

State Department of Geology and Mineral Industries

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MINUTEMAN SITES IN OREGON

The U. S. Air Force, through its Strategic Air Command, is undertaking a "crash" program for the establishment of "minuteman" missile sites throughout various parts of the continental United States. More than one thousand separate underground missile silos will be constructed within the next two to three years if the program goes ahead as planned. In Montana there are already 150 completed silos with 15 underground control centers (one control center for each "flight" of ten "birds."). Each silo is approximately 130 feet deep and 85 feet wide, and separated from its neighbor by several miles. In each "squadron" there are five "flights" or a total of 50 missiles per squadron. As there are usually at least three squadrons in a missile group, the area of land involved can cover several thousand square miles.

This information was obtained from Harold Wolfe, geologist for Burns & McConnell, consulting engineers for the Air Force Minuteman silo project. His job is to visit each area in the country where minuteman facilities are planned and to outline the geology of each region and the localities best suited for actual construction of the silos. A proposed missile facility must meet at least four basic requirements after the general site has been chosen:

1. It must be within a 150-mile radius of an S.A.C. base, as Air Force personnel will handle most of the operations at the control centers.
2. The silos should be sunk in relatively hard rock as protection from nuclear air blasts. They are designed to withstand anything except a direct hit.

3. The silos should be located above the general ground-water level. Keeping large underground holes such as these completely waterproof can be quite expensive. There should be sufficient water, however, from deep wells or nearby streams to take care of the needs of the personnel at the base.
4. Accessibility to the region should be reasonably good. This last requirement is not as stringent as the first three because the Bureau of Public Roads will construct the necessary roads to serve the missile area if the other basic qualifications are satisfactorily met.

The nearest S.A.C. base to Oregon is at Mountain Home, Idaho, about 50 miles southeast of Boise and 100 miles southeast of Ontario, Oregon. For this reason, the only part of the State near enough to be utilized would be the southern half of Malheur County. This region would be ideal for the establishment of a missile base as the lavas that underlie most of it have a relatively high density, and water seepage should be no problem. The lava plain is generally flat, and accessibility, although not good, could be improved at small additional cost.

It is probable, therefore, that construction will begin sometime this spring or summer on missile silos in Malheur County, although it will not be given much publicity. Once the missiles have been stored in their "houses", they will hardly be noticeable on the surface and in the dry climate of southeastern Oregon will require a minimum amount of maintenance and inspection. As each silo takes up a relatively small amount of ground, even the cattle will not be seriously inconvenienced.

Report by: R. E. Corcoran

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