

Francis E. Warren Air Force Base and the Cold War

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December 1998

The role Francis E. Warren Air Force Base played during the Cold War was one that was both representative of military bases elsewhere and also unique because of its location, history, mission, and armaments. Moreover, the role of the base can not be accurately understood without attention to the larger set of political, economic, and social issues shaping it and shaping the environment in which the personnel at the base and the citizens of the community operated. And, indeed, while the Cold War itself represents the focus of this study, the history of the post prior to the Cold War is essential to understanding the historic context of the post; likewise it is important to note that even though the people of the world no longer live in the shadow of the Cold War, and even though the Strategic Air Command is an organization of the past, the activity and armaments at Francis E. Warren Air Force Base remain as robust as ever. The history of this military installation is thus of singular importance in the Cold War and perhaps in its earlier history as well. Part of that importance has to do with the fact that here it is possible to see how local issues reveal national (and even international) issues and conversely how national issues become manifest in the daily life of the nation beyond the level of abstraction in the halls of power. Thus too, it can be seen at F. E. Warren AFB that historic context, by which the component parts make sense, holds a complexity that suggests larger meanings of discrete activities like security, housing, community relations, political activity, and economic growth and challenge, in addition to the life and death issues of peace and war. Clearly, the historic context goes well beyond the litany of changes of command.

Three general factors have shaped the history of this post in ways that are sometimes common to all military installations and sometimes in ways unique to Fort D. A. Russell, subsequently Francis E. Warren Air Force Base. One factor is the military activity taking place on and from the base. In this regard the history of the post has been transformed in fundamental ways from its origin with the coming of the railroad, and its function as a post for the U.S. Army to the modern siting of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles for the U.S. Air Force, along the way serving an important function as a supply depot, an important cavalry post, and a quartermaster training facility. A second factor is the political and economic environment in which the fort and base have operated. The economic impact on local communities has often surfaced as an issue both nationally and locally with military activities in general and this installation is no exception. Thirdly, the specific activities and missions of the military at this installation often have implications that reach well beyond the local. As is true in military history generally, the consequences of combat and preparedness of any and all units reach far—across the plains in early times and around the world in recent years—and deep into the pervasive issues of war and peace.

Origins of Fort D. A. Russell

Often associated with frontier military activity in the area that became Wyoming, the post that became F. E. Warren AFB actually came late in the process of military development in Wyoming. With emigrant trails crossing the central portion of the later state, a line of U. S. Army outposts ranging from temporary to permanent, from small outposts to forts, emerged along the Oregon, California and Mormon Trails, building on posts that had sometimes been active as private operations reaching back to the fur trade times. Thus Fort Laramie, Platte Bridge Station (subsequently Fort Caspar), and Fort Bridger became important military installations in the 1850s and 1860s. Indeed, even when the stage route that had traveled those trails switched to the competing Overland Stage Road across the southern edge of Wyoming in 1862, additional forts like Fort Halleck and Fort Sanders emerged to protect traffic and communications there. Likewise the abortive Bozeman Trail and the posts that were constructed along its course through the Powder River Basin preceded the construction of the military post near Cheyenne.

In concept, however, the origin of this army base was part of the same pattern as those which came before it. Just as those bases were part of a larger effort to assure safe transportation and communication along the trails, the new base that appeared in 1867 in the southeast corner of what would become in 1868 the new Wyoming Territory also was designed to protect construction, transportation, and communication along the railroad. And just as the railroad replaced the trails, this fort would outlive the other forts. And where the mere presence of the military at those other forts had proven provocative and generated as much conflict as safety and intensified conflict with the adversary—Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapahoe—the question for the future would be whether the new post would fall into that pattern as well.

Named Fort D. A. Russell after a Union general killed in the Civil War, located on the eastern base of the Laramie Range—also known then as the Black Hills—this post was the result of the convergence of the same forces that spawned other military outposts in the region. Since 1864 a state of semi-war existed on the plains as a result of the expansion of white settlement into the West. By that date somewhere between one-third and one-half million emigrants—and their livestock and wagons—had passed through on their way to Oregon, Utah, and California. In an ever-widening corridor to accommodate the traffic, they had also brought trading posts into the area, they had consumed the grass that the buffalo required, they had brought disease, they had brought new goods and practices on which some of the natives now became dependent, and they had brought the military to assure their safe passage. The result of this was predictable: Colonel William Collins, commander of the entire military district of the Platte and based at Fort Laramie, was correct when he saw the source of Indian hostility in the weeks before his son was killed as this:

It is proper to remark that almost all the Indians are just now liable to become hostile. The rush of emigrants through their country in search of gold is immense, and their game is being rapidly destroyed or frightened

away; the whites who come in contact with them generally know nothing of Indian habits or character and often do them injustice; and then they complain that the treaty promises of the Government are not kept.¹

With growing resentment of this intrusion and the potential that seemed imminent, the massacre in Colorado at Sand Creek of Cheyennes sparked a coordinated offensive by Arapahoe, Sioux, and Cheyenne Indians in the plains area. The 1866 and 1867 construction of forts in the Powder River basin, in violation of explicit assurances, represented another element of the pattern of encroachment and hostility by whites to which they responded with attacks. Moreover, a new feature emerged in 1867 with the expansion of the new Union Pacific Railroad across the plains, bringing with it a new, more permanent, and more threatening element of this penetration. In 1867 the railroad, the new town of Cheyenne, and the new Fort D. A. Russell appeared together in the southeast corner of the state.

This would likely not bring peace to the area. Indeed, it could only heighten tensions already existing. Which is not to say that the military would bear responsibility for that conflict; it is simply to recognize that the mission given the soldiers, which was essentially to solve political, economic, and social problems by force of arms, to keep the peace by threat of war, had limits and consequences. Given the pattern that had already emerged, it is hardly surprising that war continued and that more troops were needed. Indeed, in a pattern that would also presage the developments of the Cold War, especially the process of mutually escalating war machines—that the more military strength mobilized, the more that will be needed—this represents a central conundrum of warfare. One approach to that conundrum has been to disregard it and continue to rely on ever greater might for victory; another has been to try to break the cycle with meaningful peace discussions. This context, however, has shaped the development of the post near Cheyenne.

Fort D. A. Russell in Wyoming Territory, 1867-1890

In the years following the establishment of this post, construction was probably the most important activity. The soldiers stationed there would routinely guard railroad workers, escort official visitors, and protect the adjacent Cheyenne Depot (commonly known as Camp Carlin).² The soldiers also apparently provided on occasion law-enforcement for the town of Cheyenne. Unofficially, some of the same soldiers also provided the object of that law enforcement activity.³ But the main focus of their

¹ William O. Collins to William P. Dale, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 12, 1865. This document is reprinted in Agnes Wright Spring, *Caspar Collins: The Life and Exploits of an Indian Fighter of the Sixties* (reprint edition, New York, 1967), 164-168.

² Tetra Tech, Inc., *Peacekeeper Program: Cultural Resources Technical Report 1: Cheyenne Depot* (San Bernardino, CA: 1985), 15-17.

³ The most complete chronology of this activity can be found in Peggy Dickey Kircus, "Fort David A. Russell: A Study of Its History from 1867 to 1890," *Annals of Wyoming*, 40 (October, 1968), 179-184.

energies was the construction of the post, the building of barracks and officer quarters, a hospital, a parade ground, stables, and other elements of the new installation. Within a year of its establishment, indeed, the war that had been raging—on and off—to the north with the Sioux, came to an end with the Treaty of Fort Laramie of 1868. That treaty supposedly assured to the Indians what had already been guaranteed to them in earlier agreements but which had been violated by the U. S. Army's construction of posts in their territory. In reality, and contrary to assurances, that treaty also marked the removal of Native Americans in the area to reservations. With a touch of irony, the newly negotiated peace treaty actually brought the expansion of Fort D. A. Russell. Camp Collins and Fort Morgan, not far south in Colorado, were closed and some of their troops were relocated to Fort D. A. Russell. Additional troops from Fort Fetterman, situated at the beginning of the now-closed Bozeman Trail, also transferred to Fort D. A. Russell, but others at the post were sent westward to build more posts (like Fort Fred Steele on the North Platte River) along the railroad.⁴

As Fort D. A. Russell took shape and enlarged, its significance for the local community became increasingly clear and explicit. Before it had been in existence a full year, the local newspaper editor summed up the impact of the post on Cheyenne:

One of the most important adjuncts to the prosperity of Cheyenne is Fort D. A. Russell, a garrison capable of comfortably quartering fourteen companies of men, and Head Quarters This post, occupying the position it does, employs a great number of men and teams, and annually expends millions of dollars, all of which operated [sic] in favor of this city Fort Russell is pronounced the best arranged and one of the most important military garrisons in the United States.⁵

This contribution to the local economy would remain, as with other posts situated near communities, a fundamental theme in the development of both the town and the fort.⁶ This may even have been the most important theme at Fort D. A. Russell in its early years. Even with occasional reports of Indian harassment and depredation in the area, some of which were officially labeled “without foundation,” the major activity of the soldiers appeared to be construction and expansion of their post. Indeed, during the winters extended campaigns on the severe plains generated great hardship and were kept

⁴ Gerald M. Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne: A History of Fort D. A. Russell, 1867-1930* (Cheyenne, Wyoming: High Flyer Publications, 1989, revised 1996), 23.

⁵ *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, July 4, 1868, quoted in Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 24.

⁶ An alternative view is the faint suggestion by one student of the early town and its military neighbor that Camp Carlin provided a greater commercial contribution to the community because “Hundreds of freighters and their teams were needed to transport supplies from the depot’s twelve large warehouses to farflung army posts in Colorado, Dakota, Montana, and Utah.” Gilbert A. Stelter, “The Birth of a Boom Town: Cheyenne in 1867,” *Annals of Wyoming*, 39 (April, 1967), 14. See also, J. F. Jenkins, “Camp Carlin or Cheyenne Depot,” *Annals of Wyoming*, 5 (July, 1927), 24-26. Jenkins, a captain of the commissary at Camp Carlin, provides information especially regarding the transportation activities at the fort, noting that the population ranged from around a thousand to twelve hundred along with “over 25,000 animals most of the time.” Others would suggest a number of livestock closer to 2500.

to a minimum, leaving garrison duty and its monotony and off duty hours in Cheyenne as the principal activities of the soldiers.

