

## Chapter 7 Assignment Alaska

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The vast majority of Nike personnel stationed in Alaska were from outside the state. People's reactions upon learning of assignment to an Alaskan Nike battery varied dramatically. Some were excited at the possibility of adventure, while others were singularly disappointed at being stationed so far from home. However, most interviewed for this study look back on their service fondly, even if they did not particularly enjoy it at the time. As Jeral Sexton of Site Summit reflected, "At the time, I just wanted to get off the mountain and back to the lower 48, but reflecting back on my experiences of the summers in Alaska and the many adventurous trips to many scenic places as well as the comradeship of the team, I am glad I had the opportunity to serve there." Regardless of their feelings about the duty, many have powerful memories of their appointment, the journey to Alaska and arrival at their battery.

Joe Leone of C Battery in Fairbanks recalls how he was assigned to Alaska after missile training in Texas:

I think the school was twelve weeks, at Fort Bliss. And then we graduated there, they had a formation and they asked for volunteers to ship out someplace. And naturally in the Army you never volunteer for anything, that's what they told us. So the first group of guys, they asked for like twenty or thirty guys, and they raised their hand and they sent them to Europe. Well the next group of volunteers they asked for they figured well these guys went to Europe, that's terrific you know, so the next group a bunch of guys volunteered. Well they went to Korea. So they crossed them up a little bit there. And then the third group they said the balance of you fellahs are going to Alaska. You know, we didn't have a choice, so.

Billy Sparks, from Oklahoma, relates arriving at Site Summit in Anchorage:

I was coming up this mountain and it was in the evening on a Friday afternoon when I came up about 6:00pm. And it was in March, so it was already getting pretty dark. And of course I flew in and I never had seen so much white in all my life. And I thought I'd never see green again. And then when I got here....coming all the way up this mountain I just – I thought I went to the end of the world. I couldn't go anywhere else when I hit the end of this one, that was it.

Larry Goldsberry of C Battery, Fairbanks, remembered, "It felt like the end of the world. Really I thought my gosh, I was married, we had been married a year. So of course my wife at that point

**5<sup>th</sup> and Plumb**  
Billy Sparks recalled that 5<sup>th</sup> and Plumb was the unofficial address allocated to Site Summit during his tenure at the battery in 1970's. Mr. Sparks explained, "If you're in Anchorage you start looking at the mountains, start on the left, we call it count five and plumb to the top. 5<sup>th</sup> mountain, plumb to the top!"

was about six thousand miles away and I thought how am I going to do this for two years? But anyway I'm glad now that I was up there."

Ronald Gaunt, also of C Battery in Fairbanks said, "I wanted to go home...when they brought me up to Fairbanks it was around ten o'clock in the morning and it was so cold it was about thirty below or something and it was in March...They bussed me over to Eielson [AFB] and I was a little down because I knew I was going up to this mountain in no man's land practically."



At the opposite end of the spectrum were those like Greg Durocher, who were eager to visit the state: “I wanted to come to Alaska. I had relatives that lived up here. And they kept talking about how neat it was and everything, how a young man like you should come up. I had a cousin up here...pretty much my age that was mountain climbing at the time and he’d come back to visit once in a while and talk about how great Alaska was.” James McCann, who was stationed at Site Bay, relates similar sentiments: “The only other thing I ever wanted to do was come to Alaska. My whole life I just dreamed of it and I used to tell folks back east I’m going to Alaska.”

Most men stationed at Alaska’s Nike batteries were from the Lower 48, and the Alaskan scenery often left a lasting impression and even served as a form of entertainment. This was especially the case at Site Summit, with its dramatic views high atop top the Chugach Mountains. Billy Sparks commented, “What we would do for the pass time was mainly go out and watch the sunset. Just come back here and sit on the hills, beside the mountain.”

MP Gregory Durocher remembered,

I don’t know how many times that you’d just get these neon pink sunrises and you’d get these peaks just going off into infinity, with the sun coming up behind them....Guarding at night looking down over the city on those really cold nights it would be like if Anchorage was covered with water and then people were throwing pebbles in the pool because the lights would just shimmer. It was kind of like a liquid shimmering. I could look at that for the longest period of time. It was just entrancing.

Dan Caputo thought the most memorable aspect of the scenery was the view of the aurora: “I used to sit outside for hours mesmerized by the sight of the northern lights. Don’t forget I was a kid born and raised in Brooklyn. The closest I’d seen to the northern lights was the sirens from the lights of police cars.” Joseph Holland recalled, “in the wintertime on a clear day when you can see forever, oh you should see McKinley. Boy it is beautiful.”



