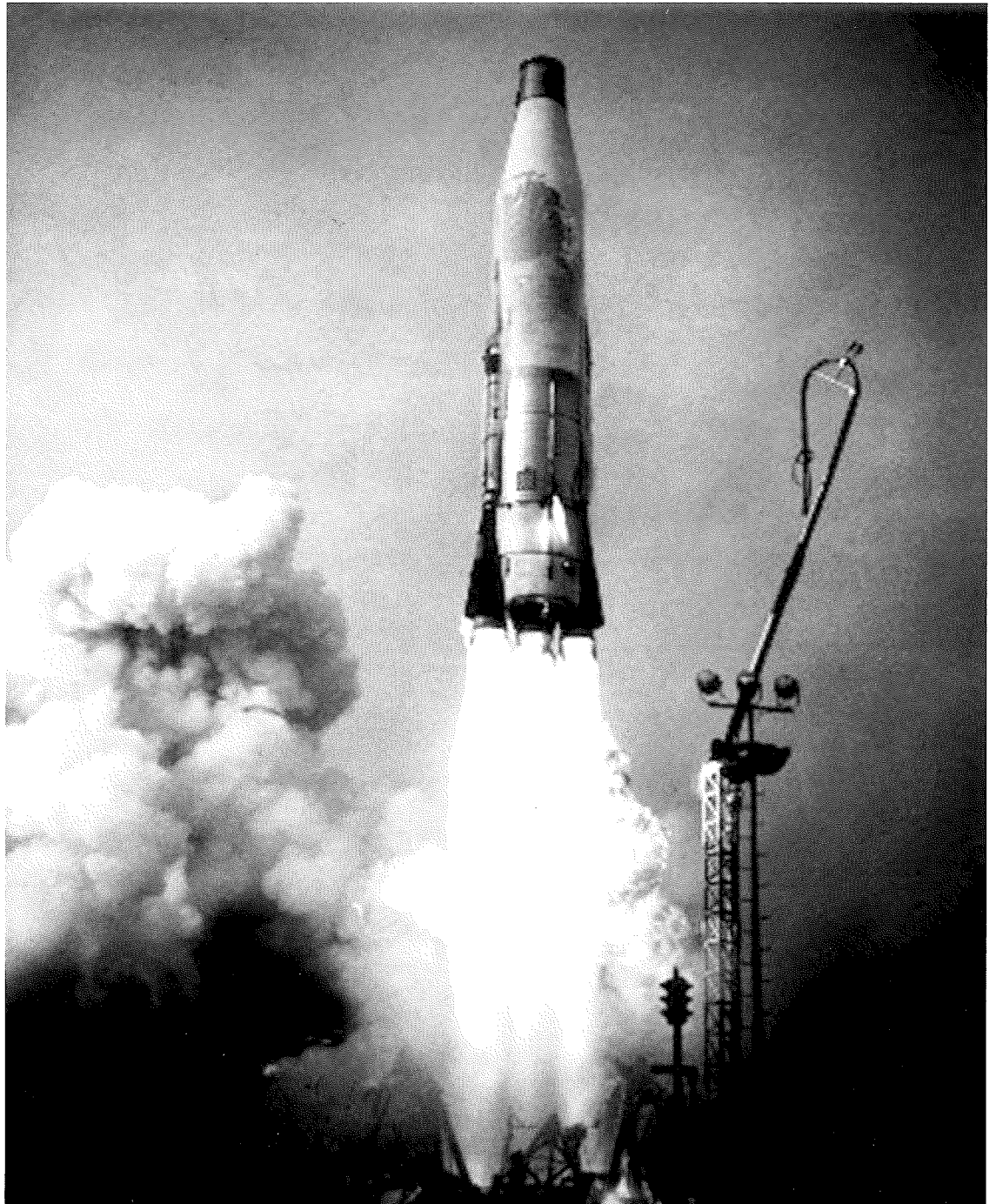
During the Second World War, thousands of young Nebraskans gave their lives on battlefields abroad. At the same time, coastal American cities dealt with the constant threat of Japanese I-boats and German U-boats. Yet it wasn’t until the Cold War that the American heartland was directly threatened by a foreign enemy.⁷ And yet, as the Soviet Union reached ever-greater heights with its missile program, American technology began to lag behind.

In September 1949, the United States announced that the Soviet Union had nuclear capability, after verifying the successful test of an atomic device in Kazakhstan.⁸ This revelation would directly influence American foreign policy for the next forty years. Of course, the Cold War also had a transformational effect at home. With the launch of Sputnik in 1957 and Soviet advances in rocketry, it became clear to the Eisenhower administration that the Soviets were quickly developing the capability to produce nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles. In contrast to the hours of flight time required by a Soviet bomber, an ICBM could strike American soil within minutes.⁹

Workers prepare an Atlas missile for a suborbital test launch at Cape Canaveral, Florida, on September 17, 1959. Starting in 1958, nuclear-armed Atlas missiles were assigned to several U.S. Air Force bases, including Offutt and Lincoln AFBs in Nebraska. Unless otherwise noted, all photos are from author’s collection.



Maiden flight of the Atlas B prototype, Cape Canaveral, Florida, July 19, 1958. The U.S. accelerated its missile program after the Soviet Union's successful launch of its Sputnik satellite in October 1957.



Control of the United States' nuclear force was vested in Strategic Air Command, which was relocated in 1948 to Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska.¹⁰ As the fleet of American bombers grew steadily, the role of SAC also broadened to encompass fledgling missile programs and escort fighter squadrons. A history of Omaha by Lawrence Larsen and Barbara Cottrell summed up the command's significance in the 1950s:

"As the Cold War progressed, SAC became one of the West's chief weapons. In deciding how to counter the Russians, contingency planners developed a system to protect North America against a surprise attack. Offutt Field was at the heart of these plans. If Russian bombers should come, the scheme called for SAC officers at Offutt to coordinate worldwide retaliatory strikes against targets in the Soviet Union."¹¹

Central to American defense plans was the creation of an American long-range missile. Conceived in the early 1950s, and originally slated for activation in 1963, the Atlas missile was designed to be the sharpest spear in the nation's Cold War arsenal.

Soviet progress spurred the Eisenhower administration into drastically shortening the program's deadlines.¹² Within months of the Sputnik launch, the United States had successfully test fired an Atlas missile into the upper reaches of Earth's atmosphere. In doing so, the United States had closed the technology gap with the Soviets, unveiling an American missile with a payload capacity forty times greater than any known Soviet rocket.¹³ In December 1958, the president ordered a special Atlas missile launched into orbit. Those who tuned in heard the radio transmitter aboard the Atlas crackle to life. In a modulated voice, Eisenhower broadcast the first presidential message via satellite in American history. From the nose cone of the Atlas, he addressed the nation:

This is the President of the United States speaking. Through the marvels of scientific advance, my voice is coming to you from a satellite circling in outer space. Through this unique means I convey to you, and to all mankind, America's wish for peace on Earth and goodwill toward men.¹⁴

With the Atlas missile capable of carrying a sizeable payload into space, all that remained was a plan to hide and protect them from the Soviet Union's reach. Initially, military strategists advised that the weapons be constantly mobile—mounted on trucks or railcars and kept in motion to mitigate the possibility of a pre-emptive strike.¹⁵ Overpasses built as part of Eisenhower's Interstate Highway System were designed with adequate clearance for a truck carrying an Atlas missile to pass beneath.¹⁶ But by 1958, a scheme was drawn up for stationary launch sites. The plan called for a network of secret missile bases, the largest concentration of which were to be hidden underneath the cornfields of Nebraska.

By the end of that year, the plans were set into motion. Reinforced launch hangars and underground missile silos would house and conceal the weapons. Military engineers and government contractors were given a grueling timetable to complete the bases, and many small Nebraska towns became the sites of massive construction projects. Operating around the clock, the workers excavated deep foundations and built enormous structures with impressive speed. Because of the high priority given to the project by the President, the United States entered the 1960s with a strong nuclear hand.¹⁷



An Atlas missile passes the State Capitol on its way to a silo near Tecumseh in this March 1962 photo. Lincoln Journal Star Archives.

Inside an Atlas Silo

While the Mead launch complex was comprised of three horizontal Atlas D launchers and a guidance control facility, most Atlas sites in Nebraska were vertical, underground silos for the more advanced Atlas F missile. One of these silos lies about ninety minutes southwest of Omaha. From the city, the gravel route to the site bisects many small farming communities. Adjoining a county road, the final stretch to the silo site is paved, with two lanes—the only surfaced road for miles. Native prairie grass and swarms of grasshoppers have reclaimed the land flanking the wide access drive up to the missile base.