Subsequent years saw the soldiers at Fort D. A. Russell used still in patrols and escorts,⁷ but also in the campaign of 1876 against the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe who were not on the constricted reservations. Five cavalry companies joined General Crook's northbound column that summer.⁸ The following year it was plain, as General Crook noted, that the Indian wars were over. That same year, in an indication of the changing mission of the military, D. A. Russell contributed a contingent in the effort to suppress the national railroad strikes, the Wyoming Territory soldiers serving in Omaha and Chicago. Despite the changes in the air, at the end of the decade of the 1870s, the fort remained a viable and thriving post. Other posts were closed—like Fort Fetterman and Fort Sanders—and some of their units were assigned to Russell even as some of this fort's soldiers were transferred elsewhere. As the various forts and posts in Wyoming Territory disappeared, with no mission to justify their continued activity, Fort D. A. Russell soon would be the sole remaining military installation.

In the face of this pattern of closures, the fate of Fort D. A. Russell itself remained uncertain until 1882 when the War Department committed to the continued operation of the fort. At that time, moreover, the post launched a building program that replaced the temporary frame structures that had prevailed with larger brick buildings appropriate to a permanent installation. Even though wooden frame buildings continued to dominate, over the decade and a half following 1885, forty-three brick buildings were constructed and, of course, that number included central and major components of the fort such as barracks, officers' quarters, and non-commissioned officers' quarters.⁹ At the same time, however, without a clear enemy at hand—the patrols for and occasional encounters with Native Americans were clearly diminishing—the military involvement in other kinds of issues increased. In 1885 soldiers from Fort D. A. Russell went to Rock Springs, Wyoming, in the aftermath of the Chinese Massacre in which twenty-eight Chinese laborers in the coal mines operated by the Union Pacific were killed and at least a dozen more were wounded. At the behest of Territorial Governor Francis E. Warren, the soldiers went to Rock Springs to restore order; in all this, the goal was not so much that of a humanitarian effort to protect the downtrodden Chinese as it was to protect the profits of the Union Pacific which had made public its intention of having “Rock Springs

⁷ Documentation of much of this patrol activity remains sparse. Few instances of soldiers' accounts of their activities on patrol remain. This extract is one such example from a soldier that summarizes his encounter with the enemy while out on patrol: “There was about 20 of us had a little squabble with the red skins the other day. There were about 25 of them as near as I could judge. We only killed three of them and the rest escaped. We took the scalps of the ones we killed and let them lay.” Letter from Charles Lester, June 16, 1869, quoted in Kircus, “Fort David A. Russell: A Study of Its History From 1867 to 1890,” p. 189n.

⁸ For an alternate view that stresses the continual nature of the task of fighting Indians, as part of “the subjugation of the Indian by the white settlers of the United States [covering] roughly a period of three hundred years” and that focuses especially on the Treaty of 1868 as “a model of appeasement,” see Jane R. Kendall, “History of Fort Francis E. Warren,” *Annals of Wyoming*, 18 (January, 1946), pp. 17-21.

⁹ Tetra Tech, Inc., *Peacekeeper Program: Cultural Resources Technical Report 4: Fort D. A. Russell / F. E. Warren* (San Bernardino, CA: 1987), 12-19 (copy available in University of Wyoming libraries).

worked entirely by Chinese and machinery.” In any case, the soldiers remained at Camp Pilot Butte in Rock Springs, rotating in one and two month tours with troops from Fort Douglas near Salt Lake City, for the next thirteen years.¹⁰

It was at this point that even the most ardent and partisan chronicler of the post notes that “political problems in Wyoming territory were rapidly becoming more important than military problems” for Fort D. A. Russell.¹¹ The political problems centered on Francis E. Warren, the territorial governor. As a political appointee of the President, Warren, a supporter of expansion of the post, was replaced in 1886 by Grover Cleveland. Cleveland was committed to the enforcement of federal laws prohibiting the enclosure of public land with fences; Warren not only failed to enforce the law but had, in fact, enclosed sections of public land adjacent to his own extensive ranch properties.¹² Now it appeared that the military would be the vehicle for removing those fences, and the fear among the large ranch owners was that the Buffalo Soldiers coming to Fort D. A. Russell were going on a fence-cutting expedition. After about four months encamped on Crow Creek adjacent to the post, the African American soldiers moved on without removing fences, much to the relief of the local power structure. On the other hand, one part of the Fort D. A. Russell complex soon fell to a challenge. At the time of the establishment of the post a separate entity, Camp Carlin, had been established between the fort and the town as a supply depot. The posts it had been supplying were now gone, and railroads made supply easier at any rate; in September 1889 Camp Carlin was closed.¹³ Local merchants proposed ways to keep the camp open or to change its function but the Army shut it down anyway.¹⁴

Fort Russell and Fort Warren Confront the 20th Century

The transformation of the post continued. Just as the post was born in 1867 on the eve of the creation of Wyoming Territory the following year, when Wyoming became a state in 1890, another threshold had been crossed for Fort D. A. Russell. In that year the Seventeenth Infantry from Fort D. A. Russell participated in the convergence of military forces around the Pine Ridge Reservation in the wake of the Ghost Dance revival among the Sioux. Beset and besieged, believing that redemption from their tragic path was at hand, the Sioux were being disarmed by the soldiers at Wounded Knee when fighting erupted with the final loss of nearly a hundred fifty Indian deaths, sixty-two of them women and children, in the massacre. Apparently not directly involved in the engagement, the D. A. Russell detachment returned unharmed.¹⁵

¹⁰ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 87.

¹¹ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 95.

¹² T. A. Larson, *History of Wyoming* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965; Second Edition, revised), 144. Lewis L. Gould, *Wyoming: A Political History, 1868-1896* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 84-88.

¹³ Charles D. Carey, “Camp Carlin,” *Annals of Wyoming*, 28 (October, 1956), 145-150.

¹⁴ “Wyoming Scrapbook: Camp Carlin,” *Annals of Wyoming*, 17 (July 1945), 157. This source refers to the camp as “the second largest depot in the United States Army.”

¹⁵ Peggy Dickey Kirkus, “Fort David A. Russell: A Study of Its History from 1867 to 1890, [Conclusion]” *Annals of Wyoming*, 41 (April 1969), 104-105. This article is the concluding second part of the study

The next year, 1891, Russell troops were given custody of a small army of about fifty hired gunmen who had been brought into the state by the large ranchers to kill and intimidate the small ranchers and homesteaders who also sought use of the public domain. Surrounded by a larger force of the farmers and ranchers near Kaycee in Johnson County, the “invaders” found themselves captive by the very people against whom they had launched their offensive, and the siege was ended only by the intervention of troops from Fort McKinney. The hired guns were escorted first to Douglas, Wyoming, and from there by the Seventeenth Infantry to Fort D. A. Russell in April where they were held, some with full freedom of the post, until released in August under their own recognizance and never brought to trial.¹⁶

Then in 1894, in the midst of the first urban depression facing the nation, a movement to secure assistance from the federal government, led by General Jacob S. Coxey, called the Grand Army of the Commonweal, marched toward Washington, D. C. Unemployed and seeking work, the goals of the movement included modest public work programs such as those that would later be enacted in the 1930s. When the band of homeless, jobless men reached Green River, Wyoming, four companies from Fort D. A. Russell met them to make sure that Union Pacific property was not threatened.¹⁷ Indeed, late the same year, with the Pullman Strike spreading across the country, Russell’s soldiers took positions protecting the railroad in Rock Springs, in Pueblo, Colorado, and in Pocatello, Idaho. Clearly, the mission of the soldiers stationed at Fort D. A. Russell had adjusted to the issues of an industrial society, even if it often appeared that they were now protecting private interests from the public itself.

For the first time that mission took on an international complexion in 1898. In April the United States declared war on Spain and proceeded to mobilize for combat in both Cuba and the Philippines, both of which ultimately ended up under the control of the United States government. The Eighth Infantry immediately left for the Cuban invasion assembly point in Georgia, four National Guard companies were quartered at Fort D. A. Russell until June before leaving for Manila, and a volunteer cavalry regiment assembled at the fort prior to leaving for Florida, although the soldiers never reached Cuba. The war against Spain thus concluded successfully, the troops sent to Cuba returned (although two battalions would return from 1907 to 1909), but those in the Philippines remained to fight against the Filipino people. The pattern of the twentieth century may have been evident in this new deployment. In July 1900, Troop B of the First Cavalry Regiment was sent to

begun and published in *Annals of Wyoming* in 1968 in which the author is identified as “Peggy Dickey Kircus.”

¹⁶ Gould, *Wyoming: A Political History, 1868-1896*, 137-158; Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 268-284.

¹⁷ Kendall, “History of Fort Francis E. Warren,” 27-29. Kendall notes “This movement of the troops of the 17th Infantry entirely broke up the march of the so-called Commonwealers eastward, over the lines of the Union Pacific Railway from Ogden and Pocatello.” She also notes that the commander, Colonel John S. Poland, then took 147 Commonweal prisoners from Green River to Idaho, even though Idaho was outside his jurisdiction. In quoting Poland’s justification, with approval, she indicated a sentiment that would here and elsewhere prove dangerous then and since: “A great moral force is a bayonet on a gun and a web-belt full of cartridges,” p. 28. At any rate, as she says, “the Commonwealers were ‘stopped.’”

China as part of the international force suppressing the Boxer Rebellion against foreign powers dominating the China economy.¹⁸

At the same time, it was no secret that a restructuring of the Army was at hand. While in 1901 and 1902 many installations, including the D. A. Russell headquarters, approached the process nervously, Fort D. A. Russell made the short list (announced in 1902) of posts to be continued and expanded, even having an infantry regiment and artillery battery. So the post then launched another building boom, finally replacing the last of the temporary structures created at the birth of the post. The political architect of this expansion was Francis E. Warren—the longtime friend and advocate of this post and now U. S. Senator from Wyoming. Warren had additional expansion in mind which evidently he shared with President Roosevelt in a visit by the President to the post in 1903 and which Roosevelt embraced. In these plans the post would acquire Forest Reserve land from the Department of Agriculture for sufficient room for maneuvers.¹⁹ These plans were enhanced in 1905 when Warren became chair of the Senate Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds and also chair of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs. Potential enemies and missions aside, the future of Fort D. A. Russell was now assured politically. The bonds increased dramatically and personally the same year when Warren's daughter married a Captain John J. Pershing. The following month, given his own talent and the influence of his father-in-law, Captain Pershing was promoted to Brigadier General, jumping past 910 senior officers.²⁰ With the addition of more soldiers, bringing the troop strength at D. A. Russell to around 2700, with finally a general officer (Frederick Smith) assigned to the post, and with an expanded building program underway, the first decade of the twentieth century marked both the culmination of a long and uncertain path of development and the beginning of a new, modern U.S. Army Fort D. A. Russell.