**Figure 30:** View from Site Summit. Courtesy Billy Sparks.



**Figure 31:** Site Summit from a distance. Courtesy Billy Sparks.



## Living Quarters



**Figure 32:** Typical living quarters, Site Summit.  
Courtesy Billy Sparks.

Most enlisted men lived on the Nike site to ensure enough personnel were always present to activate the system and perform the constant maintenance required to keep the battery operating. Housing was integrated into the Fire Control Building, and this is another element that distinguished Alaskan sites from their southern counterparts. In the Lower 48, housing facilities were contained in a separate building on the site. Married soldiers and officers could live off-site, or on the nearest Army post or Air Force Base. Living off-site could be a hardship though, as the men had to cope with long drives back and forth to the battery. The commute was treacherous in winter, and it took a heavy toll

on personal vehicles. Enlisted personnel sometimes referred to the officers working on-site in the daytime as ‘brown baggers’. Brown baggers brought their lunches to work and left the battery in the evening.

Servicemen basically remembered the barracks being satisfactory. Basil Woodfork of C Battery in Fairbanks stated,

Actually the living quarters, it was very much like if you’ve ever lived in a college dorm, if you’ve ever you know lived in a large housing arrangement, or I suppose if you ever lived in prison, it might be similar to that. Although it was not that bad, there were decent quarters, decent facilities. It was set up where you had about four to a room. There was one area where late comers or newcomers or those who were on the fringe just lived in an open bay area. But mostly you were kind of selected to move into a particular room or a particular group.

Robert Rose, also of C Battery, recalled “It was a typical Army barrack with the just your bunk and your footlocker and one hanging locker. And basically that’s what it was. And of course everything was spit and polished. Ready for inspections at all times. Restrooms and latrines, we were responsible for keeping those clean on a daily basis. Just typical housework.”

Even though the Nike sites were isolated units, privacy for the individual soldier was at a premium. Men worked and lived together constantly and it was hard to be alone on-site. Sometimes the inevitable companionship became tiresome, and some liked to get out on their own. Robert Eaglesham remembered visiting the Northern Hotel in Fairbanks whenever he had a chance, with “a couple magazines or that day’s newspaper and no television and have the privacy and just not anybody coming in trying to disturb you when you’re trying to concentrate on something you’re reading. Or nobody raising hell down the hall. Or nobody saying you had to do this or had to do that. No alerts. The privacy was just wonderful.”

A mess hall in the IFC building provided all meals to soldiers living and working on-site. Chipped beef on toast, nicknamed SOS, was a meal that stands out in many memories. Few interviewed for this study had complaints about the food. However, most eagerly anticipated



visits to the nearest Air Force Base for a change of pace. Others enjoyed cooking their own meals with food obtained in the mess hall: “We’d get the cook to give us Spam and those powdered eggs and stuff and we’d be in the room frying Spam and eggs at midnight or whatever time it might be,” remembered Larry Goldsberry of C Battery in Fairbanks.

In 1968 or 1969 A Battery in Fairbanks was awarded the Best Mess Hall in the U.S. Army. Bobby Pace remembered the Mess Sergeant went above and beyond the call of duty, ensuring there were always sandwiches, doughnuts and fresh coffee available to men working on the night shifts. This made a substantial contribution to morale.



**Figure 33:** Soldier cooking scrambled eggs in the barracks. C Battery, Fairbanks. Courtesy of Larry Goldsberry.

James McCann of Site Bay, Anchorage, recalled that Alaskan fish and game occasionally supplemented the typical Army fare:

I’ve got some photos of all of us hanging around a moose that I shot down there. We cleaned it in the motor pool...we hung the quarters and everything in the motor pool and cleaned and dressed it and cut it up. And we had it in the freezer in the mess hall so sometimes we would eat moose meat...we always had our fish in there and everything else.

Edward Hogan remembers a uniquely Alaskan incident that occurred at the C Battery mess hall in Fairbanks:

We had a bear one time came right in the mess hall. I’ll never forget that. We were eating when the bear come in that back door where the kitchen was...and came right in that doorway and walked around all the tables and walked right out again. No one moved, you know, they all just sat there. It didn’t stay in there more than a minute or so and just sort of went around all the tables. Surprisingly it didn’t stand up on its legs and start eating something, or grabbing something. He would have been welcome to mine I tell you, I wasn’t going to mess with him.

Each Nike battery had a small PX where men could purchase assorted sundries such as Cup o’ Noodles, toothpaste, razor blades and 3.2% beer; hard liquor was not allowed on-site, but many recalled sneaking in bottles of liquor and wine. Joe Leone said personnel “hid bottles of wine, like blackberry wine or blueberry wine, they had shipped up from home. A lot of the country guys. They had it hidden all over the site.” Men often purchased food in the PX and cooked small meals on hotplates in their rooms. A soldier operated the PX in his free time, and made a commission on all sales. Running the PX could be a lucrative job, as Jarret Nay of C Battery reflected, “I made about as much money on it [operating the PX] as I did at out of the military pay. Probably maybe even I made more.”