A high chain-link fence surrounds the property. A broad electronic gate, now broken, is held secure by a length of thick-gauge steel cable and a padlock. Walking around on the surface of the property, it is hard to comprehend what lies beneath the soil. At first, the site looks to be little more than a parking lot fallen into disrepair. In the verdant sea of corn and soy, the large rectangular slab of concrete seems slightly out of place, but still unremarkable. Yet a closer inspection reveals large

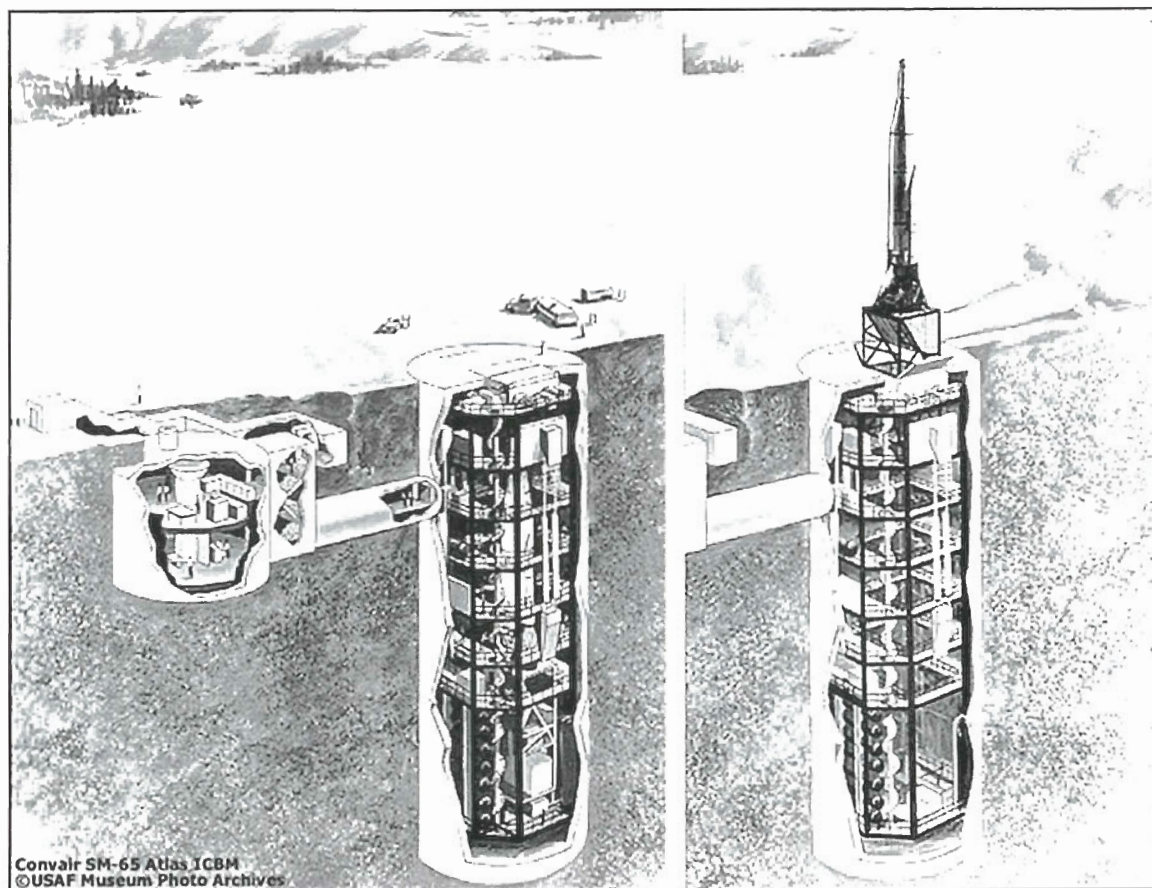
steel hinges and seams in the pavement: seventy-ton doors built to withstand a nuclear strike.¹⁸

A small shed in one corner of the lot hides a stairwell. The wires that once connected the base to the nearby power grid and the facility's closed circuit generators are long defunct; descent requires bright headlamps to illuminate the blackness of the silo's entry tunnels. Blast doors more than a foot thick sit rusted on their hinges, slightly ajar. For decades, rainwater has collected in the tunnels thirty feet beneath the surface. The cold black water is chest-high at the bottom of the stairs, and the corridor winds through the darkness toward the belly of the underground facility. The tunnel opens into a room built for a second stairwell, elevated above the stagnant pool. The iron stairs that once led down the forty-foot drop have long since been scrapped and dripping water echoes off the thick walls of reinforced concrete.

Getting into the three-story command bunker below requires rappelling gear, but is made easier by the support rivets left behind when the staircase was removed. Some of the machinery still stands in place. The floor is missing in spots and even through a half-face respirator the air smells faintly

An artist's conception of the Atlas F silo. An improvement over the above-ground launch facilities such as the one in Mead, the heavily reinforced concrete silos were the first to store ICBMs upright.

U.S. Air Force Museum.



Convair SM-65 Atlas ICBM
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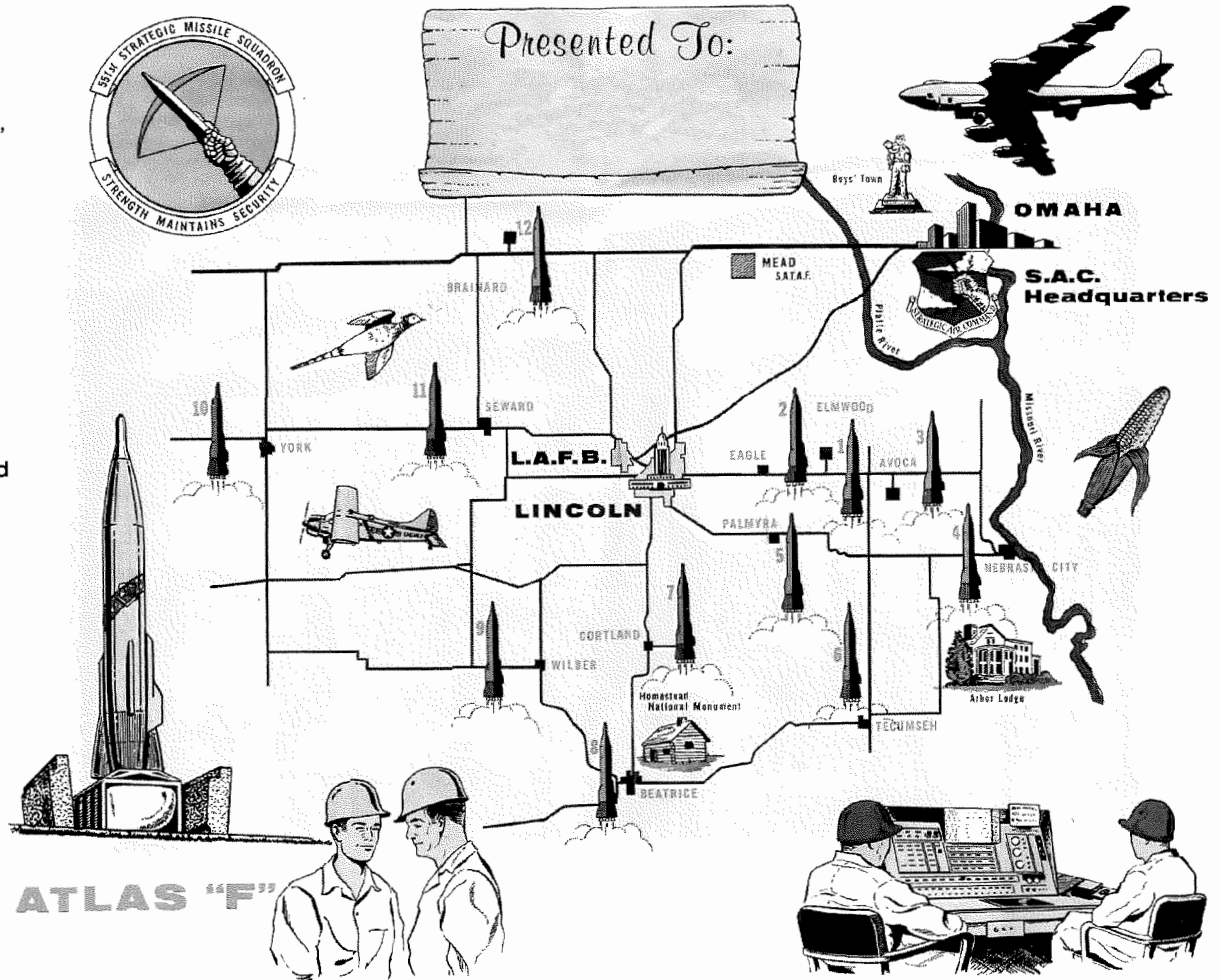
of mold and chemicals. But the cool darkness has preserved much of the bunker. Enough of the structure and equipment remain to imagine the command module as it must have been when it was still operational. Rows of computers filled with vacuum tubes, covered with large panels of numbered indicator lights, would have represented the vanguard of technology in the late fifties. From this room, technicians would have worked around the clock, monitoring the missile and ready to deploy the weapon at a moment's notice. Filled with old schematics and large computational equipment, the room is an undisturbed reliquary of the Cold War.