From this new bastion the Army dispatched units to suppress labor unrest in Cañon City, Colorado in 1914-1915 and to influence the revolution in Mexico in 1911 and 1916-1917 (actually penetrating deeply into that country in a futile pursuit of Pancho Villa in the second instance).²¹ With the declaration of war against Germany in 1917, the post gained additional importance as the troop strength increased from around 3,000 to about 5,000 soldiers and more than 3,000 horses.²² Although the relationship between the soldiers at the post and the community of Cheyenne was often tested, the impact of this substantial force on the local economy was powerful and dwarfed the previous levels that had even been considered huge. At the same time, when those soldiers departed for missions elsewhere, the Cheyenne economy suffered. In June 1916, for example, the troop strength remaining at Fort D. A. Russell was reduced to a total of two officers and

¹⁸ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 129.

¹⁹ Kendall, "History of Fort Francis E. Warren," 50-52.

²⁰ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 138. Pershing would become the most famous individual associated with the post even though he never actually served there.

²¹ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 154, 158-9.

²² Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 161.

thirty-eight enlisted men.²³ In late 1917, with deployment to Europe for World War I, five officers and a hundred enlisted men were all that occupied the post. After the mayor complained to Senator Warren that it appeared that the War Department was permanently vacating the fort, additional troops were assigned there.²⁴ The demobilization upon the conclusion of World War I achieved temporarily local goals. Selected as a demobilization point, more than thirty-five thousand soldiers left the Army at this post in the eight months following the war.²⁵ Then the installation settled into its routine activity of garrison duty and suppressing strikes, although the Fifteenth Cavalry also actually operated the coal mines during the strike of 1919 at Rock Springs, Hanna, Sheridan, Hudson, and Thermopolis.²⁶ It appeared that the glory days of brigade-size troop strength and combat missions were over. Indeed, in the post-war environment, the need for a large standing army undeniably declined and plans from Washington indicated reductions in troop strength and even the number of military installations were forthcoming. Time and again Senator Warren came to the rescue with additional troop assignments just as abandonment of the post seemed in the offing. The post finally stabilized in the 1920s with a force of approximately 1500 soldiers and officers. Two major changes appeared small at their inception but would go well beyond the attention given to buildings and polo and command socials. First, the introduction of education and training as critical mission components came quietly and positively as the command established a variety of schools and training programs; the ultimate significance of this innovation would be realized later, but at the time it offered the promise of a more professional military education and also training that would help troops upon their departure from service.²⁷ A second new development was the institutionalization in 1925 of a relationship with the Cheyenne community in the creation of a joint liaison—a Military Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Commerce that drew upon men who were prominent in the city's business community as well as military leaders—to address common issues.²⁸ These two developments would endure longer than anything else and would even outlast the efforts of the fort's senatorial patron, Francis Warren.

Fort Francis E. Warren, as the post was renamed, January 1, 1930, upon the death of the Senator, as with other military installations between the wars, settled into a pattern of training and garrison duty, punctuated by special missions like working with the Civilian Conservation Corps, that went unrelieved until 1936 at which time the Franklin Roosevelt administration dramatically increased military spending to a level greater than ever before in peacetime. Clearly even before Roosevelt entered his second term of office, he was preparing the country for war. That effort broadened dramatically in 1940 when the military undertook an expansion that included conscription and the mobilization of National Guard and reserve forces. Well before Pearl Harbor, in March 1941, more than 4500 draftees into the Quartermaster Corps were training at Fort Warren. At that

²³ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 159.

²⁴ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 162.

²⁵ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 167.

²⁶ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 169.

²⁷ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 187.

²⁸ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 187-188.

time the training program at the fort became known as the Quartermaster Replacement Training Center. Within a few months the draftees at Warren numbered over 9,500. As more and more soldiers arrived for training the post even went above 26,000 soldiers in late 1942 or early 1943.²⁹ When the training center changed from individual training to unit training, the population of the post plunged to around 3000 men and women soldiers. This was subsequently augmented, after the Africa campaigns, with perhaps a thousand German and Italian prisoners-of-war. Given that the population of the entire state of Wyoming at the beginning of the war less than 250,000, and Cheyenne at around 25,000, and with the combination of activities at Fort F. E. Warren, the judgment surely stands by the eminent historian of Wyoming, T. A. Larson, that “All told, the economic and social impact of wartime Fort Warren on Cheyenne and the state was tremendous.”³⁰

Once the war began to decline with victory in Europe and then Japan, the post became a discharge center, processing thousands of soldiers returning to the civilian world. As they shed their uniforms the size of the Army dwindled and the size and mission of Fort Francis E. Warren once again became a question to be addressed.

F. E. Warren AFB and the Onset of the Cold War

In the post-World War II years, the nature of the change was far from clear but the omens were not good for the supporters of a revitalized post. In the first place, the cavalry, which had long been important to this fort, no longer existed. It had declined steadily in the years since World War I and had counted for naught in the second war. In 1946 the cavalry, as a separate branch of the army, was terminated. Then too, the entire defense establishment was being reorganized and the deactivation of multiple posts was a certainty. The situation, as perceived by advocates for a military presence in Cheyenne, was bleak. One source put it: “Closure seemed so certain that the Cheyenne chamber of commerce decided to appoint a seven-man delegation to go to Washington and ‘fight for the fort.’”³¹ Even so, the population of the fort—at that time training Army Air Corps Engineers—included almost 5,000 officers and soldiers.

What ultimately saved Fort Warren was the Truman administration’s decision to rebuild the military establishment to wage the Cold War. Fort Francis E. Warren was transferred to the newly created Air Force and in October 1949 became Francis E. Warren Air Force Base. The key to its survival, aside from the escalation of the Cold War in the Truman administration, was both its continued training function and its close coordination with the business leaders in Cheyenne. So this military installation began to grow dramatically once again.

The Cold War expansion at F. E. Warren AFB brought more than 9,000 personnel, including both staff and students of the 3450th Training Wing, to the base as

²⁹ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 209.

³⁰ T. A. Larson, *History of Wyoming*, 477.

³¹ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 213.

early as the end of 1949. By 1951 the number had increased to 12,000. This number required, significantly, the addition of five hundred Wherry housing units in 1951 and 1952, those units being constructed by a consortium of local contractors.³² The construction and the spending by the additional military personnel pumped millions into the Cheyenne economy.

At the same time, Eisenhower's policy in waging Cold War had taken a different tack from that of his predecessor. With an approach that de-emphasized ground forces and put a premium on the threat of "massive retaliation" with nuclear weapons to any adversary, the Air Force stood to gain—apparently. Yet Eisenhower also sought to balance the budget and to restrict all military spending as much as possible. Arguing that "There is no defense for a country that busts its own budget," Eisenhower consistently tried to reduce military expenditures as President. Indeed, his first budgetary action upon taking office was to reduce the Air Force appropriation by five billion dollars.³³ This also meant closing some military installations. So once again the future of F. E. Warren AFB was up in the air.

Although 14,336 students graduated from the training schools at F. E. Warren AFB in just the second half of 1956, and although new dormitories, and a new service club and a dining hall were under construction at that time,³⁴ an undercurrent of retrenchment also threatened. The commander of the 3450th Technical Training Wing, Colonel H. F. Muentner, sent a letter to George Cole, president of the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, the following March, advising Cole "that a reduction in force of civilian employees is in progress." Muentner continued:

In consonance with the overall reductions in civilians in the Department of the Air Force, this base has been advised by headquarters, Technical Training Air Command, that the civilian personnel authorization at Francis E. Warren is to be lowered immediately. The new authorization is 1728 instead of the old of 1900. Since we did not have the full 1900 on board, our forced reduction will affect about 120 people. This reduction is necessitated by fund limitations and reduced technical training student loads.

You can rest assured that the reductions will be well planned and accomplished in those areas best able to absorb them.³⁵

The reduction of such a small number—120—of personnel would not ordinarily signal a crisis. Yet in an environment in which base closings seemed imminent everywhere, this

³² Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 214-215.

³³ Blanche Wiesen Cook, *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy of Peace and Political Warfare* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 299.

³⁴ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 218.

³⁵ COL H. F. Muentner to George Cole, March 14, 1957. Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne, Wyoming, Collection H97-1, Records of the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee, 1955-1957.

was taken to be the initial step—with possibly more to come. Indeed, the rumor circulated as well that the entire technical training wing would be transferred to another location leaving F. E. Warren AFB vacant and abandoned and with obvious consequences for the community that had come to depend upon it.

Immediately the Chamber of Commerce launched its counteroffensive, writing and wiring all three members of the Wyoming Congressional delegation. A powerful flurry of telephone calls, telegrams, and letters ensued involving the two Senators (O'Mahoney and Barrett) and Congressman (Thomson), the Air Force brass in Washington, and various Cheyenne leaders. Senator Frank Barrett responded to Tracy McCracken, publisher of Wyoming Newspapers Incorporated, "It was a like a bolt of lightning out of the sky when the fellows told us about the reduction at Warren Air Force Base, particularly when they said that the decision to make the change had already been made by general Myers [sic]."³⁶ Support for Cheyenne even came from elsewhere in the state. Donald Chapin, a prominent attorney and community leader in Casper, weighed in also, indicating concern in that town over the threatened departure of the technical training school from F. E. Warren AFB: "Furthermore, the injury which would be done the economy of not only Cheyenne, but all of Wyoming, is of serious consequence, the prevention of which should be an issue of prime importance to the state."³⁷ The resolution of this issue was slow in coming. The ordered reduction-in-force evidently had been made at a level lower than the Washington Air Force command, and that decision had been made at the appropriate level. With the intervention of the entire Wyoming delegation, however, the decision to move the technical training wing to Lackland Air Force Base was rescinded pending an investigation. Moreover, the delegation had been able to extract a commitment from the Air Force to maintain Warren even if the training program were moved. As of August 1957, Congressman Keith Thomson reported to the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce the following in a telegram:

Air Force advises no change in Warren status as I have previously reported to you. Study is underway as previously reported but decision will still be made here and we will be allowed an opportunity to present case if study should be adverse. Regardless, Air Force assures me of continuing requirement for Francis E. Warren AF Base.³⁸

There the situation rested. But certainly the Chamber of Commerce did not rest. The fear was palpable and the threat imminent. Seven years earlier, the dependence of the community on the base was made clear when a local newspaper article reported the monthly payroll at the base ("Cheyenne's Leading Industry") reached well over a million dollars with an annual total of more than sixteen million dollars—not counting any

³⁶Barrett to McCracken, April 5, 1957, Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, Military Affairs Committee files.

