

# Minuteman Missile

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



National Historic Site  
South Dakota



*A nuclear-missile silo is one of the quintessential Great Plains objects: to the eye, it is almost nothing, just one or two acres of ground with a concrete slab in the middle and some posts and poles sticking up behind an eight-foot-high Cyclone fence; but to the imagination, it is the end of the world.*

—Ian Frazier, *Great Plains*, 1989

The underground silo at Launch Facility (Missile Silo) Delta-09 (above) once housed a Minuteman II missile. NPS / ANNE TUBIOLLO

## The Cold War and Nuclear Deterrence

The history of the Cold War is still being written. For the millions of people who lived through that era, memories and images remain: duck-and-cover drills, the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Richard Nixon's 1972 trip to China, the 1980 US Olympic hockey team's upset victory, and the fall of the Berlin Wall—an event widely viewed as the beginning of the end of the Cold War.

Unlike a conventional war, there are no starting or ending dates, direct military encounters, or casualty counts. Instead, the Cold War is commonly understood as an ideological, economic, and political struggle between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

(USSR). A key part of the US defense strategy during the Cold War was deterrence, wherein US nuclear forces were (and still are) maintained at a constant state of readiness.

Developed in the 1950s, the Minuteman I missile was an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), part of the triad of air-, land-, and sea-based nuclear weapons. Innovative solid-fuel technology enabled Minuteman I and later Minuteman II to be deployed remotely from underground launch facilities (missile silos). If necessary, these missiles would be launched by crews stationed miles away. The missiles could travel over the North Pole and arrive at a target in less than 30 minutes.

Minuteman II's 1.2 megaton warhead was the explosive equivalent of over a million tons of dynamite. There are no active Minuteman silos in South Dakota today, but 450 Minuteman Missiles are still deployed in the upper Great Plains.

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site was established by Congress in 1999 to preserve two 1960s missile sites: Delta-09, a missile silo, and Delta-01, a launch control facility. The park invites you to explore the history and significance of the arms race and ICBM development, visit sites once off limits to civilians, and learn about the role the Minuteman II system had as a nuclear deterrent which maintained peace and prevented war.



The US Army Corps of Engineers built South Dakota's 15 underground Minuteman missile launch centers in the early 1960s.

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE US AIR FORCE



President John F. Kennedy (center) tours a Strategic Air Command facility in California in 1962. Kennedy was a strong proponent of the Minuteman II missile defense system.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES



In 1987 President Ronald Reagan challenged Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall and bring an end to the Cold War.

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**Left: Underground Launch Control Center at Delta-01.**

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**Right: Minuteman II missile (unarmed) in the silo at Delta-09.**

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**A Delta Flight Peacekeeper vehicle used by the security personnel to patrol surface facilities.**

NPS



## A National Park for the Cold War

In 1991 as the Cold War was coming to an end, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) was signed by US President George H.W. Bush and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Both sides agreed to dramatically reduce their nuclear arms.

Three Minuteman missile fields, including the one in western South Dakota, were chosen for deactivation. As the sites were being shut down, the US Air Force and National Park Service worked together to find a site that would represent the nuclear arms race, the Minuteman's role during the Cold War, and the

dedication of Air Force personnel who staffed the sites.

In 1999 Minuteman Missile National Historic Site was established. It was the first national park dedicated exclusively to the Cold War. Launch Control Facility Delta-01 included an underground Launch Control Center (LCC) where two Air Force officers (missileers) worked on 24-hour alert duty shifts, ready to launch Minuteman Missiles if there was a nuclear attack. There were 100 LCCs and each one, like the LCC at Delta-01, remotely monitored ten missiles. If the correct codes and commands were received,

Minuteman missiles could be quickly launched.

Today the facilities are preserved in their historic state. The underground Launch Control Center and aboveground Launch Control Facility at Delta-01 have virtually the same equipment and furnishings they did while operational. The silo at Delta-09 held a Minuteman missile for three decades. Today, it holds a Minuteman II training missile, the same size and specifications as the one housed here during the Cold War. The two sites provide an unprecedented opportunity to explore the history and significance of the nuclear arms race.

## Planning Your Visit

The park consists of three sites along Interstate 90 between Badlands National Park and Wall, South Dakota. Begin at the Visitor Center, located ¼ mile north of I-90 Exit 131. A film and exhibits explore the broader context of the Cold War. Tours of the Delta 01 Launch Control Facility are offered year-round and take visitors underground to experience the front lines of the Cold War. Please call, email, or visit our website for operating hours and tour information.

**Accessibility** We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, call, or check our website.

For firearms regulations check the park website.

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, please visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov).

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