Blast doors on the bottom floor of the command bunker open to a long concrete tunnel. Bundles of wiring run the length of the corridor. Without warning, the passage ends at an enormous man-made cavern. Fifty feet above, sunlight manages to break

in through pin-sized holes in the exhaust vents of the main missile elevator. But most of the light fails to cut through the vast darkness of the giant underground silo, an empty quiver that once held the world's most powerful weapon. Handheld flashlights prove ineffective at piercing even the width of the space and a ten-inch spotlight is just enough to see the bottom, separated from the tunnel by a vertical drop of over a hundred feet. A dozen floors of scaffolding and the missile itself were removed by 1965, and decades without maintenance have led to structural deterioration in the silo. However, the enormity of the hollow edifice is still impressive. In the days of its operation, the missile housed in the 170-foot silo could have been fueled and airborne in a matter of minutes, to be sent arcing above the atmosphere of the Earth. The structure itself could have survived the nearby impact of a one-megaton nuclear blast, and redundant utilities mitigated the risk of technical failure.¹⁹

An Atlas F service tunnel, undated photo.

Atlas F missile sites assigned to the 551st Strategic Missile Squadron, Lincoln Air Force Base. Mead, which appears on this map, had a three-missile Atlas D launch complex assigned to the 549th SMS out of Offutt AFB. The 549th also operated Atlas D sites at Arlington, Nebraska, and Missouri Valley, Iowa. In the Nebraska Panhandle, an Atlas E site was built near Kimball and operated by the 566th SMS out of Warren AFB in Wyoming.



Although the Nebraska Atlas missile bases have long since been decommissioned, some of the structures remain intact today. In total, fifteen Atlas bases dotted Nebraska's rural landscape, all but one in the eastern part of the state.²⁰ Had but a single one of the vertical underground silos been built as a freestanding structure above ground, it would have been the second-tallest building in Nebraska—surpassed only by the state capitol.²¹ What did the construction of these massive edifices, intimately linked with the looming danger of nuclear destruction, mean to surrounding communities? To date, historians have had surprisingly little to say about the integration of such rural populations into the nation's burgeoning nuclear project. Considering the tremendous scale of the project and its significance in American and international history, the local story of the Atlas project represents a critical gap in the narrative of the Cold War.

With closer examination, a story emerges to reveal the complex choices that faced rural Nebraskans near Atlas sites. Ultimately, in deciding whether to support the program, communities had to weigh the personal dangers of living in close

proximity to a nuclear base against the economic benefits of a large-scale military construction project. Although community concerns did arise, Atlas ultimately delivered on promises of employment and regional development. In the end, the economic boon of Atlas base construction outweighed other concerns. Having won community support, the Atlas project was able to meet its rigorous deadlines as thousands of Nebraskans came together alongside military contractors to construct the missile bases.

In the end, the history of the Atlas project in rural America has much in common with the nuclear missile bases themselves. Easy to overlook, the story of the missile sites in Nebraska has been neglected and forgotten. To some, this rural history may seem remote and of little consequence. To others, the source material might appear sparse and gutted. But beneath the surface, there is much to be discovered. Access is difficult, but with enough climbing and proper illumination, a descent into the murky past reveals an intricate and unique story.

Although the military entered 1958 with massive expansion plans, Nebraska entered 1958 in an economic recession.²² State unemployment offices were mobbed by tens of thousands of applicants.²³ Communities west of Omaha were particularly hard hit; the employment office in Fremont saw rates jump forty percent.²⁴ Although most communities in Nebraska had entered the recession healthy, hard times led to significant losses in construction and farm-dependant industries. By the end of 1958, job placement rates steadily declined as unemployment offices found it increasingly difficult to help the influx of applicants.²⁵

Although the timing of Atlas coming to the state in the midst of this recession was unintentional, it nonetheless proved fortuitous for both America's ICBM program and the residents of rural Nebraska. Local leaders met the announcement of Atlas base construction with open arms. "It's going to be a crash program," an officer from Fremont's chamber of commerce was quoted as saying in an address to a local chapter of the Lions Club, adding "we don't know yet how many thousands of workers it is going to take [to build]."²⁶ There were high hopes for the incoming labor opportunities. Atlas bases, though secretive and mysterious, were known to be massive construction projects—a single section of a completed underground silo featured over three hundred thousand moving parts.²⁷ Locals knew that such a project could not survive without the sweat of local labor, a revelation that recession-era communities met with optimism. A local newspaper speculated that "[Government contractors] will

probably pay California wages to employees."²⁸

As predicted, Atlas construction did bring a massive influx of jobs and capital to the local economy. Renald Barrett, a farmer who grew up outside of Mead, just a few miles from the missile construction site, recalled his father being hired to perform unskilled labor at the base. The elder Barrett, Everett, worked on a pour team that handled some of the concrete work.²⁹ Barrett and other concrete workers followed a three-shift rotation which allowed construction to continue through the night.³⁰ The concrete team at Mead poured over a hundred thousand cubic yards of portland mix in the span of six months.³¹ Other unskilled laborers worked ten-to-twelve-hour days to meet the rigorous construction schedule.³² The national urgency of completing America's missile defense network meant that the Atlas sites in Nebraska were built simultaneously.³³ Consequently, the majority of unskilled and basic trade labor—the work typically performed by local hires—would be assigned specifically to a single site.³⁴

Communities found themselves blessed by more job opportunities than the local labor pool could provide. Renald Barrett remembers his mother quitting her job as a teller in Mead's bank to work as a secretary for General Dynamics, one of many out-of-state contractors involved in the project.³⁵ After exhausting the local labor supply, contractors reached into neighboring communities for workers, evidence that the impact of the project was a phenomenon felt by the entire region. As historians of Omaha have observed, the missile projects "advanced Omaha's economic fortunes," and the

To protect the facility against an enemy nuclear blast, Atlas missile bases used massive amounts of rebar in thick concrete surfaces.



city's "contracting and engineering firms received lucrative contracts."³⁶ Much of the work required long hours and extended work weeks but, given the economic situation, the pay associated with the overtime was a welcome benefit.³⁷ Ultimately, the recession produced the large and capable labor pool required to keep the Atlas program on track to meet its grueling schedule. For local communities, the project was a blessing, and mitigated most of the effects of a difficult recession.