³⁷ Donald Chapin to Senator Frank Barrett, April 17, 1957, Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, Military Affairs Committee Files. The copy of the letter does not include a letterhead, but Chapin's signature as "Vice-President" suggests perhaps his position in the Casper or Wyoming Chamber of Commerce.

³⁸ Telegram, Thomson to Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, August 9, 1957, Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, Military Affairs Committee Files.

construction or local contracting.³⁹ The stakes, in other words, from the perspective of the Cheyenne business community, were high and there was no foreseeing the outcome. Given the Eisenhower administration's commitment to retrenchment and budget cuts, Cheyenne could still, the assurances of the Air Force notwithstanding, lose its base.⁴⁰

In September 1957, Malcolm MacIntyre, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force, provided the following reassurance to Congressman Thomson, but it was sufficiently qualified to be less than a total commitment:

This reduced allocation created problems at Warren Air Force Base which I am informed have been alleviated by the Air Training Command allocating an additional \$500,000 for the first quarter. Thus it is not anticipated that any major temporary layoffs will occur at Warren Air Force Base during September.

In the event that command changes occur, every effort will be made to provide an orderly transition and a continuous activity although, naturally, any change in basic mission would unquestionably involve some adjustment in civilian employment. Needless to say, every effort will be made to keep such adjustments to a minimum.⁴¹

That was September. The nervousness continued.

War, Peace, and the Atlas Missile, 1957 – 1962

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched the world's first artificial satellite,

³⁹ Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 215.

⁴⁰ This is not to suggest a unified community or even a common view shared by the businessmen and the airmen on the base. Rather, this crisis operated much as other crises elsewhere do and illuminated fault lines in the local social structure, fault lines that might in various communities follow the contours of race, of class, or other social division. An airman who chose to sign his letter only as "A disgruntled airman," wrote the military Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Commerce a stinging rebuke that went so:

You d—n money grabbers, Why can't you let General Myers run the Air Training Command and you tend to your own shystering in Cheyenne. You all probably voted Republican because you thought General Ike would lower taxes and cut the budget.

Well! It will never get cut if you block the move of the Supply School to Kelly Field. What if every Chamber of Commerce tried to keep every military outfit under their thumb[?]

* * *

I hope the Air Force retaliates by closing the Air Base. It would serve you money grabbers right.

* * *

Wise up, Midas before your fatted calf turns to uneatable gold.

This letter, dated April 9, 1957, is located in the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee Files.

⁴¹ Malcolm A. MacIntyre, to Keith Thomson, September 9, 1957, copy of letter in Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee Files.

Sputnik, and the entire discussion changed. Amidst intense and powerful pressures for an enlarged defense program and expenditures, Eisenhower continued to resist (“We could not turn the nation into a garrison state” he explained later), but he did permit acceleration of the ballistic missile program; the Democratic Congress attacked the administration’s posture as too timid and pushed for, and secured, even greater defense expenditures. The decision-making process in the Pentagon, and in Washington, generally, is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. Historians usually forego the temptation to argue that specific pressures lead to specific outcomes. The pressure for continued Air Force presence in Cheyenne and the pressure for accelerating the ballistic missile program were separate and coincidental. Nonetheless, on November 22, 1958, within two months of the launching of Sputnik, the decision had been reached and announced to locate an intercontinental ballistic missile site at F. E. Warren Air Force Base. Senator Frank A. Barrett summed up the connection at the end of the year without mentioning the needs of Cheyenne’s economy: “On the whole, I am quite well pleased with the rapid acceleration of plans since Sputnik first ventured into outer space. I am very optimistic with regard to our ability to regain superiority in every area of defense.”⁴² The *Wyoming State Tribune*, in Cheyenne, however, put a different light on the subject when it reflected on the decision:

The post sputnik era hit Wyoming with a bang last fall as the U.S. Defense Department announced plans for the construction of its first intercontinental [sic] ballistics [sic] missile base at Cheyenne.

Figures ranged from \$65 to \$100 million expected to be spent in construction and maintenance of the new missile launching site, and the announcement caused businessmen to plan a complete change in the economy of the city of Cheyenne.

The announcement was a shot in the arm for the city which had been searching for new areas for investment. This search resulted from the nationwide decline in the railroad industry that had paced the city’s economy since the rails first pushed their way into the state in 1867.⁴³

Speculation generated about the possibilities being brought by the new construction as plans were laid in the spring of 1958. The basic configuration of the plan was to construct four missile-launching sites, each with six Atlas-armed launching pads, in a ring around Cheyenne with a radius of 20 to 25 miles. The *Wyoming State Tribune* covered one meeting in which “the tremendous employment-construction scope of the Cheyenne-Warren air base missile-launching facility was outlined today.”⁴⁴ It remained difficult, however, to calculate the number of jobs that would actually be created by the construction of the missile sites. That left the door open for rampant conjecture.

When groundbreaking came in the summer of 1958, actually a brief period since the decision was made, given the complexity and size of the project, it appeared that all

⁴² *Wyoming State Tribune*, December 22, 1957.

⁴³ *Wyoming State Tribune*, July 22, 25 1958.

⁴⁴ *Wyoming State Tribune*, March 25, 1958.

needs were met. To underscore the importance of the occasion, General Nathan Twining, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made the trip to participate. A variety of other dignitaries also contributed. Colonel Muentner, commander, presented an understated perspective of the importance of the facility being constructed.

The breaking of ground here today signals the beginning of the development and construction of support facilities to be built on the base. A modern communications facility will be erected approximately on the site of today's ceremony. When completed, it will tie the 706th Strategic Missile Wing into the world-wide Strategic Air Command Communications network, to provide for instantaneous command control over our Missile Force.⁴⁵

And Cheyenne's mayor found a larger significance to the location of Atlas missiles near Cheyenne. Mayor Worth Story proclaimed, "Cheyenne is proud to have the first missile base in the country and proud to be the nation's No. 1 target for enemy missiles."⁴⁶

Others, however, were less enthusiastic and expressed their concerns. In response, at the Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee meetings in April and May of 1958, the military and business community dismissed those concerns. The noise of static tests would not be disruptive for ranchers. And the social consequences of new population were greatly exaggerated, according to the committee.⁴⁷ Even so, at the groundbreaking, according to press accounts, "A lone Cheyenne housewife, Mrs. Robert Laybourn, the mother of six children, picketed the pavilion with a cardboard sandwich sign protesting the theory of nuclear and missile defense. 'There's no possible defense from it,' she said. 'I had to do something today to draw the attention of someone to the fact that we have to have peace.'"⁴⁸

With groundbreaking and progress on construction, two integrally related developments emerged. First of all, as a subsequent news article summarized, construction boomed in the city in 1958. New residences constituted the majority of the building with 461 permits for new homes issued, but new businesses and commercial buildings also began, as did public facilities, and the city annexed 230 acres. At the same time, because of the publicity for this construction, "too many persons who were out of work due to the recession came to Cheyenne looking for work." While some found work, many were disillusioned and left. "For a while," the summary noted, "they posed a problem for relief agencies."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ This is taken from the program for the groundbreaking for Atlas missile site, June 7, 1958, copy located in Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee Files.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 219.

⁴⁷ Minutes, Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, Military Affairs Committee Files, for meetings in April and May 1958.

⁴⁸ *Wyoming State Tribune*, June 9, 1958.

⁴⁹ "Missile Project Brings Changes at Cheyenne," *Casper Tribune-Herald and Star*, February 22, 1959.

Secondly, the eyes of the nation focused on Cheyenne and that meant that while the construction of the missile sites signified a stronger national defense to some, to others it moved the earth closer to annihilation and nuclear holocaust. In addition to the lonely vigil of Ms. Laybourn in Frontier Park, others from outside the area called on the Air Force to cancel its plan and not build the missile sites. The *Casper Tribune Herald and Star* reported “Early in the summer the movement started and gained momentum until it projected Cheyenne into the nationwide news spotlight in August.”⁵⁰ In July, two men, a Baptist minister and an activist, circulated leaflets in Cheyenne asking the citizens to join them in meditation at the construction site northwest of the city. That leaflet and others they distributed made an explicit connection between the missiles and the only nuclear weapons ever used against humans (in Japan by the United States) and reinforced that connection by convening at the construction site on August 9, the thirteenth anniversary of the destruction of Nagasaki. It was their hope, at that meeting, they said, “to achieve insight into our relationship to events 13 years ago and to what is happening in Cheyenne now.”⁵¹ Arthur Springer, a former member of the American Friends Service Committee and one of the two organizers of the meditation session, told reporters, “When people become concerned about their lives, they begin to think about the methods that are being used to ‘gain the peace,’ Since hydrogen bomb missiles cannot be used without disaster and because the idea of deterrence involves great risks and is morally wrong, we propose that work on the missile base be stopped.”⁵² Those who attended the meeting were identified by the local press as a cross section of people including a minister, a typist, a secretary, a school teacher, a dairy farmer, and three students, as well as others who were not identified, and came from places as far away as Illinois, Pennsylvania, Iowa, and New York.⁵³

Although this meeting convened and dismissed without incident, a similar meeting later in August generated even more national attention when one of their number, Kenneth Calkins, seated himself on a cattle guard entry to Site A, in an action of passive resistance to the construction of the site, and was then hit by a truck that did not stop for him. He suffered a broken pelvis. Subsequently two additional protestors were arrested for trespassing and served jail terms in the county jail when they refused to pay their fines. One, Reverend Theodore Olson, remained in jail more than three months as a “moral duty.”⁵⁴ The protests and meditations, of course, did not halt construction of the

This was the Annual Wyoming Edition of the newspaper.

⁵⁰ Kirk Knox, “Missile Project Brings Changes at Cheyenne,” *Casper Tribune-Herald and Star*, February 22, 1959.