Many soldiers stored food and drinks outside on their windowsills during the winter, taking advantage of the natural refrigeration. But in extremely cold weather, carbonated drinks had a tendency to explode. Billy Sparks remembered, “you couldn’t leave them [cans] all night because by morning they’d freeze and bust and then they’d run all the way down the side and the officers would come and be real upset with us.” Jerome LeDonne of C battery in Fairbanks recalled, “my mother used to send me Italian salamis and...we didn’t have refrigerators or anything. And God you’d never, you dare not put it in the mess hall down there because it would be gone in like about two seconds. So we used to hang them from our windows.”



**Figure 34:** Soldier in hallway, Site Summit. IFC Building. Courtesy Billy Sparks.



**Figure 35:** C Battery, personnel in front of the PX, Fairbanks. Courtesy Larry Goldsberry.



## Transportation

Even though the most remote Alaskan Nike site was only about sixty or seventy miles from the nearest city or military base, road conditions were such that a sixty-mile trip could mean a very long drive over rough roads. “If you went to Goose Bay, figure a three-hour trip,” remembered Ira Rion. “Because once you got to Wasilla at the train station, the road from Wasilla it was like an old rocky streambed. Course now it’s all paved. We spent a lot of time in vehicles.” Occasionally helicopters were used to transport personnel back and forth to the remote batteries. Each battery had a helicopter landing pad for this purpose.



**Figure 36:** Pass run vehicle preparing to transport MP’s from IFC area to launch area, ca. 1974-1976. Site Summit. Courtesy Gregory Durocher.

Enlisted personnel often relied on Army transportation to travel on and off-site. The frequency and reliability of transportation varied over the years and according to each battery location, and at some of the more remote batteries Army transportation was inconsistent. “We had some people that had no transportation at times, and they’d have to stay out at the missile site...they couldn’t get back and forth,” remembered Bobby Pace of Batteries A and E in Fairbanks. Even those who did own a car discovered that the long drives back and forth from the batteries were hard on their vehicles. As Pace commented: “they were all bumpy really rough roads, four-wheel drive would probably get torn up on them.” Wear and tear problems were compounded at Site Summit where, in the summer, high winds blew dirt and rocks into parked cars, damaging the exteriors. Don Neal remembered, “You never had to police the rocks off the parking lot because if they were smaller than a potato they’d blow off in a windstorm. I’ve seen cars that had dings all over them from rocks just blowing across the parking lot”.

Winter access to Site Summit in Anchorage was particularly troublesome. The road leading to the top of the mountain was steep and winding. Often cars had to follow directly behind a snowplow to get on or off the site, as the snow and wind rapidly made the road impassable. Extreme whiteout conditions caused access problems as well. MP Gregory Durocher describes driving on the road leading to the battery:

We had these big Internationals....carryalls or something, that would haul our change of shift. And so we’d get off duty and sometimes it would be so bad that we’d have a person walking in front of the vehicle...In a lot of cases there weren’t guardrails and it would just drop off, you know. You’d be sitting in there and it was nothing but white, there isn’t a speck of relief anywhere. So we’re sitting there and the driver would say ok, it’s time for somebody to get out, and the person would just walk along on the side of the road. Sometimes you’re just walking along and you just feel [with] your foot where the drop off is.”



Driving on remote roads was a new experience to many servicemen and their families. Anne McCauley remembers traveling out to C Battery in Fairbanks to deliver something to her husband, Charles McCauley.

I hadn't been there terribly long...I got the car keys and I'm walking out to go in the car and the woman that was in this motel says, where you going? And I said well I have to go pick Charley up...And she said, well are you prepared? I said well I've got the car keys, what else...Oh no, you can't go like that, she says. Suppose the car breaks down, it's wilderness out there. I had to go back in and I can't remember all the stuff that she made me get, blankets and pillows...she said people die out there from not being prepared, you must be prepared.



**Figure 37:** Frank Pruitt on access road to Site Summit. 5 Nov. 1974. Courtesy Gregory Durocher.



**Figure 38:** Snow blower, Site Summit. Courtesy Billy Sparks



**Figure 39:** Helicopter on Nike landing pad. Courtesy Ira Rion.



## Recreation

“It was kind of funny the guys up on B battery [Site Summit] they could look down on city lights but they might just as well have been a thousand miles away.”

~ Jackson Murray ~

The demands of maintaining a Nike site kept soldiers working long days and nights, limiting recreational possibilities. However, many took advantage of the outdoor opportunities that Alaska afforded. Hiking, fishing and hunting were popular summer activities. Once a year most men at the Fairbanks batteries made a special trip to Unalakleet to the Air Force’s fish camp. Many remember this as the highlight of their time in Alaska. Closer to home there were movies shown nearly every night in the recreation room. Basil Woodfork recalled, “I will say during that time I did watch about four hundred movies.” A pool table and pinball machine also helped pass the time. Basketball and volleyball teams were formed for battery and inter-service competitions. Despite these distractions, boredom was often a prominent feature of the Nike service. Some stayed on their Nike site for weeks or months at a time without going into town or visiting the nearest military base. Soldiers often fixated on the day they could return home: counting the months, weeks, days and even *seconds* left in their tour of duty.