The mutually beneficial interplay between Nebraskan workers and military contractors led to amicable labor relations. "[Agreements] were settled by a handshake, unions stuck by the agreements made, and union management was very helpful in finding solutions to other problems once they understood them . . . which avoided many problems that otherwise could have got out of hand."³⁸

Strong support for the civilian workers also came from the military command. When construction in Nebraska began to slow, Air Force General Tom Gerrity personally flew into the state to consult his officers.³⁹ Phil Prohett, the civilian director of base activation, later recalled the meeting between General Gerrity and the colonel in charge of managing labor in Nebraska:

The Colonel's presentation was directed toward painting [the civilian workers at the site] as black as possible. Watching Gerrity as the presentation continued, I could see him getting madder and madder. So, when the Colonel

came to a stopping point, the General broke in and said, "Colonel, what suggestions have you made to the Contractor that would have alleviated this appalling situation?" Since his mission at that time was to denigrate the Contractor's efforts, the Colonel had no answer and was left with his drawers around his ankles.⁴⁰

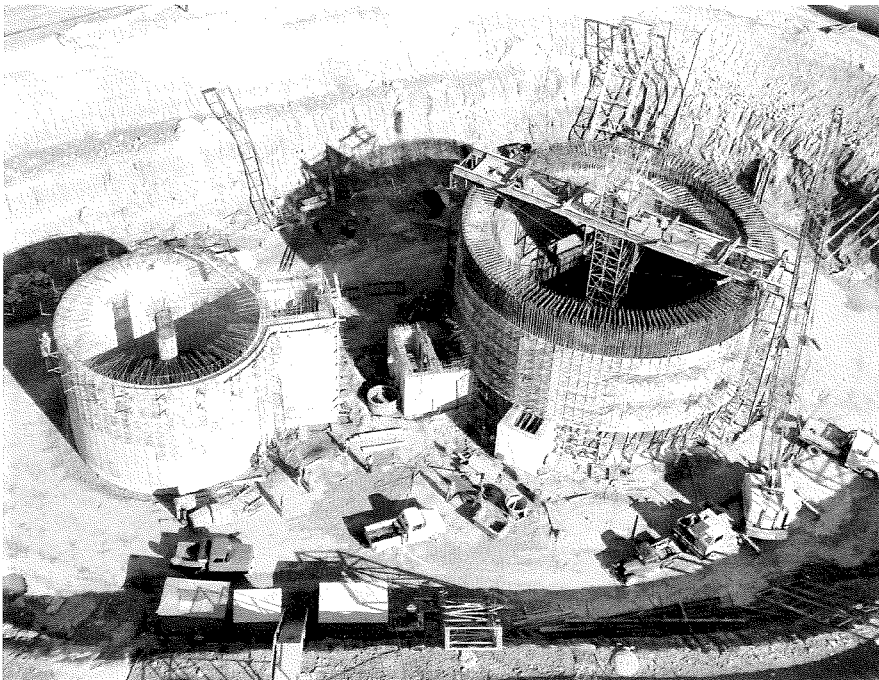
At the end of the meeting, an angry Gerrity relieved the colonel of his duty.⁴¹

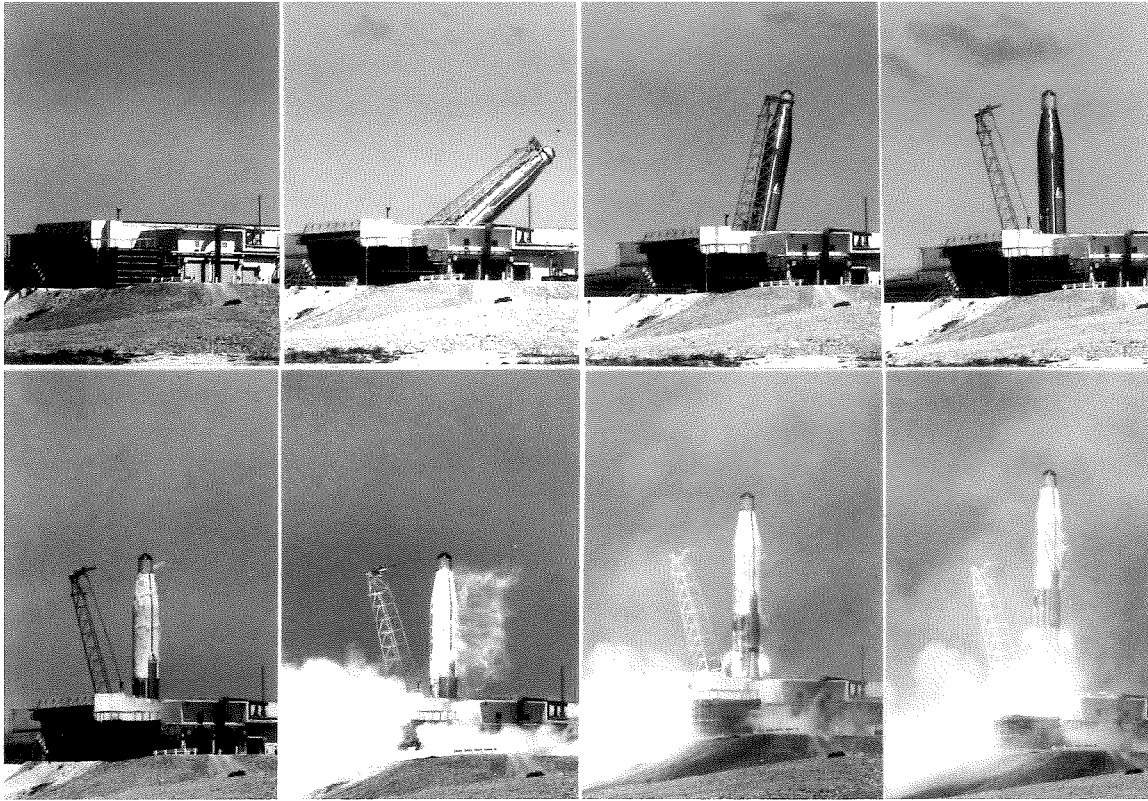
The Atlas project would ultimately employ over ten thousand workers from the state—an employment boost that cut the recession labor losses by more than half.⁴² One subcontractor alone employed over six hundred workers just at the Mead site, the majority of which were drawn from the local area.⁴³ Additionally, thousands of outside contractors were sent to Nebraska for the project—so many, in fact, that the children of these new residents put local schools over capacity. Busses were brought in to send some of the new students to neighboring towns for classes.⁴⁴ The scale of the project put millions of dollars into the local economy. The presence of the workers also led to infrastructure development, as the government expanded plumbing, water, and electricity systems to meet the influx of population.⁴⁵ This growth offered a secondary shot in the arm, further insulating Nebraska from the financial troubles of the rest of the country.

To rural communities suffering through the 1958 recession and an unemployment crisis which hit agricultural and blue-collar workers disproportionately hard, the Atlas project was the shelter that allowed many households to weather the storm. As a result, these communities quickly came to associate the project with opportunity and growth. The jobs provided by Atlas offered full workdays, good pay, and a supportive job environment. As the rest of America struggled to recover from the 1958 recession—which had been the sharpest downturn of the generation—Nebraskans near Atlas bases were able to rebound quickly. Opportune timing shaped the perception of rural communities, who not only accepted the silos, but ultimately embraced them.

Due to the secrecy of the projects, local media largely abstained or were prevented from reporting directly on the construction status on the bases. However, even in the penumbra of the needed secrecy, the effects upon the community at the time are apparent. In mid-August 1958, the Saunders County fair kicked off celebrations with its annual parade. Most of the floats were the same as in previous years: tractors hauling local preschool

An unlabeled photo of Atlas F silo construction gives some idea of the project's scale.





Launch sequence at an Atlas D missile base, Vandenberg AFB, California. Stored horizontally, the missile was raised into launch position by a crane.

students sitting on square bales and members of the local American Legion Post piled onto an antique Model-A, with a large American flag streaming behind.⁴⁶ But among the other floats, there seemed to be an unofficial theme: the missiles. Of the eight floats entered in the parade, three of them featured homemade rockets.⁴⁷ The Marietta Dairy Hustlers from Mead built a large missile out of old oil drums and the newspaper reported that during the parade route a “live calf was shown going aboard.”⁴⁸ Another missile-themed float by the 4-H Club of Cedar Bluffs bore the proud banner “4-H WILL SUCCEED” underneath a homemade wooden launch pad.⁴⁹ In the parade that year, the Atlas was held up as an icon of community identity and a source of pride and progress.

Miles away in the city of Lincoln, one can imagine a different scene that summer night. The crescendo of an approaching prop engine cut through the drone of cicada and mourning dove. A young boy in an empty lot, the quarterback in a neighborhood game of touch football, signaled a time out. Both teams rushed to the sidewalk, eyes skyward, searching for the source of the noise. They spotted a distant black silhouette, squinting to see details in the setting sun. Short fuselage and a triangular tail—a Piper Comanche likely bringing personnel to Lincoln Air Force Base or passengers to the newly renovated airfield in Omaha. More importantly, it was not a Soviet Bomber.

Nebraska’s youth, trained to identify aircraft on site, became a failsafe for long range radar. Thirteen-year-old Bob Kerrey of Lincoln had learned to identify craft in his Boy Scout troop.⁵⁰ Yet despite his involvement, young Kerrey’s recollections are about what one would expect from a young boy at the time. “I don’t remember the details of Alger Hiss. . . but I do remember something about secret messages hidden inside pumpkins.”⁵¹ Just the same, Kerrey could recall “anxiety about a Soviet missile attack” but “was not aware at the time of the [Atlas] silos being built.”⁵² It wasn’t until decades later that then-Senator Kerrey would come to learn of the Atlas’s footprint in Nebraska, during an intelligence briefing in Washington, D.C.⁵³

Unlike the children in Mead and other missile towns, youth in Nebraskan cities were oblivious to the Atlas bases. Judging by newspaper coverage at the time, their parents were perhaps equally unaware of the full scope of the projects happening in neighboring counties. Yet that gulf of understanding would be narrowed by an unexpected source: a group of well-known protesters who traveled to the state, opening their headquarters in downtown Omaha.