⁵¹ Unidentified newspaper clipping, dated July 29, 1958, in Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, Military Affairs Committee Files; single page, untitled handout authored by Theodore Olson and Arthur Springer, also located in Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, Military Affairs Committee Files.

⁵² Unidentified newspaper clipping, dated July 29, 1958, in Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, Military Affairs Committee Files.

⁵³ “Anti-Missile Base Group Has Meeting,” *Wyoming State Tribune*, August 11, 1958.

⁵⁴ *Wyoming State Tribune*, August 18, 1958; *Wyoming Eagle*, September 9, 1958; Kirk Knox, “Missile Project Brings Changes at Cheyenne;” “Two Pacifists Ousted,” *New York Times*, August 19, 1958, p. 17;

Atlas site. They did indicate, however, that the waging of the Cold War at F. E. Warren Air Force Base was being watched carefully and questioned by observers in the community and across the nation.

Thus began the Atlas Missile program at F. E. Warren Air Force Base. While the completion of the program would be well into the future, additional developments shaped the contours of the base and the Cold War. In the middle of August 1958 the Air Force announced its consideration of a plan, actually before the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, to nearly double the size of the missile base at Warren so that instead of four sites with six missiles each, there would be seven sites, bringing the total missile deployment to 42. The personnel at the base would increase thereby from around four thousand to between five and six thousand. The additional construction funds would increase by approximately two hundred million dollars.⁵⁵ Although that project expanding the ultimate Warren arsenal of Atlas missiles did not materialize, construction continued. Bids were opened for the complex known as Warren II in February 1959.⁵⁶ Construction proceeded on the various sites and in September 1959, the first Atlas D missile to be located outside Vandenberg Air Force Base was delivered to F. E. Warren AFB. A month later another Atlas missile arrived by air.⁵⁷

The configuration of the missile deployment was modified from the initial anticipated design so that ultimately three squadrons were utilized at Warren. The first, the 564th Strategic Missile Squadron, at Site A (or Warren I), consisted of six missiles in pairs at launch pads clustered together. This squadron, utilizing Atlas D missiles, with an expected completion date of May 1960, was declared fully operational on September 2, 1960. The missiles were contained in enclosures placed on top of the ground called coffins. Upon launch command, each missile would obviously be raised to firing position and then its liquid fuel ignited. Considerable attention came to bear on this Warren I site because of its novelty. As the *New York Times* assessed the development, after noting that commissioning of the missiles was imminent, “Still, the significance of the event is somewhat more elusive than might be thought initially.” Observing that other Atlas missiles (“one or more”) had been on alert status at Vandenberg AFB in California since the previous fall, the *Times* went on to clarify:

The Cheyenne base will be the first ICBM installation with a clear-cut, unequivocal combat mission. There will be no practice shots to dilute its military readiness.

A second point about the first Cheyenne Atlas squadron is that it

“Missile Base Foe Hurt” *New York Times*, August 20, 1958, p. 44; “Two Pacifist Demonstrators Fined,” *New York Times*, August 21, 1958, p.49; “2d Pacifist Released,” *New York Times*, September 18, 1958, p. 28; “Two Pacifists Released,” *New York Times*, September 20, 1958, p. 4.

⁵⁵ *Denver Post*, Aug 14, 1958; *Wyoming State Tribune*, Aug 14, 1958.

⁵⁶ John C. Lonnquest and David F. Winkler, *To Defend and Deter: The Legacy of the United States Cold War Missile Program* (Rock Island, Illinois: Defense Publishing Service, 1996), 441.

⁵⁷ “Atlas Era at F. E. Warren AFB,” information sheet in files of Historic Preservation Officer, F. E. Warren AFB.

will be the most vulnerable of the thirteen Atlas and fourteen Titan squadrons in the current first-generation ICBM program.

The last comment referred to the deployment of the missiles “so closely clustered that one enemy nuclear warhead could destroy the entire squadron.”⁵⁸ The analysis then continued and anticipated changes in the deployment of additional missile squadrons at Warren.

The second squadron, at Warren II, the 565th Strategic Missile Squadron, also used the Atlas D missiles. Nine missiles were distributed at three different locations (Sites B, C, and D), positioned out from Cheyenne in different direction, also in above ground coffins. Warren II, the 565th SMS became fully operational March 7, 1961.⁵⁹ Finally, Warren III, operated by the 549th Strategic Missile Squadron (subsequently redesignated the 566th SMS), used the advanced Atlas E missile. Completely dispersed because they were no longer dependent upon a central launch facility’s guidance system, these missiles were located near Pine Bluffs, LaGrange, and Chugwater in Wyoming, one in Nebraska near Kimball, and five in Colorado near Grover, Briggsdale, Nunn, Greeley, and Fort Collins. Aside from the different guidance systems the type E missile employed, the basing was also different because the Atlas E lay in coffin launchers the tops of which were flush with the ground. The nine missiles and sites were finally completed and handed over to the Strategic Air Command at F. E. Warren AFB from October 4 to November 20, 1961.⁶⁰ Thus, when all squadrons were operational, they included twenty-four missiles, not counting any reload capability.

Significant delays and frustrations accompanied the Atlas construction program with all three squadrons. At the time that the first site came on line, the schedule was announced as being six months behind.⁶¹ Several problems accounted for the delays. Most of these problems derived from “inexperience, time pressure, remote locations, and constant modifications,” but others included work stoppages focusing on pay, hours, and union status. The work stoppages in March 1961 and April 1962 brought local workers into conflict with the national leadership of their own labor unions in one instance, and

⁵⁸ Richard Witkin, “Atlas Missile Bases Rising in Wyoming,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1960, pp. 5, 12. Cf. also the photographic essay “Atomic Missile Base,” with views of Cheyenne and F. E. Warren AFB and its new missiles, in *New York Times Magazine*, April 17, 1960, p. 19.

⁵⁹ “3 Atlas Sites Combat-Ready,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1961, p. 95.

⁶⁰ Lonquist and Winkler, *To Defend and Deter: The Legacy of the United States Cold War Missile Program*, 440-441; TSgt Danny G. Sprong, “ATLAS: F E Warren AFB,” pamphlet in files of Historic Preservation Officer, F. E. Warren AFB, p. 3; “Atlas Era at F. E. Warren AFB,” information sheet in files of Historic Preservation Officer, F. E. Warren AFB. The dates used in the Lonquist and Winkler and the F. E. Warren AFB publications are at variance; I have drawn upon the F. E. Warren AFB publication because the dates are more precise for the individual missile handoff to SAC and because the 1961 framework, rather than the 1960 cited by Lonquist and Winkler, is consistent with construction sequence at the base.

⁶¹ “Base in Wyoming Installs 3 ICBM’s,” *New York Times*, August 31, 1960, p. 13. The tenor of the disappointment can be seen in the first line of the article: “Three more Atlas intercontinental ballistic missiles were declared combat-ready in Cheyenne, Wyo. today in the lagging ICBM base-construction program.” The three missiles announced were the second group of three at Site A (Warren I).

with the Air Force, which opted, in the words of Secretary of Defense McNamara, “to take a strike before we will pay unreasonable payments or subject ourselves to unreasonable demands.”⁶² A third strike, in Connecticut against United Aircraft, supplier to Convair, a major contractor for the Atlas project, slowed work at Warren; Governor Ribicoff of Connecticut declined to use state police to break the strike.⁶³ Moreover, a prototype propellant loading system, a critical and problematic component, had never been built because of the rush to deploy. Finally, at the macro-level, some of the problems could only be resolved ultimately when inter-service rivalry subsided in an institutional coordination of construction management.⁶⁴

In addition to the construction of the missile sites, the infrastructure of the post had to expand and modernize. Accordingly, in 1961, the base secured authorization (initiated in 1959) to construct Capehart Military Housing on the base for a hundred families. The initial request had been for one hundred fifty-six units.⁶⁵ As at other posts, the Capehart housing would be an important mark of the military development of the Cold War and an indication that the lasting signs of the Cold War went far beyond the armaments and munitions themselves.

Within a year of the completion and acceptance of the final elements of the Atlas missiles at Warren Air Force Base, the Cuban Missile Crisis, as it has become known, tested the readiness of the base. As a result of the Kennedy administration’s abortive invasion attempt at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961, the Soviet Union began, in August 1962, to place medium range ballistic missiles in Cuba to prevent another invasion. When American spy planes flying over Cuba noticed those installations, Kennedy responded with (1) a blockade to prevent additional armaments from entering the island and (2) the threat of force to secure the removal of the missiles already there. The threat of force included mobilizing an invasion force in Florida ready to go to Cuba, much as had happened in 1898, and also placing the Strategic Air Command on full alert status. That, of course, included the missiles at F. E. Warren Air Force Base. Immediately a tight wall of security concealed activities within the base from the public.

Because of the nearby missile base, and because of the timing of the events, the Cuban Missile Crisis had perhaps a greater meaning for the citizens of Cheyenne than it did for people in other communities. In the first place, President Kennedy was scheduled to make an appearance in Cheyenne on October 24 as part of his campaign tour for the mid-term elections. That visit, of course, was canceled at the last minute.⁶⁶ More importantly, the Strategic Air Command announced that it had canceled all leaves of

⁶² “Union Chief Bars Strike at Bases,” *New York Times*, March 22, 1962, p. 20; “Strikes at Bases Called Serious,” *New York Times*, April 5, 1962, p. 5.

⁶³ “Machinists Out at Missile Sites,” *New York Times*, June 6, 1961, p. 14; “33,000 Strike in Connecticut at 7 United Aircraft Factories,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1961, p. 14.

⁶⁴ Lonquest and Winkler, *To Defend and Deter: The Legacy of the United States Cold War Missile Program*, 441.

⁶⁵ Minutes, Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee, November 5, 1959; Adams, *The Post near Cheyenne*, 220.