More recreational possibilities were available for soldiers living off-site. This was tempered by the hardship of traveling to and from work, especially for men stationed at the remote batteries where commuting expended a great deal of time. Recreational opportunities at each battery varied slightly. The men stationed at Site Summit, for instance, had access to the Army ski facilities just east of the battery. The steep mountain slopes also presented exciting sledding possibilities, as Billy Sparks recalled:

There used to be along this wall, chairs with vinyl cushions in them. And we’d take those cushions and get over on the edge of the mountain and slide forever. We’d go all the way down the mountain and then catch a pass run that would bring us back up. That really was fun. We even had a toboggan with rails on it. And it would go fast. So we put our motorcycle helmets on.



**Figure 40:** Launch control building, recreation room. Site Summit. Ca. 1975. Courtesy Gregory Durocher.



At Site Bay, personnel spent a great deal of time socializing with homesteaders living near the battery. Donald Dukes remembered, "Sundays at the site was the highlight of the week for the homesteaders and us. The Battalion Chaplain came out by chopper and we always had homesteader visitors for church service. They would remain for lunch, then we'd pull down the blinds in the mess hall and show all the week's movies."

In Fairbanks officer Ralph New ran a trap line on a back road between B and C battery; he checked it on his way to and from work. With the furs he made a stole for his mother and a coat for his wife. "So we would end up with oh, a hundred fifty marten a year. And then we had lynx, wolverines, wolf," recalled Mr. New.

Battery C in Fairbanks had the Boon Docks bar just a few miles down the site's access road. Robert Eaglesham describes the popular establishment:

Boon Docks Bar was a very rustic bar, I guess the bar room itself was maybe 18 by 24, 25 and had a U-shaped bar and it was run by Boots and Jerry. Boots was the woman, the wife and Jerry was the husband. They both tended bar. They lived on a house on the hill across the Richardson highway. They were on the, I guess it was the west side of the Richardson Highway along side the Tanana River. And across the highway was a mountain that Battery B was on and they had sold that property to the government for Battery B and they kept a piece of the property where they had a house. So they were right there, the same as we were except that was their livelihood. And they were wonderful, wonderful people. And we loved their hamburgers and we found later on that there was some caribou in with that beef in with the hamburgers. And they were terrific. But

### Site Summit Snow Cave

For something to do in the wintertime we'd come out here and this area right here would fill up with snow. And it would blow and fill this up, this was all completely level. And the snow would get real deep. And we'd tunnel into the snow... And once you got tunneled down in here you'd make a big room.

And one year we'd have it on one side and the next year we'd have it on this other side. And we'd have enough room to get 16 or 17 guys in there. And the snow would either blow or freeze up the hole so we'd have to mark it with a 2 x 4 to find it the next day and then we'd have to dig the hole out.

But at the first of the year, when you started digging it, the hole might be five feet deep, but the end of the year it would probably be 14 or 15 feet. It was a huge chute going down that thing. And it was kind of scary going down that thing, going in and out. But once you got in there it was ok....

We'd take candles and burn candles for light. And the body heat with the candles would actually melt the snow just a little bit and the snow above us was probably 8, 9, 10 foot. And the candles and body heat would melt and at night it would freeze as hard as rock. As the summer started coming and you could see it starting to sag, and then we stayed out then.

~ Billy Sparks ~

**Figure 41:** Snow Cave. Courtesy Billy Sparks



everybody liked to go down to the Boon Docks Bar and drink. And the duty run was a truck that would go back and forth from the battery and Eielson Air Force Base for people that had dental appointments or wanted to go to the PX or that sort of thing. So that duty run would always stop at the Boon Docks Bar. There were almost always people that were there ready to go back up to the battery.

Harding Lake was close enough for Fairbanks personnel to visit for daylong fishing expeditions. Jim Rutledge of C Battery remembers renting a boat, “and we just had the greatest time out there on the lake and we always caught fish and we always brought fish back to the site with us and the cooks would have one enormous fish fry for the whole unit. And that was great. And the Captain enjoyed that too. Even though he lived off-site he would stay around for the fish fries.”

USO shows at the closest Army post or Air Force Base were another popular diversion. Some recall seeing big name acts like Bob Hope and Brenda Lee. The USO also sponsored dances, but the men often far outnumbered the women at these events.

The remoteness of Nike sites compelled men to rely on each other for most of their socializing, and many close friendships formed as a result. Jim Rutledge remembered “a lot of good times just going into each other’s rooms and gathering around and just shooting the bull, you know, the breeze. And that relieved tension and that opened up guys and we had a lot of laughs even though we were lonely and all those other things that go along with being away from home.” C Battery MP Ronald Gaunt said, “Well we used to go up on top of the assembly room roof and sunbathe in the summer. And – I think there were two or three of us....And we got pretty good sun up there and the mosquitoes didn’t seem to like to get up there.”