As Atlas grew to represent opportunity in rural communities, its presence in Nebraska came to symbolize the entirety of Eisenhower’s military-industrial complex to national pacifist groups. The protesters, under the leadership of famed peace activist A. J. Muste, launched an enormous campaign, dubbed “Omaha Action,” that operated publishing

operations out of a headquarters in Omaha, culminated with the erection of a permanent vigil camp outside the Mead base, and ended in the arrest and incarceration of over a dozen of the organization's leaders. However, the group's activities were not without considerable consequence to the local perception of the Atlas project, even if those consequences were completely unintended by the organizers of the campaign. In the end, the group's civil disobedience and lack of interface with the local community succeeded in raising the profile of the Atlas project in the regional media while unifying communities in the area in support of missile base construction. In a recent letter reflecting on the rationale of choosing to stage the protests in Nebraska, Bradford Lyttle, one of the leaders of the group, wrote: "We believed that contrasting our belief in nonviolent resistance with SAC's belief in military force and nuclear deterrence would be dramatic and thought-provoking."⁵⁴

On June 22, small groups of activists marched to Mead from Omaha and Lincoln, setting up a vigil camp outside of the main entrance to the missile base. Much to the surprise of local papers, the protesters were "not wild-eyed as most people have believed them to be, but rather quiet, educated, and sincere in their belief."⁵⁵ Indeed, the protesters, clad in flannel and denim, some with thick-rimmed Bakelite glasses, had the appearance of almost any other Midwesterners—save for the large hand-painted picket signs they carried denouncing the United States' nuclear program.⁵⁶

Upon arriving near the missile base, the group constructed its vigil—a campsite where members would live for the remainder of their protest. The activists pitched tents atop a small hill overlooking the main entrance used by construction workers at

the site.⁵⁷ Over the next several weeks, many of the group members were arrested for trespassing as they jumped the fence into the site, blocking trucks and attempting to pass out literature to construction workers inside the base. Muste, in a letter to President Eisenhower, wrote: "Our reason for this is that we feel called to speak with our fellows who are building the missile base at the point where our government is carrying out this crucial part of a nuclear military program, which we believe to be both profoundly evil and practically suicidal."⁵⁸

Two days later, the seventy-four-year-old minister, wearing a tweed suit and a straw Panama hat, climbed over a low wooden fence near the entrance to the construction site. Within moments, he was arrested by government officials. A federal judge would sentence him to six months in prison, and fine him five hundred dollars.⁵⁹

Ultimately, Omaha Action failed

to directly achieve any of its stated goals. It is doubtful that even the most optimistic of the protesters thought they would be able to deter an entire construction team from completing the launch complex in Mead. The protest itself received mostly local publicity—the majority of which was unfavorable. None of the organization's papers, now part of the collection of the Nebraska State Historical Society, show any Nebraskans participating in the group's efforts. On the surface, it seems as if the group's efforts were, as one member of the group would have put it, merely "a cry in the wilderness."⁶⁰

Historians have unanimously agreed, paying very little attention to the activity in Saunders County. A biography of Muste seems to confuse much of the episode, placing his demonstration incorrectly in Omaha at a non-existent Air Force base named Mead.⁶¹ The few accounts that do consider the protests do not give them substantial consideration, concluding only that "Omaha Action had a negligible effect on the public debate about the arms race."⁶² But this stance is only partially true. The protest did nothing to forestall construction of any of Nebraska's missile bases. However, Omaha Action did have an important local footprint: by challenging the programs, the protesters inadvertently galvanized support for the missile program among locals, who rose to defend Atlas. So, even though Omaha Action did not influence Nebraskans through nonviolent means of "direct action protest," the indirect consequences of the protests played an important role in shaping public perception of the Atlas project.

Members of Omaha Action at their campsite near Mead, Nebraska, 1959. The group's leader, Rev. A. J. Muste, is seated in a chair with his arms crossed.
NSHS RG1861-1



Despite intending its message for a national audience, the organization's message was heard most clearly by Nebraskans living near the construction sites in the summer of 1959. Lyttle wrote that the group did not plan "any interactions with people who lived in Mead."⁶³ Sharing its message with civilians living near the missile base ranked low among the organization's priorities. Lyttle reflects that "I don't recall any of us being particularly interested in reaching rural Nebraskans."⁶⁴ However, it was these people who lived in the shadow of the Atlas project, and who would remain near the project even after construction and attention would cease, for whom the stakes of the project were the greatest. For these people, Omaha Action played an important role—even if unintentionally.

Local newspapers were largely critical of the pacifists' efforts. A subheading in *The Wahoo Newspaper* characterized the group as "not well-accepted."⁶⁵ Accounts from the protesters themselves seem to support this assessment. A July issue of the *Omaha Action Bulletin* reported that essentially all of the people who showed up to the vigil camp over the course of the month were either idle on-lookers or active antagonists.⁶⁶ Many of the group's documents detail the extensive visits by the press to the vigil site, observing that some media coverage was "designed to discredit Omaha Action" with only a rare fraction being "honest and factual."⁶⁷ Wilmer Young reported that "the press and the radio have been generous in giving space to our activities here." However, Young was critical of the coverage, asserting that members of the press "have not, with a few exceptions, published our message. On the contrary they have occasionally exposed it to ridicule and often presented to the public what we believe to be a distorted image of our own program."⁶⁸

However, of all the coverage, the massive front-page spread in the July 2, 1959, Saunders County paper is the most surprising. Its editors had, up until then, mostly obliged government requests to keep the Atlas project out of the headlines. But the spectacle caused by Omaha Action was too important to overlook and became the biggest article related to the missile base up until that point. The paper largely describes the group's initial acts of civil disobedience while maintaining a generally critical tone. In its coverage, the paper tells the story of the pacifists' march from Omaha and how, upon stopping at a diner for a break, the "manager noted who they were and refused refreshments [to the group]."⁶⁹

Yet even more surprising than the sudden media coverage on the front page of that week's paper was the response that came in the form of a full-page advertisement taken out against Omaha Action. The newspaper rearranged its normal format to allow for a private response on the second page of the paper. In bold text, taking up the entire page, was a direct message to the protesters (see p. 96).⁷⁰

The editorial advertisement, which featured a photo of the protesters alongside a cartoon depicting Uncle Sam with his sleeves rolled up, criticized the group as unlawful and naïve. To add weight to the message, the names of businesses which paid for the advertisement was printed down the side of the page. In total, thirty-seven companies were



Lincoln to Mead "Pacifists" are shown here as they marched last Wednesday on their way to the Missile Site gate two miles east of the NOP main gate. Picture of the group was taken when they were within half a mile of their goal. Pictured from left: John White, 71; Lonsdale, Mo., Ed Lazar, 21; New York; Erica Kizer, 33; Chicago; Wendell Hill, 38; Ulen, North Carolina; Russ Anderson, 50; Americus, Ga.; Laurie Lovett, 19; Glenview, Ill.; and Don Kottenberry, 29; Adrian, Texas. Wahoo Newspaper Photo

"Pacifist" Group Wants Peace At Any Cost

All Educated,
Quiet, Sincere,
About Project

They call themselves "Pacifists," but J. Edgar Hoover labels them Hoax, as the Omaha Action group passed before the gate near the NOP Missile Site last past week calling for disarmament and passing out leaflets to workers on the site and others passing by.

The Omaha and Lincoln groups met at the site last Wednesday about 2:30 after a two-day march from each of the two cities. They at once set up camp on U. S. Government property outside the gate located two miles and one south of the NOP main entrance.

For about one hour the group sat in a semi-circle in 85 degree heat "mediating" and waiting for photographers from newspapers, Pathe News, and television to finish shooting their pictures.

Then, about 3:30 p.m. Wednesday they threw up a tarpaulin against the hot sun, crawled under, had lunch and laid their plans for the 10-day siege against the erection of the Atlas missile launching site on the NOP land.

Rev. A. J. Muzke, who arrived as the marchers met at the gate, led the 12 "Pacifists" discussion and attempted to organize the group's activities for the week.