⁶⁶ *Wyoming State Tribune*, October 14, 1962, p. 1, and October 23, 1962, p. 1.

military personnel and recalled to duty those on leave as part of its intensified alert capability. In addition, security measures at all SAC bases, including Warren, had been tightened.⁶⁷

The crisis was not just on the base, however. The local newspaper ran a story under the blunt headline, “Cheyenneites Alarmed” and related how the Cheyenne – Laramie County Civil Defense office was swamped by telephone calls from frightened people seeking information on what to do in case of nuclear attack. Civil Defense Director Ed Braun handed out brochures on “Fallout Protection” and told citizens the precautions to take in case of an alert. He explained that the “nearest silo is 20 miles from Cheyenne and a missile strike there should leave about 10-15 minutes to obtain protection from fallout.”⁶⁸

The alarm continued as the tension of the crisis heightened. Residents of Cheyenne rushed stores for potentially precious commodities like canned food, sealed water, radio and flashlight batteries, canned heat, portable stoves, and other goods appropriate for the fallout shelter. One drug store manager summarized the situation: “I think the public is panicky.”⁶⁹ The statewide newspaper in Casper put it slightly differently: “The Cheyenne area has been considered by some as a possible target because of the 24 Atlas intercontinental missiles controlled by Warren.”⁷⁰

In the meantime, the only word from the Warren Air Base was that “Col. E. B. Daily, base commander of Francis E. Warren Air Force Base, announced today that the west gate of the base will be closed effective 7:00 a.m. today, until further notice.”⁷¹

Into November, by which time the crisis of nuclear war had been averted, Colonel Daily announced at the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee meeting that “due to the fact that the Base was in a state of advanced alert, very few officers and enlisted men would be seen downtown and none would be able to attend any evening functions for the present because of the Cuban crisis.” In the one glimmer of information provided about activities on base, Daily indicated that

a assimilated [sic] control exercise would be held on the Base on November 16th which will simile [sic] an enemy attack in the area to test the ability of the Base officials to resist an enemy attack. The Base will be closed to everyone including commercial activities for the entire day; missile activities will continue.⁷²

⁶⁷ *Wyoming State Tribune*, October 24, 1962, p. 1.

⁶⁸ “Cheyenneites Alarmed,” *Wyoming State Tribune*, October 24, 1962, p. 1.

⁶⁹ “Alarm Causes Run on Shelter Needs,” *Wyoming State Tribune*, October 25, 1962, p. 1.

⁷⁰ *Casper Tribune-Herald*, October 25, 1962.

⁷¹ *Wyoming State Tribune*, October 26, 1962, p. 20.

⁷² Minutes, Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee, November 1, 1962, in Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee Files.

By all outward appearances, which are impressionistic and undocumented, readiness and performance at Francis E. Warren Air Force Base during the Cuban Missile Crisis was satisfactory, but some room remains for speculation and for additional information to be gathered. The only instance in which such a study has been conducted for an Atlas base focuses on the Atlas missile sites at Walker Air Force Base near Roswell, New Mexico. At Walker, the squadron commander at the time later observed that despite maximum effort on the part of civilian and military personnel, the problems were serious. Using the type F Atlas missile (similar to the Atlas E at Warren with the significant exception of the type F being stored in a vertical underground silo) which had recently been installed, Colonel William Eckles recalled: "We had a max[imum] effort between the 579th and contractors to place all possible missiles on alert. No one had the slightest confidence they would launch from the silo let alone reach their target."⁷³

Warren AFB, Cheyenne, and the Minuteman, 1962 - 1978

Whatever the capabilities of the missiles and the F. E. Warren Air Force Base, those Atlas missiles were becoming rapidly obsolete. Indeed, development of a replacement generation of ICBM proceeded even as the Atlas was deployed, and even before the first Atlas was ready at Warren, according to the *New York Times*, "the town fathers put together a sales pitch and went to Washington with a proposal for making Cheyenne a hub for deployment of Minutemen ICBM's."⁷⁴ The pitch worked. The Atlas missiles at Warren had returned to "normal" status (down from alert status of the Cuban Missile Crisis) only two weeks when the Air Force announced that Cheyenne,

hub of the nation's largest Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile complex, will also be the center of 200 Minuteman silos. On completion they will make up the biggest base of that type in the country.⁷⁵

Indeed, earthwork had already begun for the construction of the silos when the announcement was made.⁷⁶ Not to be lost in the significance of the decision, the public relations office at Warren estimated a total cost for the project between one hundred fifty million and two hundred million dollars.⁷⁷

Construction of the new missile facility moved rapidly and by October 2, 1963 the first site was completed. By July 1, 1964, all two hundred sites were complete. Commanded by the reactivated 90th Wing, redesignated the 90th Strategic Missile Wing,

⁷³ Quoted in Terry Isaacs, "Thirty Years after the Cuban Missile Crisis: An Eastern New Mexico Missile Base Retrospective," *Military History of the West*, 23 (Spring 1993), 36.

⁷⁴ Richard Witkin, "Atlas Missile Bases Rising in Wyoming," *New York Times*, May 2, 1960, p. 12.

⁷⁵ "Minuteman Bases to Ring Cheyenne," *New York Times*, December 10, 1962, p. 10.

⁷⁶ See the *Wyoming State Tribune* for October 11, 12, and 17, 1962, in which bids were opened for "the huge 200-unit Minuteman missile project" employing "an estimated 2,000 workers" adding to the local economy.

⁷⁷ "Minuteman Bases to Ring Cheyenne," *New York Times*, December 10, 1962, p. 10.

four strategic missile squadrons operated the Minuteman missiles. Each squadron was assigned fifty LGM-30B missiles, and five launch control centers each commanded ten missiles. The Minuteman missile, smaller than the Atlas, is a solid-fuel missile housed in an underground silo. To construct the silos, the contractors—Meridith Drilling—employed an innovative system utilizing enormous augurs capable of literally drilling a complete hole in one day.⁷⁸ Widely dispersed even beyond the distances previously utilized for the Atlas E missiles, the twenty flights (ten missiles each) reached into Nebraska and Colorado. The accompanying infrastructure included miles of access and service roads as well as the control centers themselves. Where previous work stoppages because of labor-management disagreement had been significant, in this instance the creation of a Missile Site Labor Committee minimized the impact of the four work stoppages. On the other hand, this time five fatalities resulted from construction, and many complaints from property owners had to be resolved.⁷⁹

With the replacement by the Minuteman system at Warren, the Atlas missiles were phased out. In May and June 1964, the Atlas Strategic Missile Squadrons at Warren were relieved of alert duty and began their phasedown. By the end July that year, the last Atlas D missile was gone from F. E. Warren AFB. By February 1965 the last Atlas E missile left. On February 10, 1965, the 389th Strategic Missile Wing was deactivated.⁸⁰

Of course, the phase out of the Atlas missile also meant consequences for the personnel who had been involved in the program. At the Military Affairs Committee meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in Cheyenne, Colonel Brier endeavored to placate business concerns over this loss by indicating that as many civilian employees as possible would be shifted from the Atlas program to other base programs and projects. Even so, it was clear that a net loss would come in the civilian personnel strength at Warren.⁸¹ The other side was the brighter day promised by the Minuteman, at least for the time being.

Just as the Minuteman base had finished completion and had entirely come on line, a threat greater than that of the Soviet missiles appeared ready to remove F. E. Warren AFB from the map. In his proposal to reorganize the military and reduce the number of bases, Secretary Robert S. McNamara had raised the possibility that Warren Air Force Base might be among those closed.⁸² Immediately the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce launched its own offensive to save the base. When the group called on their

⁷⁸ Lonquest and Winkler, *To Defend and Deter: The Legacy of the United States Cold War Missile Program*, 442; “Background of F. E. Warren AFB (Minuteman),” pp. 2-3, typed manuscript in files of F. E. Warren AFB Historic Preservation Officer.

⁷⁹ Lonquest and Winkler, *To Defend and Deter: The Legacy of the United States Cold War Missile Program*, 442.

⁸⁰ Sprong, “ATLAS: F E Warren AFB.”

⁸¹ Minutes, Military Affairs Committee, Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, October 8, 1964.

⁸² Ultimately Secretary McNamara’s cost-reduction program was credited, through audit, with savings of more than \$15 billion by closing “967 installations, freeing 1,818 million acres of land, and eliminating 207,000 jobs.” Of course, McNamara also attempted to offset the negative local consequences of these closures with assistance programs. Henry L. Trewhitt, *McNamara* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), 257.

national organization, the United States Chamber of Commerce, for assistance, they were curtly rebuffed by Walter F. Carey, the president of the national chamber. After reminding local businessmen that many communities faced the same challenge and that the decisions would have to be made on an individual basis, and that there were “many demands on our tax dollars,” Carey did not cheer the hearts of local businessmen when he anticipated more recent calls for privatization and sided with the Kennedy administration in the name of free enterprise against big government and massive spending:

Secretary of Defense McNamara has assured us that the facility can make greater contributions to the economy if returned to private use. Moreover, he has said that all help possible will be given individuals and communities during the phase-out period.

I share the Secretary’s feeling that this inescapable change can be turned to the economic benefit of your community as well as the nation. This has been the case in many communities which have found greater prosperity by putting unneeded military installations to productive use under private enterprise, [t]hus turning apparent misfortune into advantage.⁸³

The issue of base-closing or base-reduction was in no way a new one to Cheyenne. That had constituted an uncertain and ongoing component of life adjacent to Fort D. A. Russell, Fort Francis E. Warren, and then Francis E. Warren Air Force Base for almost a hundred years. What was new in this instance was that the local business community found itself at odds, not just with a disgruntled airman, but with the pre-eminent advocates of capitalism and free enterprise and limited government in the nation and the language long sacred to that cause. Actually, however, there was probably never any real question of closing Warren. Although the Atlas was being phased out, the investment in the vast and expensive Minuteman system was so great and so recent that it would be difficult indeed to justify duplicating the investment elsewhere, along with, of course, the time lost in starting over some other place. F. E. Warren Air Force Base remained.

Of far less consequence than other developments, but revealing of larger contours of the base, the next year F. E. Warren AFB finally became the home to actual aircraft. In November 1965, sixteen UH-1F helicopters were assigned to the base and a landing pad was constructed for them. Never before did the fort or base have aircraft or a landing strip. At a time when the military generally was expanding its acquisition and use of the Huey helicopter, mostly as a result of escalation in Vietnam, however, this air base acquired some and was no longer flightless except for missiles.⁸⁴ These helicopters would be used primarily for transportation between the base proper and the far-flung launch sites.

⁸³ Telegram, Walter F. Carey, President Chamber of Commerce of the United States, to Clyde W. Gaymon, President, Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, November 20, 1964. Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce, Military Affairs Committee Files.