At Site Point, which was located very close to the Anchorage Airport, men liked to get close to the runway and ‘experience the heavy jets landing up close and personal’. AADCP personnel enjoyed whiling away the hours at the top of the old abandoned Target Tracking Radar (TTR) tower. The tower was vacant since one battery of the double site was closed in 1970.



**Figure 42:** C Battery Basketball Team, Fairbanks. Ca. 1960. Courtesy Larry Goldsberry.

“A couple of times some of the boosters didn’t fire properly and there would be rocket fuel all over the place. And we used to gather it up, and a lot of the guys brought it back to the barracks. And to amuse ourselves again we’d make little missiles out of the tin foil, in the shape of a ballpoint pen, and then take the pen out and fill it with this rocket fuel. Make a little V shaped launcher in our barracks hallway, which was about over a hundred feet long I think. And we’d just sit out there and fire missiles back and forth down the hallway. The Sergeant was wondering where all these little burn marks had come in on the tile. We did that a lot.”

~ Joe Leone ~  
C Battery, Fairbanks



It provided a beautiful 360-degree view where we could watch the aircraft coming and going and scan miles of mountains and sea with binoculars. It was a place of peace and serenity just a few short steps from the barracks. The center of the tower was a hollow concrete cylinder with a steel spiral stairway inside it leading up to the top. The door into the stairway was padlocked shut for a long time, but we would climb up the steel scaffolding on the inside off the outer sheeting to get to the top anyway. There were sandbags up there, I suppose for the event that we would ever need a high sniper position, but they made good seats and a comfortable perch.<sup>46</sup>

Each Nike battery had its own benefits and drawbacks for the individual servicemen. Those who served at more than one battery during their service usually had a favorite site location. For men that enjoyed fishing and hunting, Site Bay (C Battery) across the inlet was the battery of choice, while those that enjoyed the amenities of a city preferred duty at Site Summit (B Battery), Site Point (A Battery) in Anchorage, or Site Love in Fairbanks.



**Figure 43:** Ralph New of C Battery, Fairbanks, with furs and wild game. Dec 1962. Courtesy Ralph New.

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<sup>46</sup> Site Point, Alaska: The Last North American AADCP of the Last Operational Nike Hercules Missile Battalion. [http://home.att.net/~jsstars/1\\_43/AADCP.html](http://home.att.net/~jsstars/1_43/AADCP.html).



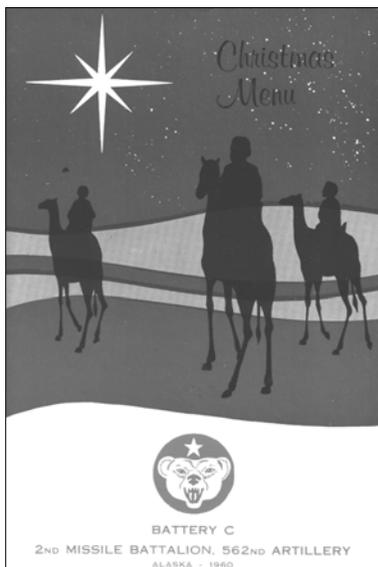
## Holidays

Thanksgiving and Christmas helped break up the normal winter routine of operating the Nike batteries. In accordance with Army tradition, soldiers' families were invited to visit the Nike sites for holiday meals. This was usually the only time family members ever had an opportunity to visit the battery and see the place where their husbands, fathers, or boyfriends dedicated so much of their lives. Warrant Officer Don Neal explained further:

Since the Group or Battalion Commander and staff had no separate unit mess hall on post, they and their families were invited out to eat with the missile site personnel. My family and I usually were invited to Site Summit, and I still remember how my three daughters looked forward to the occasion....The custom of family attendance was good in many ways. The mess steward and cooks got a chance to show their talents and earn the appreciation of all. Family members could see where the men performed their duties, and could meet the people they worked with. Dependents got to meet and know each other. And the single soldiers, far from their own home and families, must have been a little less lonely while surrounded by the visiting families and the warmth of the holiday spirit.<sup>47</sup>



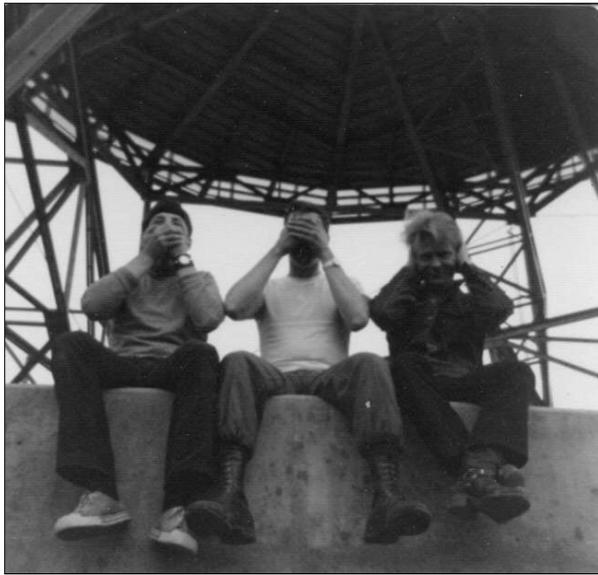
**Figure 44:** Guests in the Site Summit Mess Hall decorated for Thanksgiving. Courtesy Joe Holland.