Not Well Accepted

The group members each in turn passed on observations they had



Omaha to Mead Action Marchers, pause en route Wednesday noon to

Wahoo Newspaper, July 2, 1959

listed, ranging from gas stations to doctors' offices. Even the local Dairy Queen franchise got in on the action. However, and perhaps not surprisingly, the final business named on the list was *The Wahoo Newspaper* itself.⁷¹

This display of community solidarity for Atlas would soon be matched by community efforts against the pacifists. As news of Omaha Action's vigil spread, members of American Legion Post #262, based out of the neighboring town of Yutan, organized a counter-protest.⁷² They were joined by more Nebraskans from Valley, Elkhorn, and Nebraska City.⁷³ In total, at least four counties were represented as locals congregated in support of the construction of the Atlas D base. Within days of the publication of Omaha Action's civil disobedience, the pacifists were outnumbered by Nebraskans who had come to rally in support of Atlas. The peace activists, who had not engaged the local community at any phase of their project, inadvertently provided an opportunity for the community to rally together in support of the base. The newspaper wrote an article about one Mead elder, Ralph Burnett, who stomped on the toes of the pacifists as they tried to enter the missile base. Burnett, well

into his seventies, began threatening Omaha Action members, saying "I'm no pacifist. I'm willing to fight for my country."⁷⁴ The sherriff was eventually called in to intervene, and newspaper photos show one officer standing between Burnett and a group led by Lyttle, presumably for the protection of the latter.⁷⁵ For his zeal in defending the missile base project, Burnett was lionized in the local paper. His portrait ran on the front page of the *Wahoo Newspaper*, with a caption that read "Ralph Burnett. . . Worth 100 of Them Kind."⁷⁶

Later in July 1959, a few weeks after the heated standoff between locals and the pacifists, a group of ten men attacked the vigil camp. Only one member of Omaha Action, Walter Gormly, was at the site when the group came and threw eggs, kicked over tents, set part of the camp on fire, and pushed the camp's water tank down a ravine.⁷⁷ The men finally relented in the attack in order to brag to the guards stationed outside the gates of the missile base.⁷⁸ However, before the vandals left, Gormly asked the group why they had attacked the camp. One of the men stepped forward, saying they had hoped to destroy the camp because the pacifists' efforts threatened the community, and that there were growing fears that the civil disobedience by Omaha Action may "throw people out of work by getting defense contracts cancelled."⁷⁹

In the end, Omaha Action's numbers dwindled as members were arrested and taken to prison. In a portion of his unpublished autobiography, Bradford Lyttle, the co-coordinator of Omaha Action, describes his arrest and time in the Omaha jail. Lyttle recalls that members of Omaha Action were often treated worse than other inmates. Lyttle was thrown into a cell on the top floor of City Hall in Omaha. The rising July heat settled in the jail, which quickly "became a furnace."⁸⁰ Leaky pipes kept the floor and mattresses perpetually soaked. During their detention, the pacifists were refused the exercise and library privileges normally allotted to prisoners. Lyttle, reflecting over a lifetime of civil disobedience, remembered the Omaha jail as "one of the worst I have been in."⁸¹ As most of the group's leadership was arrested, Omaha Action's presence in Nebraska evaporated. The *Omaha Action Bulletin*, a periodical that frequently published statements and updates from the organization, quickly transformed into a fund-raising mechanism for the legal defense of its members. In the months after the march to Mead, the bulletins no longer listed the group's original return address in downtown Omaha. Instead, Omaha Action could only be reached by mail at a post

Wahoo Newspaper,
July 2, 1959

We Believe In Peace Power

The strength
to keep the peace



**and We OPPOSE Those
who Work Against Peace
by Suggesting the U.S.
Face an Armed Enemy
Without Power**

To The Demonstrators At N.O.P., We Say:

WRONG PLACE
The "peace" is peace for which Russia, the United States, in the name of which the Kremlin will strike first. Why not advise your demonstrators to march where the real threat to peace exists?

WRONG TIME
The U.S. has the capability of long peace. They do not all have an operational hydrogen bomb. The little missile never leaves its test site. Why did you not advise your demonstrators and critics then?

WRONG WAY
You advocate "civil disobedience" or "peaceful violation of laws or regulations." As law-abiding citizens, we cannot and will not tolerate any such manipulation. Your methods are alien to law-abiding Americans, who, before, in orderly manner through elected officials.

This Patronage Ad Is Sponsored And Paid For By . . .



- Rudy's Mobil Service
- Johnson Deep Rock Service
- 1st National Bank
- Brodahl Motor Company
- Peez Implement & Feed
- Farmers Union Co-Op.
- Oil Association
- Markle Produce
- Federal Land Bank
- Loan Office
- Farmers Co-Op. Company
- Jo & Bud's Place
- Keith's Sinclair Service
- Schroeder's Paint & Wall Paper
- Bill's Champlin Service
- Kratky's Conoco Service
- Wahoo Oil Company
- Dr. Mason Lathrop, M.D.
- Wigvam Cafe
- Kaur Sheet Metal
- Fullerton Lumber Company
- Drs. R. C. & J. R. Swanson
- Orthopedic Practice
- A. W. Hanson Plbg. & Htg.
- Dairy Queen
- Gamble Store
- Poultry Packers, Inc.
- Trautt Hardware
- James E. Vanek Insurance
- L. E. Hult Furniture
- Wahoo Appliance Company
- Anderson Boick-Pontiac, Inc.
- Anderson Auto Company
- Economy Housing Company
- Armo Drainage & Metal Products
- Fritz's Texaco Service Station
- Glen Grieser Insurance
- Kontos & Sons Cleaners
- Wahno Auto Supply
- Wahoo Newspaper

**"WE EXIST
if we're
too tough
to tackle,**



**WE PERISH
if we're
weak and
unready!"**

GENERAL N. P. TWINING
TYPE OF T. W. & S. CO. ST. LOUIS



office box in Chicago.⁸² As the pacifists disbanded, or were sent away to federal prison in other states, they ironically left behind communities that supported the missiles even more than when the group had arrived.

However, it is important to note that the strong community acceptance Atlas ultimately received was not an automatic reaction of economic and patriotic opportunity. Government officials worked hard with communities, who realized quickly that housing such armaments during the Cold War amounted “to having a target right outside their door.”⁸³ Rural Nebraskans took this threat seriously.

In 1960, a new pastor came to lead the Federated Church in Aurora, Nebraska. The Reverend Bill Osick had grown up a little over an hour east, near Omaha. He was a newly minted man of the cloth, fresh out of the seminary in Dubuque.⁸⁴ On Sundays, two hundred and fifty faithful would gather to hear his sermon in a fashion similar to most of the rural churches across Nebraska. The worshippers came from town or from the farms that covered the countryside for miles in every direction. They filed into the simple but proud chapel, made of pale bricks with white Doric columns near the entrance.⁸⁵ The pastor’s church, a mixed Presbyterian and United Church of Christ congregation, counted many prominent citizens among its flock.⁸⁶ All of the doctors and lawyers in town were members, as were the principals of both the elementary and high schools.

John Newman, one of the lawyers in Aurora, was quick to invite the new pastor and his wife over to dinner. The Newman house was likely one of the nicest in town. Built just a few years earlier, it even had a two-car garage.⁸⁷

During dinner, the pastor and the lawyer made idle conversation about the town, the weather, and the news. While the world at large was embroiled in the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, at the dinner table in rural Aurora these geopolitical issues may have seemed like distant concerns. But Rev. Osick and John Newman both knew this was not the case. Within the previous year alone, the government had begun construction on two nuclear missile silos in Seward and York counties to the east.⁸⁸ While a farming community was probably of no interest to Moscow, nuclear missile bases certainly were. The Soviets, who had demonstrated their ability to take photographs of the far side of the moon with spy satellites the previous October, perhaps also possessed the technology to watch the Corps of Engineers as they

installed the missiles in Nebraska.⁸⁹

But as Russia was advancing its technology with feats in space, and the United States was engaged in prolific development in rural Nebraska, John Newman had also been working on a construction project of his own.⁹⁶

“If the Red Army comes marching down Highway Six, I’ll be ready,” the lawyer said to the pastor, leading him outside. Through a cellar door and under the slab concrete floor of the garage, John Newman had built a bunker. The shelter, installed in the event of a surprise nuclear attack by Russia, was fully stocked with tinned meat and canned vegetables. It had containers of fresh water and more beds than the Newman family had members. “Enough room for friends, too,” the lawyer pointed out.⁹¹

In his five years leading the church in Aurora, Pastor Osick never preached a single sermon about the morality of the nuclear weapons sitting in the countryside to the east. His presbytery had not passed along any advice from the national church—there was none to be shared. As he recollected, “you could [preach about the missiles] if you wanted to, but you didn’t. It was best to speak on non-political issues.”⁹² Such official silence was typical of all Protestant denominations at the time.

