

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. Department of the Interior

# National Park Service

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New National Register Listing

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## ANCHORAGE BOROUGH-CENSUS AREA, ALASKA Site Summit Missile Complex Listed in the National Register of Historic Places

On November 20, 1960, General J.H. "Iron Mike" Michaelis, Commander of the U.S. Army Alaska, told spectators gathered at the first live Nike missile test firing from Site Summit that "live-fire exercises were invaluable training in firing from actual combat sites and at the same time demonstrated to the citizens of Alaska and the nation the power of this modern weapon." Annual firings from Site Summit continued during the months of November and December for four years, 1960-1963. In July 1964, the Army cancelled practice firings from Site Summit because population growth in the flight range area made the firings unsafe. "Site Summit remains an important physical representation of U.S. military strategy during the Cold War," said Roger G. Kennedy, Director of the National Park Service. "Completed in 1959, the site is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a Cold War era Nike-Hercules missile installation." Site Summit was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on July 11, 1996.

During World War II, the United States Army recognized that advancements in Germany's aircraft and missile technology had made America's existing conventional artillery obsolete. In response, Army ordnance studies focused on developing a surface-to-air guided missile system that could intercept and destroy attacking planes. The Nike and Nike-Hercules missile systems were essential components of the United States' military defense system during the Cold War period. Established in response to the increasing threat of long-range Soviet bombers carrying nuclear and conventional weapons, the Nike program provided an important surface-to-air missile system capable of destroying incoming enemy aircraft. Approximately 274 Nike-Hercules missile batteries were built across the United States during late 1950s and early 1960s, protecting strategic military and civilian targets.

A total of eight Nike batteries were erected in Alaska. Due to its proximity to the Soviet mainland, Alaska was considered a pivotal location in the United States' first line of defense from anticipated Soviet aggression. Alaska's eight Nike installations were critical to the overall military strategy for the air defense of the country, representing crucial components in the military network of detection, identification, interception, and destruction. Site Summit, located atop Mount Gordo Lyon just outside Anchorage, was situated to protect Fort Richardson Army and Elmendorf Air Force Bases as well as the city of Anchorage.

Construction of Site Summit necessitated the blasting of approximately 60 feet of the mountain peak to provide a level area for the Battery Control Building. A second ridge was leveled for the launch area. In addition to the massive rock work, it was necessary to construct 1.5 miles of road that rose 2,000 feet. Construction, supervised by the Alaska District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, began in May 1957 and was completed by September 1958. The equipment arrived in February 1959 and by May the Missile battery was declared operational. Washington D.C. architect Leon Chatelain Jr., in cooperation with Spector and Montgomery Architects, designed the original Nike facilities.

Typically, 125 soldiers were needed to operate a Nike site. Although not all personnel were required to live on the premises, the site was staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The changing political climate and rapidly developing defense technologies, especially with the development of the intercontinental ballistic missiles, made the Nike missile bases obsolete. In May 1979, Site Summit was placed on stand down status and deactivated two months later. The Army continued to guard the site until 1986. "Site Summit is a reminder of the U.S. military's role in Alaska and was listed as a cooperative project between the Army and the State," said Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer Judie Bittner. "Every winter during the holiday season a lighted star is placed on the mountain above the site, which has special significance for the local community. The state of Alaska continues to look into the possibility of using the site."

Alaska State Historian Jo Antonson added, "It is important for Alaskans and Americans to recognize the contributions of recent history. The Post World War II period has added important resource sites into our cultural heritage, which should be studied and recognized while the materials are still intact." Today it is the only Nike missile site left in Alaska that retains its physical integrity. Because of its isolated location and restricted access, the buildings at Site Summit still stand.

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture. Listing in the National Register provides recognition that a property is significant in the heritage of the nation, the state, or the community. Owners of private property listed in the National Register are free to manage listed properties as they choose provided that no Federal license, permit, or funding is involved. When there is Federal involvement, the appropriate Federal agency is responsible for giving the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation an opportunity to comment on the project and its effects on the property. This review procedure ensures that historic and archeological properties are considered in the Federal planning process. The National Register is maintained and updated by the National Park Service.

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