<p><b>Christmas Message</b></p> <p>It is with a renewed sincerity that I wish the Officers and Men of this Command a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.</p> <p>I am deeply aware of the fine spirit and devotion to duty which each of you have contributed to this organization.</p> <p>It is my earnest hope that Peace on Earth will make it again possible for you to spend Christmas with your loved ones at home.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Commanding</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CHRISTMAS MENU</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chilled Tomato Juice with Lemon Wedge</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Roast Turkey with Bread Dressing and Giblet Gravy</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Cranberry Sauce</p> <p>Mashed Potatoes                      Browned Sweet Potatoes</p> <p>Buttered Green Beans                  Buttered Parsley Corn</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Assorted Crisp Relishes</p> <p>Assorted Rolls                          Butter</p> <p>Pumpkin Pie with Whipped Cream or Mincemeat Pie</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Assorted Fresh Fruit</p> <p>Candy                                      Nuts</p> <p>Tea    Coffee                      Milk</p>
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<sup>47</sup> Don Neal, correspondence with Kristy Hollinger. June 2004.





**Figure 45:** Speak no evil, see no evil, hear no evil. Site Summit, HIPAR radar. Courtesy Gregory Durocher.



**Figure 46:** USO show, Fairbanks. Courtesy Larry Goldsberry.



**Figure 47:** Lounging in the barracks. Site Summit. Courtesy Billy Sparks.





**Figure 48:** Operator Billy Sparks in front of the LOPAR radar. Site Summit. Courtesy Billy Sparks.



**Figure 49:** Men mopping the floors. C Battery, Fairbanks. Courtesy Paul Klassic.



**Figure 50:** Site Summit battery dog and mascot 'Lue' enjoying the view from the IFC area, ca. 1973. Courtesy Billy Sparks.



## Playing in the Danger Zone

*Gregory Durocher, an MP at Site Summit, recounts a remarkable incident that occurred during a guard duty break...*

Well you could only play so much pool and you could only watch so much television. So another thing that we would do is goof around, get ourselves in trouble... So one time we had a big windstorm, and snow and everything. The fences around the perimeters had like eight feet of chain link fence with a slanted, you know how they have the slanted three strands of barbed wire... In the wintertime you could step right over it. And that's what I did. I was on my four-hour break. Told the guys at Gate 2 that...I was going to go sliding down the hill.

So a couple guys came out to watch me do that. I just stepped right over the concertina wire, and you know where the Christmas Star is on the side of the mountain? Well this was right above that area [where] it was really steep, [and] drops off. So I started sliding down. Our coats were, the outside of them was cotton, not nylon, and so that doesn't slide real well in the snow. So I'm sitting there with my feet pushing, trying to get some speed up going down this hill, heading down backwards. All of the sudden something didn't seem right.

I don't know if I heard something or what. I looked around and I could see that the surface I was on, it was undulating and there [were] these cracks, and the cracks opened and closed, opened and closed. The first thing that came to my mind is, you know, the fact that if you're ever in an avalanche you're supposed to try and swim. Well...I was on top of a slab avalanche, and there's not much swimming on top of a slab, because it's just big chunks like ice flowing down the river. So I'm just flailing about trying to keep above the thing, well the thing started piling up on itself and it just came over the top of me. I felt like I had...sacks of potatoes rolling over me. Because it was just this kind of crushing weight.

And, you know I don't know what I'm thinking at that point, just, you know, terror basically. I guess I was thinking how deep am I getting buried, you know? Then when it stops I had a hand that stopped by the side of my face. My other hand was down at my side. And I couldn't move...Fortunately I'd held my breath out and...because this hand was so close to my face, I was kind of able to clear a little space.

And I'm sitting there you know, 'blow blow blow' I had my little cavity that...if I wouldn't have held my breath I probably would have been a goner. Because it would have, you know, hardened up that quick that I couldn't have inhaled. So I'm sitting there and it's kind of like panicking and it's, get a hold of yourself, get a hold of yourself.



I'm thinking, this is stupid...what's my family going to say? 'He was playing', you know. Then your first instinct is just to try and get yourself out of there. And just push and push. OK, wait a minute, calm down, calm down. Then I realized I could move a foot. I was in not very deep. I was pointed head down, with one leg...sticking out. Just from the knee on up, and so I started kicking my foot thinking, those guys were watching me, you know, maybe they'll see me. And then I got thinking what if I'm just in a little internal cavity? So then I get all panicky again. Try pushing myself, and then: wait, wait, wait, calm down, calm down. This was all, I'm sure it wasn't very long between the time I stopped and the time they made it down to where I was. It seemed like a long time. So I'm sitting there trying to calm down again and everything.