Conversely, the Catholic Church had been quick to condemn nuclear warfare, and many Catholic groups were vociferously opposed to nuclear arms. The Pope wrote that Catholics should “tirelessly endeavor to bring about . . . the banishment of atomic warfare.”⁹³ However, Catholics in small

Inside an Airborne Launch Control Center for Atlas D missiles, 576th Strategic Missile Squadron, Vandenberg AFB, California. Similar facilities existed at Nebraska missile bases.



Nick Batten graduated from Harvard University with a degree in history and is currently an officer in the Army Corps of Engineers.

Nebraskan communities occupied a tenuous social stratum. Ailine Rauer grew up Catholic in Mead, and recalled the social problems: "There were very few families in the Catholic Church back then and we felt that everyone looked down on us."⁹⁴ When Rauer was a girl, her best friend belonged to the Lutheran congregation. As soon as the pastor discovered their friendship, he called Rauer's playmate into his office and cautioned her against befriending a Catholic.⁹⁵ In the end, rural Catholics, likely due to their difficult position in communities at the time, did not stand against the Atlas project publicly.

However, the lack of public religious opposition on the issue was by no means an indication of a lack of passion over the nuclear question. The citizens of rural Nebraska were fully engaged in the debate, which even led to differing opinions within families. One of the most poignant examples occurred in the Johnson family of Mead, the town's largest family. The county postman would later recall of the Johnsons:

On the north route there were 26 Johnson families. . . There was a Furniture Johnson, an Elevator Johnson, a Pop Johnson, a Big Lou Johnson, a Big Charlie Johnson, a One-Eyed Johnson, a Corn-King Johnson, a Rich Johnson, a Red Head Johnson, there were three Henry Johnsons, a Little Hank, a Long Hank, and a Windy Hank, there were three David Johnsons, one was known as Cyclone Dave, one as Crackwagon Dave, one as Noisy Dave. The one known as Noisy Dave could speak but would never talk.⁹⁶

As the United States was in the thick of the war with Japan, two of the Johnson boys were preparing for service in the Pacific. Milford Johnson was sent to basic training at Fort Hood in Texas to prepare for the invasion of the Japanese mainland. His younger brother Ken, a seminary hopeful, was preparing for missionary work in Ube, a fishing community midway between Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Both of the brothers had grown up in the congregation of Alma Lutheran Church, and graduated from high school in town.⁹⁷ Yet by the end of the war, the brothers would have radically different views on America's development and use of the nuclear weapons.

Milford was being trained as an infantryman, and to him the bombs that ended the war came as a complete surprise. "Nobody knew about the plan until BANG. That was the best kept secret

of the war."⁹⁸ With the surrender of Japan, the army's need for infantrymen dropped and Milford was sent to serve with the 236th Quartermaster Company, an outfit assigned to support salvage operations in the Pacific.⁹⁹ On his way to his post in Kobe, Milford passed through Nagasaki. While the destruction was immense, the young soldier felt that without the bomb, he likely would have died in the fierce battle for the Japanese mainland.¹⁰⁰ The bomb had perhaps saved the lives of thousands of Americans like him.

Kenneth Johnson, who went by Ken Dale to avoid confusion with other Johnsons in Mead, arrived in Ube as a missionary. Like his older brother, he would see much of the war's destruction first hand. Immersed in the community for three years after the war, he also witnessed the long term devastation in the country, and ultimately took a different view on the bomb than Milford. To the young man of *The Book*, the use of such a massive weapon against other humans was terrible under any circumstances.¹⁰¹ As Japan's recovery progressed, the brothers came home to Mead, and shared stories of their time abroad. The subject of nuclear weapons was discussed, and the brothers tried and failed at reconciling their differing views. In the end, the nuclear concerns that even most churches refused to address directly were discussed and debated at dinner tables throughout Nebraska.

By the latter half of the 1960s, the Atlas missiles would be gone from Nebraska. As the technical needs of the United States ICBM and rocketry programs changed, technology advanced. The Atlas, which had to be fueled up immediately before launch, was replaced by weapons like the Minuteman missile, which burned solid fuel and had a quicker launch time. New bases were constructed and soon, as American submarine technology progressed, most land-based silos became obsolete.¹⁰² In 1962, the world watched as John Glenn rode into space upon the nose of an Atlas.¹⁰³ But NASA, too, would require new boosters. By the end of the decade, the ICBM program and NASA, which had both benefited from the collaborative missile development of the fifties, parted ways. Putting men on the moon required greater thrust than sending a nuclear payload across the ocean, and the Saturn rockets were developed.¹⁰⁴

The government tried to devise alternative uses for the enormous silos that had housed the missiles, but ultimately found none. The rural locations that



At the entrance to an abandoned Atlas missile site.

had made the bases strategically advantageous also ruined their feasibility for other military purposes.¹⁰⁵ Scrappers gutted the sites, removing much of the material inside. Most of the bases were imploded or backfilled, though a few in Nebraska survived. The base properties were sold off to farmers. One man, who bought some of the land to graze his cattle, charged his neighbors one dollar to dispose of old tractor tires by throwing them down to the bottom of the silo. His briefly successful enterprise was shut down when the state deemed it an environmental concern.¹⁰⁶ With this minor exception, the missile bases' significance to the communities ended with their decommissioning.¹⁰⁷ Chuck Walker, a key figure in the program, would later eulogize that the Atlas structures simply "became part of the landscape."¹⁰⁸

In many ways, the project's local story has likewise disappeared into the historical landscape. Yet examining how the Atlas program interacted with rural communities makes the importance and nuance of that close relationship clear. Rural Nebraskans did not live in isolation, unaware of the national nuclear debate. Many stockpiled canned vegetables and fresh water, turning tornado shelters and root cellars into improvised nuclear bunkers.¹⁰⁹ Roberts Dairy, one of the state's largest creameries, constructed fallout shelters just east of Mead that could house one hundred Holsteins and two cattle hands.¹¹⁰ In 1958, the governor even mandated that rural county newspapers print fallout plans to inform citizens of evacuation procedures in the event of a nuclear strike.

Given this understanding, the community's ultimate acceptance of the missile sites is even more remarkable. In the end, it is clear that for many rural Nebraskans, Atlas was more than just

a government facility outside of town; the project represented patriotic opportunity and economic promise. Thousands of Cornhuskers came together to participate in the construction of the bases, collectively playing a key role during one of America's most critical moments. Had local history unfolded differently, the Cold War itself could have taken a different course. If the project had not arrived on the heels of a dire recession, if protesters had won over locals, or if religious leaders had condemned the nuclear project, community support for Atlas could have faltered. Without thousands of Nebraskan hands working on the project and its peripheral support facilities, America's first generation of missile defense might never have arrived on schedule. ❏

NOTES

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¹ "Farmers Union Co-op Advertisement" (Farmers Union Cooperative Company, Oct. 2, 1958).

² Ibid.

³ "New Grain Elevator Celebrated," *The Wahoo Newspaper*, Oct. 9, 1958.

⁴ "Farmers Union Co-op Advertisement."

⁵ "The Atlas," *The Military Engineer*, Nov. 15, 1959.

⁶ This was the 549th Strategic Missile Squadron, assigned to the 385th Strategic Aerospace Wing, stationed at Oifutt Air Force Base, Nebraska. The squadron's other launch complexes were at Arlington, Nebraska, and Missouri Valley, Iowa. Each site housed three missiles.

⁷ *World War II Honor List of Dead and Missing* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center Of Military History, 1946).

⁸ Chuck Walker, *Atlas: The Ultimate Weapon By Those Who Built It* (Toronto: Apogee Books, 2005), 260.

⁹ *From Snark to Peacekeeper: a pictorial history of Strategic Air Command missiles* (Offutt Air Force Base: Strategic Air Command, 1990), 21.

¹⁰ Bill Yenne, *SAC: a Primer of Modern Strategic Airpower* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 2000), 12.

¹¹ Lawrence Larsen and Barbara Cottrell, *The Gate City: A History of Omaha*, 1st ed. (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1982), 213.

