

# 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

## Cold War 101

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 U.S. 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 (U.S.S.R.). A key part of the U.S. defense

strategy during the Cold War was deterrence, wherein U.S. 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 from these unstaffed underground silos. Launched by crews who were stationed miles away, the missiles could travel over the North Pole and arrive at a target in 30 minutes. Minuteman II's 1.2-megaton warhead was the explosive equivalent of over a million tons of dynamite.

Only a few surface structures show above the underground Delta-09 launch facility for the Minuteman II missile. NPS ABNE 1108/010

There are no longer active ICBM silos in South Dakota, but 500 nuclear missiles are still deployed in the upper Great Plains. While the threats of the Cold War era have subsided, the nation's defense systems remain on alert.

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. You can learn about the Minuteman II system's role and visit sites seldom seen by civilians while in use but that nevertheless loomed large on the political landscape.



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

COURTESY NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE U.S. 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



## Why This Site?

Under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) signed in 1991 by U.S. President George Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, the U.S. and U.S.S.R. began to reduce their stockpiles of nuclear arms. As Minuteman II missile sites were deactivated, the U.S. Air Force (USAF) and National Park Service worked toward preserving a representative site to illustrate the history and significance of the Cold War, the arms race, and the dedication of USAF personnel.

After years of work Minuteman Missile National Historic Site was established in 1999, the first site dedicated exclusively to Cold War events.

Out of 450 Minuteman II missile sites nationwide, Delta-01 Launch Control Facility and Delta-09 Launch Facility were selected for preservation because:

- They were the most typical and least altered from the original 1961 Minuteman missile configuration.
- They symbolize the dedication and preparedness of USAF personnel stationed in remote locations across the upper Great Plains.
- They are near a major traffic corridor (I-90) that allows easy public access.



President George Bush (seated, left) and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev (seated, right) sign the START treaty on July 31, 1991.

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## Planning Your Visit

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site is one of the newer National Park System areas. Offered all year, tours start from the contact station at I-90 Exit 131. Please call or visit [www.nps.gov/mimi](http://www.nps.gov/mimi) for hours of operation and tour reservations.

The South Dakota Air and Space Museum at Ellsworth Air Force Base displays Cold War-era artifacts, including aircraft, missiles, a transporter-erector vehicle, and a missile procedures trainer. It also maintains the former missile wing's training launch facility, where you can tour an underground missile silo. Contact the Air and Space Museum at 605-385-5188.

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site is one of over 390 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).

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site  
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The park lies 70 miles east of Rapid City, S. Dak. off I-90 at exit 131.

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