Then I heard footsteps punching on the snow above me. And those guys were as excited as I was, because all of the sudden this hand comes plunging down through the snow and grabs me by the corner of my eyeball and was trying to pull my head up. I'm yelling 'I'm all right, I'm all right!' They said there was a slab about the size of a tabletop that they couldn't lift, so one guy just gave it a big kick and it broke in half. Then they moved the pieces and they just shoveled the loose snow around me. And they said, boy are your eyes big! Your face is purple!



**Figure 51:** Gregory Durocher.



## Chapter 8 Nike Hercules Deactivated

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In the early Cold War years the United States recognized a grave Soviet threat in the form of intercontinental bombers. The prospect of long-range, high-speed planes entering U.S. territory to release nuclear weapons was a danger that demanded response. The Nike anti-aircraft guided missile system was developed to meet that threat. But as the Cold War continued, the Soviet Union redirected its efforts towards the development and acquisition of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM's), launching its first test missile in 1957. In 1960 Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev famously stated that wars of the future would be fought by launching missiles deep into a country's territory. The same year he cut 1.2 million soldiers from the conventional Soviet forces to direct resources towards the Strategic Rocket Forces.

Even as Nike sites were being deployed across the country, the U.S. government recognized that Soviet strategies were shifting. A 1960 National Security Council discussion paper stated, "Soviet delivery systems for attack on the continental United States are changing importantly in character... The period of the early 1960's will represent a gradual transition from a largely bomber threat to mainly one composed of ICBM's."<sup>48</sup> Though the threat was changing, it was still determined necessary to retain the Nike system as long as the Soviets still possessed long range bombers.

The Department of Defense began devoting substantial resources towards the development of antiballistic missile (ABM) defense systems in the late 1950's.<sup>49</sup> By the mid 1970's, the threat from intercontinental bombers had been almost entirely replaced by the threat of ICBM's. And protection against an ICBM attack became the chief U.S. security concern.

This evolving threat along with budget constraints and a dearth of manpower caused by the Vietnam War all contributed to the closure of the Nike Hercules system throughout the 1970's. Sites across the country were largely deactivated in two phases, with roughly half the batteries closing in 1970/71, and the remainder closing in 1974/75. The Fairbanks Nike batteries were deactivated in 1970 and 1971 due to budgetary constraints. The deactivations were part of nationwide closures involving twenty-seven firing batteries in fifteen states, the ARADCOM second Regional Headquarters at Selfridge AFB, and



**Figure 52:** Soldiers of B Battery, Site Summit, dig up radar cables during battery closure in May, 1979. U.S. Army Photo.

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<sup>48</sup> Discussion Paper on Continental Defense, Memorandum for the National Security Council. Executive Office of the President, National Security Council, Washington. 14 July 1960.

<sup>49</sup> The Army worked to develop its own missile defense systems; first with Nike Zeus and later with Nike X. Nike Zeus never got past the testing phase and the program was cancelled in 1961. Nike X was researched until 1967, until it was replaced by the Sentinel program and later Safeguard, neither of which were ever deployed.



two Air Defense Group Headquarters. One firing unit of the double battery at Site Point was also closed to reduce expenditures in 1970.

The Department of the Army was actually considering deactivating the Anchorage Nike Battalion as early as 1972. According to Army records, “Since [that] time, persistent rumors concerning the battalion’s future here in Alaska...have always been present and created instability and uncertainty among soldiers assigned or alerted for assignment to the battalion.”<sup>50</sup> NORAD considered the battalion necessary and it remained operational until 1979.

After 1975, Alaska and Florida were the only states in the country with operational Nike sites. The likely reason for this was their proximity to the Soviet Union and Cuba. By the late 1970’s, however, the utility of the Nike system was greatly diminished. Just as technological advancements had once made anti-aircraft artillery ineffective, the same situation now faced Nike missile sites.<sup>51</sup>

The decision to close the Anchorage Nike batteries was made in March of 1979. Mission relief was granted on April 9, and by July of 1979 all equipment and sensitive technology was removed from the three sites. Closing and inactivating the Nike batteries was a sizeable job requiring careful planning and execution. In particular, the removal of the missiles and warheads was an extremely sensitive operation. The battalion turned in over \$100 million worth of equipment. The HIPAR radomes and towers from B and C battery were sold to a foreign country. Guard dogs were sent to Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. The only valuable equipment left on the sites were the 250 kW generators, which were deemed too large and expensive for removal. Initially, Site Point and Site Bay were guarded for protection against trespassers and vandalism. Site Summit, the only site within the boundaries of Fort Richardson, was locked and left unguarded.<sup>52</sup>

The closure of Anchorage’s Nike sites received considerable media attention. An inactivation parade was conducted at Fort Richardson on July 30, 1979. Individual awards were presented to soldiers, and the Battalion colors were retired. The Air Force presented the Battalion with an Air Force Outstanding Unit Award for service to the Alaskan NORAD region. Within just four short months of the inactivation order, Alaska’s Nike Hercules operations came to an end. The closure of the Nike system affected over 700 people associated with running and maintaining the sites - all had to be reassigned or released from the Army. Two thirds of the servicemen were transferred out of Alaska.