¹² Walker, *Atlas: The Ultimate Weapon*, 260-1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁴ "Atlas IN ORBIT: Radios Ike's Message Of Peace To World," newsreel, Universal Studios, Dec. 22, 1958, http://www.archive.org/details/1958-12-22_Atlas_In_Orbit.

¹⁵ George Seiler, *Strategic Nuclear Force Requirements and Issues* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1983), 32.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ "The Atlas," *The Military Engineer*, Nov. 15, 1959.

²⁰ Two of these sites (at Mead and Arlington, Nebraska), housed multiple Atlas D missiles in horizontal above-ground launch facilities; one (at Kimball, Nebraska) housed an Atlas E missile in a horizontal underground "coffin" bunker. The Kimball site was part of the 566th Strategic Missile Squadron based at Warren AFB, Wyoming.

²¹ The Nebraska state capitol is the second-tallest capitol in the United States, a few floors shy of the height of the capitol of Louisiana. While taller buildings do exist in the state today, they were not constructed until years after Atlas construction had been completed.

²² Andrew Busch, *Horses in Midstream: U.S. Midterm Elections and Their Consequences, 1894-1998* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press), 94. Busch identifies the 1958 recession as one of the most dramatic in American history, which resulted in significant shifts in power during that year's midterm elections.

²³ *Twentieth Annual Report of the Division of Employment Security for the Period July 1, 1956 to June 30, 1957 to the HONORABLE VICTOR E. ANDERSON, Governor of Nebraska* (Nebraska State Department of Labor, Nov. 1, 1957), 32; *Twenty-First Annual Report of the Division of Employment Security for the Period July 1, 1957 to June 30, 1958 to the HONORABLE VICTOR E. ANDERSON, Governor of Nebraska* (Nebraska State Department of Labor, Nov. 1, 1958), 33; *Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Division of Employment Security for the Period July 1, 1958 to June 30, 1959 to the HONORABLE RALPH G. BROOKS, Governor of Nebraska* (Nebraska State Department of Labor, Nov. 1, 1959), 33; *Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Division of Employment Security for the Period July 1, 1959 to June 30, 1960 to the HONORABLE DWIGHT W. BURNEY, Governor of Nebraska*

(Nebraska State Department of Labor, Nov. 1, 1960), 33. Economic reports show the number of job-seekers at fifteen thousand above normal levels.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ "Fremont Man Predicts Financial Boom Here," *The Wahoo Newspaper*, Mar. 19, 1959.

²⁷ *Ibid.* While some of the machinery was prefabricated, a large portion of the highly skilled labor was performed on site.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Inez Barrett, telephone interview by author, Jan. 24, 2009.

³⁰ Renald Barrett, telephone interview by author, Jan. 24, 2009.

³¹ Walker, *Atlas: The Ultimate Weapon*, 17.

³² Chuck Walker, telephone interview by author, Oct. 7, 2008.

³³ "Activation Schedule," internal document, Dec. 30, 1959, Strategic Air Command Office of the Historian.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Renald Barrett interview.

³⁶ Larsen and Cottrell, *The Gate City*, 214.

³⁷ Chuck Walker interview.

³⁸ Walker, *Atlas: The Ultimate Weapon*, 174.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴⁰ "Phil Prohett interview by Chuck Walker" in Walker, *Atlas: The Ultimate Weapon*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴² *Twenty-First Annual Report of the Division of Employment Security*.

⁴³ Walker, *Atlas: The Ultimate Weapon*; "Missile Site May Attract Thousands," *The Wahoo Newspaper*, Mar. 19, 1959. Early subcontractors filled about two-thirds of their positions with local hires.

⁴⁴ Renald Barrett interview.

⁴⁵ Walker, *Atlas: The Ultimate Weapon*, 216.

⁴⁶ "Parade Kicks Off Saunders County Fair," *The Wahoo Newspaper*, Aug. 23, 1958.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Bob Kerrey, personal interview by author, Jan. 24, 2009.

⁵¹ Bob Kerrey, *When I Was a Young Man: A Memoir*, 1st ed. (Boston: Mariner Books, 2003), 67.

⁵² Kerrey interview.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Letter, Bradford Lyttle to author, Jan. 22, 2009.

⁵⁵ "'Pacifist' Group Wants Peace At Any Cost," *The Wahoo Newspaper*, July 2, 1959.

⁵⁶ "Omaha Action Leaders Trespass," *Omaha World-Herald*, July 2, 1959.

⁵⁷ Bradford Lyttle letter.

⁵⁸ Letter, A. J. Muste to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, June 29, 1959, RG1861, Nebraska State Historical Society (hereafter NSHS).

⁵⁹ "More Pacifists Arrested Monday – Trespassing," *The Wahoo Newspaper*, July 9, 1959.

⁶⁰ Erica Enzer, "Statement of Erica Enzer," July 13, 1959, RG1861, NSHS.

⁶¹ Robinson, *Abraham Went Out: A Biography of A. J. Muste* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 165.

⁶² James Tracy, *Direct Action: Radical Pacifism from the Union Eight to the Chicago Seven* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 110.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ "Omaha Action Leaders Trespass."

⁶⁶ "Omaha Action Bulletin #12," newsletter (Omaha, July 28, 1959), RG1861, NSHS.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "Statement of Wilmer J. Young," July 6, 1959, RG1861, NSHS.

⁶⁹ "To The Demonstrators At N.O.P.," *The Wahoo Newspaper*, July 2, 1959, sec. advertisement.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Capitalization, punctuation and formatting is preserved from the original. The acronym NOP stands for Nebraska Ordnance Plant, a World War II and Korean War military facility where the Mead Atlas base was constructed.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² "More Pacifists Arrested Monday – Trespassing."

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ "Burnett Parades Against NOP Pacifists," *The Wahoo Newspaper*, July 2, 1959.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Omaha Action, "Vigil Camp Flattened," 1959, RG1861, NSHS.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Bradford Lyttle letter; "Omaha Action Bulletin #12."

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² "Omaha Action Bulletin #12."

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Pastor Bill Osick, personal interview by author, Nov. 30, 2008.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid. While Pastor Osick does emphasize socio-economic divisions across denominations in his community, there is no apparent trend in play across Nebraska. In some communities, ethnicity seems to be a bigger determining

factor. In others, churches serve different parts of the community based on proximity. Also, the existence of joint congregations is somewhat common and often the result of shrinking congregations, a lack of pulpit supply, or other convenience. What is crucial to point out, however, is how much this ease-of-integration illustrates the fact that many Protestants did not see themselves as vastly differing from their neighbors belonging to other denominations.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Walker, *Atlas: The Ultimate Weapon*, 263.

⁸⁹ "Luna 3 Mission Page," http://nssdc.gsfc.nasa.gov/imgcat/html/mission_page/EM_Luna_3_page1.html.

⁹⁰ Osick interview.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Pope Pius XII, "Easter Message" (Vatican City, 1954).

⁹⁴ Ailine Rauer, personal interview by author, Dec. 28, 2008.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Eben Williams, "untitled," in *Mead Centennial 1877-1977* (Mead, NE, 1977).

⁹⁷ Milford Johnson, personal interview by author, Dec. 28, 2008.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² *From Snark to Peacekeeper*. Atlas missiles were used for decades at Cape Canaveral to launch satellites, and some that used radio inertial guidance systems were shot out of the sky to test American anti-missile defense technology.

¹⁰³ "SPACE TRIUMPH!: Glenn Flight Thrills World," newsreel, Universal Studios, Feb. 22, 1962, http://www.archive.org/details/1962-02-22_Space_Triumph.

¹⁰⁴ Between the Mercury missions, which used Atlas boosters, and the Apollo missions, which used the Saturn rockets, Titan boosters were used for project Gemini. The Gemini missions, unlike the solo Mercury flights, sent two astronauts into space, and so the Titan's slightly greater payload capacity was favored by NASA.

¹⁰⁵ Walker, *Atlas: The Ultimate Weapon*, 181.

¹⁰⁶ Tony Castillo, personal interview by author, July 17, 2008.

¹⁰⁷ The Nebraska State Historical Society has erected an historical marker at one former Atlas site in Otoe County in memory of a command crew assigned to the base that died in a plane crash. See: http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/markers/texts/atlas_missile_site.htm

¹⁰⁸ Walker, *Atlas: The Ultimate Weapon*, 187.

¹⁰⁹ Stockpiles and impromptu bomb shelters were reported by many interviewees.

¹¹⁰ Kenneth Rose, *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2004), 5.