⁸⁴ “Background of F. E. Warren AFB (Minuteman),” pp. 3-4.

In the late 1960s, more than two decades after the detonation of the atomic bombs signaled the beginning of the Cold War, and with the nation becoming more deeply involved and entangled in the ground war in Vietnam, the tension and anxiety associated with the threat of nuclear war seemed to have become a permanent feature of life and thereby also either acceptable, and perhaps inevitable, or intolerable. In either case, the issue would be less precisely focused on installations such as Warren Air Force Base, which, after all, had become part of the landscape and were not embarking upon specific changes and innovations that would raise question in the eyes of a media that found news not in systems and structures but in flashy events, and more broadly concentrated on national defense posture and goals generally. This lack of media focus, however, did not make the issue go away or reduce the tension. A 1969 study of a similar complex at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana, also the home of two hundred Minuteman missiles, produced results that could likely have been found at F. E. Warren AFB at the same time. One Great Falls businessman soberly commented that “We know those 200 missiles are out there—all around us—but we don’t talk about them much.” He went on, “The whole thing is like a pain that stays with you for a long time. After a while you just don’t think about it much.” Then, there were the “missileers,” the junior officers who operated the control facility, and the other Air Force personnel at the base. At Malmstrom, the report noted, “Most of the Air Force personnel here are technicians, who insist that they do not think about the life-and-death political questions about nuclear war and the arms race.”⁸⁵ Whether viewed in terms of the reduction of combat to a question of technical efficiency apart from victims, and, for that matter, victors, or in terms of a general numbness to its presence and potential, the Cold War was proving itself to be something dramatically different from previous conflicts. Again, it is speculative to apply the same sentiments and observations from one base to another, but the larger social, economic, and political context certainly remains much the same. The Cold War had seemingly settled in for good, whether in Montana or Wyoming or the world.

In the early 1970s a program to modernize the Minuteman system generated significant changes to the individual missiles, to the silos, and to the world arms equilibrium. Beginning in November 1972, the Warren Air Force Base, like the rest of the Strategic Air Command, proceeded with the Minuteman Integrated Improvement Program.⁸⁶ This ambitious project required a hardening of the silos and launch control centers for greater protection, but it also modified the silos to accommodate a new missile, the Minuteman III.⁸⁷ Where the Minuteman I, which had been deployed at the

⁸⁵ Winthrop Griffin, “This Is an Atomic Missile Base,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 4, 1969, pp. 29, 31, 33, 102-112, 116-118.

⁸⁶ Lonquest and Winkler, *To Defend and Deter: The Legacy of the United States Cold War Missile Program*, 442.

⁸⁷ Francis E. Warren Air Force Base largely skipped the other stage of development, the Minuteman II. The Minuteman II was capable of carrying the same size warhead as the Minuteman I, but its range and accuracy were significantly enhanced in the Minuteman II. Even with the same size warhead, its destructive capacity was thereby increased. Destructive capacity, according to the Department of Defense, “increases with the cube of the accuracy and approximately linearly with the yield.” See, “Minuteman II May be Operational in 1965,” *Missiles and Rockets*, October 5, 1964, p. 17.

base, had only a single nuclear warhead, the Minuteman III had three independently targetable warheads delivered by each missile. The quarterly reports of the 90th Strategic Missile Wing at Warren indicated the progress of the conversion. In the third quarter of calendar year 1972, two hundred Minuteman I missiles were on the inventory. That number dropped to 180 in the fourth quarter, with the other two hundred reported as Minuteman II (SATAF). That was an indication of missiles in the process of conversion by the Site Activation Task Force. The first quarter of 1973 showed 160 Minuteman I missiles with 40 Minuteman III (SATAF). By the third quarter, 1973, the conversion had been completed for 30 missiles, another 130 Minuteman I's remained, and 40 were in the process under the SATAF. By the report for January – March 1975, all two hundred missiles were reported as Minuteman III.⁸⁸ The mission of the wing had come a long way from the days of the nineteenth century, and indeed from the nature of the post when the Air Force acquired it:

Mission: Assure that assigned units are capable of conducting strategic aerospace warfare using intercontinental ballistic missiles, long range bombardment, sustained and effective air refueling according to the emergency war order, including Airborne Command and Control responsibilities at Ellsworth AFB, SD.⁸⁹

Perhaps most importantly, with this conversion from Minuteman I to Minuteman III, the world arms race had quietly ratcheted up by a factor of three.

MX: The National Debate Becomes Local and the Local, National

Just as the development of the Minuteman had taken place even as the Atlas was being deployed, so too did development of an alternative missile system to the Minuteman continue while that system was being fielded and operated. The commitment of the Carter administration to a delivery system capable of yielding more than the three warheads of Minuteman III generated significant controversy in arms talks, in Congress, and in his own political party, but Carter and Secretary of Defense Harold Brown committed in 1978 to “full-scale development of a new mobile missile, the MX, which may start in the next fiscal year if a decision is made on the best system for deploying the missiles.”⁹⁰ Two fundamental design components marked the MX as distinct from other systems preceding it. First of all, two hundred such missiles (as Carter proposed) would be able to deliver ten warheads each. This, of course, was a quantum leap in capability, and, some argued, a dramatically de-stabilizing component in the arms race. Second, it

⁸⁸ Quarterly reports, 4th Strategic Aerospace Division, including 90th Strategic Missile Wing, in Wyoming State Archives, Collection H88-37, Box 5, Book 2, 1970-1979. Cited information comes from reports as dated in the text. These important documents are part of a collection of material donated to the Wyoming State Archives by Colonel Gerald Adams, USAF, retired.

⁸⁹ This mission, which underwent minor changes over the years, is from the quarterly report for January – March 1975 in the collection cited above.

⁹⁰ “Pentagon Seeks \$56 Billion Increase Over Five Years,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1978, p. 1.

would be, as Secretary Brown noted, completely mobile. To enhance the security and survivability of the missile, to make it difficult or impossible to target by incoming missiles, the theory advanced was to make it literally a moving target. Several designs were advanced for this mobility. One would place two hundred missiles on a “race track” of rails in an unpopulated part of the country where they would be shuttled among four thousand silos. Since decoys (empty or simulated missile containers) would be utilized and since the systems would more or less remain in motion, the missiles would be able to defy being targeted. In order to also provide verification to international inspectors that the United States remained within its agreed limit in the number of missiles, periodically inspection bays would open to reveal some contents to satellite observation. In other words, this system amounted to a vast and complex shell game. This was the preferred system. There were other options, in fact, more than thirty different alternatives. Those others included super-hardening silos for the missiles, deploying them at sea, hiding them in tunnels, placing them aboard airplanes in continuous flight, on trucks in motion, and a host of other schemes. But each plan had serious drawbacks, and the preferred one, the “race track” formulation, held glaring deficiencies even if one accepted its theoretical framework. It was very expensive to build and operate. And it required vast amounts of land.⁹¹ Nevada and Utah were designated the tentative locations, but those choices had to be rescinded when the governors of the two states, local ranchers, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon Church) vigorously objected. When Texas and New Mexico ranchers also protested consideration of their homes for such an extravagant program, the Reagan administration cancelled Carter’s “race track” scheme and proceeded to revise plans. After additional frustration stemming from the grandiose but flawed nature of each plan, President Reagan announced in October 1981 his decision to deploy MX missiles in existing, but hardened, silos and to scrap proposals for mobile basing.⁹² The silos to be used would be those containing the Titan missile, a system assessed as “nearly obsolete.” In December the administration revised that plan to instead locate the MX in hardened Minuteman silos. The following February the administration announced that it would not use the hardened silos but would instead deploy the first forty MX missiles in existing silos. To harden those Minuteman silos, to make them more resistant to attack, would have required negotiating with the Soviet Union because of the provisions of the Strategic Arms Limitation Agreement; in addition the Pentagon now argued that the super-hardening was not economical on an interim basis.⁹³ A narrowing process had begun in which the possible locations for the new missile were being reduced to those that already existed for the Minuteman. Ranchers in

⁹¹ Throughout the discussion of the basing system for the MX missile, one inherent problem defied solution. Colin Gray, director of national security studies at the Hudson Institute and a leading proponent of the MX, expressed the conundrum succinctly: “while it may be desirable on military and social grounds to deploy MX/MPS [multiple protective structures] in areas of very low population density (relatively very few people are directly affected), such low population density means that the disruptive effect of the system is bound to be unusually severe.” Colin S. Gray, *The MX ICBM and National Security* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), p. 113.

⁹² Steven V. Roberts, “MX Decision Wins Praise but B-1 Plan Faces Test,” *New York Times*, October 3, 1981, p. 14.

⁹³ Steven R. Weisman, “Reagan Abandons Plan to Reinforce first 40 MX Silos,” *New York Times*, February 12, 1982, pp. 1, 36.

the vicinity of F. E. Warren AFB in some instances saw the process moving inexorably toward them. In July 1982, Rod and Mae Kirkbride, ranchers in the Meriden area, north and east of Cheyenne, wrote an open letter to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, in the *New York Times* urging deployment of other than a land-based system.

Many of your own advisers have counseled that submarines at sea would provide the cheapest and least vulnerable basing mode. Still, however, you pursue land basing.

We feel compelled to ask you—why are you preoccupied with land basing?

We are preoccupied with a fear of it. As ranchers, let us tell you what will happen if the MX comes to Western soil.

Our vital agricultural economy will suffer irreparable damage as rangeland, farmland and valuable water resources are appropriated for MX expansion. Existing water rights in our semiarid region will become weak and tentative as requirements and demands for water increase.

A boom syndrome will rise and hundreds of millions of dollars in public works projects will fall on the backs of present Western residents. The burden of impact will be awesome, as every aspect of our Western way of life becomes affected.

* * *

We are getting no answers, no discussion of impact. Officials ignore it and the silence they create is deafening.⁹⁴

The specific proposal to which the Kirkbrides responded was that of the “dense pack” configuration. In that deployment a hundred MX missiles would be situated closely together within ten square miles under the theory that concentrating incoming missiles into such a tight area would generate enemy fratricide—the repeated destruction of the enemy missiles themselves, sparing the U.S. missiles. Never before officially announced, but floated as a possibility, this proposal generated fears that in fact such would be the next step in deployment. Indeed, discussion of “dense pack” continued in the Pentagon and in the area.⁹⁵ By November 4, 1982, the Air Force announced that such a “dense pack” was indeed their intention, utilizing a space one mile wide and fourteen miles long to cluster a hundred MX missiles. At that time, reports indicated that “Although Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger has not yet made a final recommendation to the White House, closely spaced basing is now regarded as all but certain to become the Administration’s proposed policy.” A location, however, was not specified. Congress had given the administration until December 1 to make its plan final.⁹⁶ As the deadline approached, no commitment and no final decision had been announced. The only decision, in fact, had been Reagan’s cancellation of President

⁹⁴ Rod Kirkbride and Mae Kirkbride, Letter, “A Call from the Plains: Where are We Going with the MX Missile?” *New York Times*, July 21, p. 3.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Leslie H. Gelb, “Missile Plan Would Put All MX’s in One Basket,” *New York Times*, September 5, 1982, IV, 6.

⁹⁶ Charles Mohr, “Air Force Alters Its MX Basing Plan,” *New York Times*, November 5, 1982, pp. 1, D19.

Carter's plan to deploy two hundred MX missiles among four thousand shelters in the desert.

An additional factor then emerged to complicate matters for the administration. It turned out that the sentiments voiced by ranchers like the Kirkbrides were shared by others. In Sidney, Nebraska, with F. E. Warren AFB Minuteman missiles deployed nearby, Robert Clark, owner of a furniture store, explained, "If what they're going to do is put the MX into the silos we already have on our land, then that's fine. . . . We're already pretty used to living around missiles, anyhow." He went on, though, to say "But if it means they're going to have [to] take away more farm land to put in some new and bigger system like this so-called dense pack, then I have to say I'm against it, . . . and so are most of the farmers around here."⁹⁷ At the same time the *New York Times* reported that the Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce "has strongly endorsed the deployment of the MX in Wyoming," noting that Cheyenne demonstrated "a broader level of support for the missile than in rural communities like Sidney." It explained: "The fortunes of the local Cheyenne economy have long been tied to the military. According to Air Force officials, the Warren base pumps \$217.5 million annually into the local Cheyenne economy."⁹⁸ Again, F. E. Warren AFB surfaced as a preferred site for the missile.

In the evening of November 22, 1982, President Reagan announced that he would deploy the first contingent of MX missiles, now renamed "Peacekeeper" missiles, in the dense pack formation at Francis E. Warren Air Force Base. The initial force would consist of a hundred missiles, but the Air Force wanted another hundred after that.⁹⁹ Local response to the announcement followed predictable lines. The mayor of Cheyenne, Bill Nation, expressed the usual supportive comment reflective of business interests: "I think the MX is going to be great for Cheyenne."¹⁰⁰ Ranchers and farmers, concerned about the impact of the missile development on agriculture, began to make public their fears and apprehensions. The simple statement by Linda Kirkbride that "Folks are worried. . . . This could mean their land," suggested the contours of their anxiety. While no specific site had yet been designated for deployment, the options included several hundred square miles of land northeast and northwest of Cheyenne. In addition, the paper noted: "All the land is privately owned." At this point others in the local religious community opposed to the MX started to mobilize to fight the local deployment.¹⁰¹ Whatever the impact of the local concerns, which built upon the even more powerful protests that had previously been articulated in Utah and Nevada, and in a public referendum on deployment in the state in Montana, Congress in December blocked further spending on the development of the MX because of widespread opposition to the

⁹⁷ William E. Schmidt, "Farmers Accustomed to Missiles but Leery of MX," *New York Times*, November 20, 1982, p. 9.

⁹⁸ Schmidt, "Farmers Accustomed to Missiles but Leery of MX," p. 9.

⁹⁹ Charles Mohr, "Credibility of Basing System for MX Affects Military, Money and Politics," *New York Times*, November 24, 1982, p. 18.

¹⁰⁰ William E. Schmidt, "Wyoming Businessmen Tend to Favor MX Plan," *New York Times*, November 24, 1982, p. 18.

¹⁰¹ Schmidt, "Wyoming Businessmen Tend to Favor MX Plan," p. 18.

“dense pack” configuration the administration had announced.

President Reagan appointed a bi-partisan commission to study the problem and make a recommendation, and finally in April 1983, the commission, chaired by retired Air Force Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft, urged the MX missile to be located in existing Minuteman silos.¹⁰² A week later the President endorsed the recommendations.¹⁰³ At this point the debate over the MX / Peacekeeper¹⁰⁴ missile followed several different directions. The White House acknowledged the vulnerability of the recommended basing plan, and had, indeed, at one time rejected exactly that plan on grounds of vulnerability. Instead it sought to deploy the MX to have a bargaining chip in arms control talks with the Soviet Union. Others, who believed that the administration’s arms negotiation efforts were insincere and lacked commitment, sought to deploy the MX simply to force the president to move more aggressively in arms control talks, to have a means of holding the President accountable in those discussions. Yet others bluntly acknowledged that their support of the system had nothing to do with defense and everything to do with creating jobs in their districts.¹⁰⁵ The opponents, in Washington and Wyoming alike, pointed to the Orwellian irony of developing and deploying such a devastating weapon in the name of arms control, pointed to its vulnerability, and noted its destabilizing effect. In Wyoming, acceptance of the proposal could not be assumed. In the small community of Torrington, Wyoming, near the periphery of the area in which the Minuteman missiles had been deployed and also the proposed home for the MX, “one hundred residents aired concerns with regard to the future integrity of ranching and farming in the area, receiving adequate federal impact assistance, and surviving a boom-bust phenomenon if the MX is deployed.”¹⁰⁶ A far cry from the small meditation meetings that greeted the Atlas D site construction a quarter of a century earlier near Cheyenne, more than a thousand people, listened to Lindi Kirkbride, on whose ranch three Minuteman III missiles were deployed, and protested in Cheyenne both the MX and the siting plan. Kirkbride called the MX “an unnecessary

¹⁰² Hedrick Smith, “MX Panel Proposes Basing 100 Missiles in Minuteman Silos,” *New York Times*, April 12, 1983, pp. 1, 20. A significant portion of the President’s Commission on Strategic Forces is included at page 18 of the same issue of the *New York Times*. It should be noted that additional recommendations of the Commission, which were, in the words of General Scowcroft, “inseparable” from each other, included the development of a smaller “midgetman” missile and also greater flexibility of the United States in arms talks, especially a willingness to count warheads rather than missiles, given the new environment of multiple warhead delivery systems.

¹⁰³ Francis X. Clines, “Reagan Endorses Plan to Base MX in Existing Silos,” *New York Times*, April 20, 1983, pp. 1, 23.

¹⁰⁴ Despite President Reagan’s naming of the missile the “Peacekeeper,” the uses of the new name tended to be only by the White House and in official Air Force communications. In Congress and in the press, among proponents and opponents alike, the missile would more commonly be called the MX, which largely remains the case in 1998.

¹⁰⁵ See especially the debate in the Senate on the resolution to accept the President’s plan and to proceed with testing of the MX. Note especially the positions of Senators from the President’s own party like Quayle, Lugar, Hatfield, and Kassebaum. Steven V. Roberts, “Senate, by 59 to 39, Votes \$625 Million for Testing of MX; Base Search Seems at End,” *New York Times*, May 26, 1983, pp. 1, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Lauren H. Holland and Robert A. Hoover, *The MX Decision: A New Direction in U.S. Weapons Procurement Policy?* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, Inc., 1985), 209.

encroachment on our way of life, the land and the resources.” The editor of the statewide newspaper, the *Casper Star-Tribune*, debated the issue with Senator Alan Simpson, during which Simpson, an advocate of the Peacekeeper deployment, emphasized his view of the missile in the context of arms control discussions, saying that “if the President drops away from those commitments to keep it all tied together, there are 19 of us who will keep him on course.”¹⁰⁷

Conspicuously absent from the debates was a focus on the missile as a deterrent to the Soviet Union. Clearly the Cold War had changed from its origins and from its early years. The political process moved on inexorably in Washington and the next year Congress voted funding and work began to modify fifteen silos to be modified to accept the new Peacekeeper missile. Even so, Governor Ed Herschler of Wyoming, who had earlier welcomed the missile to the state, joined Nebraska Governor Bob Kerrey in requesting that President Reagan delay deployment of the missile for one year and thereby send a “clear message to the Soviet Union of our desire for peace and a more stable world.”¹⁰⁸ Reagan refused. In the late spring of 1986 the first armed peacekeeper missile was lowered into its silo. By December, ten of the missiles, each with ten nuclear warheads, were completed, armed, poised for launching, and on alert status at Francis E. Warren Air Force Base.¹⁰⁹ By that time deployment plans had been scaled back to fifty such missiles and by 1988 the full complement of fifty MX missiles had been installed.

It would be tempting to suggest that the installation of the MX missiles at F. E. Warren AFB led directly to the events of the following several years in which the Berlin wall came down, the eastern bloc of nations broke away from the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union itself disintegrated, bringing to a close the last vestige of the Cold War. That, of course, would be far too simple in such a complex world. Indeed, the forces at work within the small territory encompassed by Warren Air Force Base were just as complex. The sheer fact that two hundred missiles, including fifty MX missiles, remain at the base in 1998, suggests that more has been at work in the Cold War history of the base than mere competition with the Soviet Union. In fact, a compelling argument could be made, and has been made, that the missiles at the base not only did not hasten the end of the Cold War, but the step-by-step deployment at F. E. Warren AFB and at other places on both sides of the tension contributed to the escalation and the continuation of that war that cast such a long shadow over the lives of the people of the world since World War II.

¹⁰⁷ In addition to the previous citation illustrating the debates, see also, Martin Tolchin, “Editor in Wyoming and Senator Duel,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1983, p. 25; “Briefing: For B-I-G Headaches,” quoting Rear Admiral Eugene J. Carroll, USN, retired, and one of the speakers at the Cheyenne anti-MX rally, *New York Times*, May 16, 1984, p. 24; “Hundreds March in Wyoming against Stationing of the MX,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1983, p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Governor Herschler is quoted in Lauren H. Holland and Robert A. Hoover, *The MX Decision: A New Direction in U.S. Weapons Procurement Policy?*, p. 257.

¹⁰⁹ “First 10 MX Missiles Placed on Alert,” *New York Times*, December 24, 1986, p. D16; Thomas J. Knudson, “Wyoming MX Silos Stir Love, Hate and Apathy,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1986, p. A10.