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<sup>50</sup> After Action Report, Inactivation of 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, 43d ADA. To: Commanding General, 172d Infantry Brigade, Fort Richardson, Alaska 99505. 31 July 1979. On file at Public Affairs Office, Fort Richardson, Nike files.

<sup>51</sup> While the United States had outgrown the Nike system, other countries continued to use Nike Hercules defenses well into the 1990’s.

<sup>52</sup> Press Release, ‘Status of Army Nike Hercules Sites in Alaska’. March 14, 1980. On file at Public Affairs Office, Fort Richardson, Nike files.



## Current Status of Sites



**Figure 53:** Launch building at former Site Tare, Fairbanks. Now used by Fairbanks North Star Borough for maintenance and storage. June 2004.



**Figure 54:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Launch building at former Site Tare, Fairbanks. Used by Corps of Engineers. June 2004.

Alaska's Nike batteries experienced a varied end after decommissioning in the early and late 1970's. Uniformly, however, site abandonment has resulted in the steady deterioration of the buildings. Structures that were adapted for reuse, particularly some of the concrete launch buildings, survived in better condition. Though the original character of these buildings is often still apparent, the historic integrity is questionable.

The Fairbanks batteries were left unguarded after deactivation and immediately suffered from vandalism and scavenging. Sites Jig and Love were demolished under the Defense Environmental Restoration Account Program in 1986. The battery control facilities at Site Tare were demolished in the 1980's. The launch area was taken over by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during construction of the Chena River Flood Control Project. Today, one launch building remains in good condition and is used by the Corps for maintenance and storage. A warhead storage igloo is also still standing, and is used for boat storage. The second launch building is leased to the Fairbanks North Star Borough for the Chena Lakes Recreation Area. It is also used for storage and maintenance. Sites Peter and Mike, the only two Fairbanks batteries still on

military land, were heavily vandalized and then damaged by military training after being deactivated in 1970 and 1971. The remains of the batteries are scheduled for final demolition in 2004.

The Anchorage Nike sites were temporarily guarded after the battalion was deactivated in 1979, and were initially in better condition than their northern counterparts. Currently only Site Summit remains under Army control, and it is the only site sufficiently intact to retain historic integrity. Integrity is threatened by vandalism and weather deterioration, which have taken a heavy toll on the facilities. Site Summit is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>53</sup>

The Battery Control facilities at Site Bay were transferred to the Alaska Department of Corrections (ADC) in 1983 and converted to a minimum-security correctional center. The prison operated from 1983 to 1986, until asbestos was discovered in the buildings and the prison was

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<sup>53</sup> See Janet Clemens and Russell Sackett's *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for Site Summit*. Anchorage, Alaska Office of History and Archaeology, 1995.



forced to close. The ADC continued using the facilities for training until 1989. The University of Alaska obtained the launch area and surrounding lands.<sup>54</sup>

Site Point was transferred to the Anchorage Municipality in 1982 for a park, now known as Kincaid. The IFC area at the dual site was demolished, but most of the launch area buildings remain. One launch structure was renovated for use as a ski warm up facility and the other three are used for storage. The warhead storage igloo, two ammunition storage bunkers, and one launch control building also remain. (See appendix B). The structures are in good condition, and because the



**Figure 55:** Converted launch building, Site Point, Kincaid Park. May 2004.

battery was a dual site, almost one complete launch area remains with only the dog kennels, fencing, guard shacks, and vehicle/storage building absent. This highly accessible site has excellent potential for historic interpretation. Many of the buildings are in better or equivalent condition to their counterparts at Site Summit launch area. (Photos 56-66)

At one time 145 Nike Hercules batteries dotted the U.S. landscape, surrounding important cities, military installations and industrial centers. Twenty-five years following deactivation of the last operable sites in Alaska and Florida, traces remain to remind the public of the remarkable Nike mission, though they are often incomplete and invisible to the uninformed. One site in San Francisco, SF-88, is being restored for guided tours. Many other sites have been demolished or adaptively reused for diverse purposes, from a vocational school to a munitions storage site. The Nike structures that remain are a reminder of the Cold War and the threat which the Army and thousands of U.S. soldiers prepared to meet.

For twenty years Alaska's Nike sites were manned and maintained around the clock to provide defensive cover for the country. The overall dedication and hard work by everyone involved in operating the system made a lasting impression on many. As Phillip Parks of Site Point remembered, "the guys were dedicated...Some of them put in lots and lots of hours, gave up lots of free time to make things work." Intelligence Officer Jackson Murray stated, "I think they did an outstanding job." Billy Badger reflected, "we really had the best people we could get working on it. Those people really put their all into it. They wanted to do well and they did well."

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<sup>54</sup> Rindi White, 'Toxic Tug-of-War,' *Frontiersman (Mat-Su)*. 14 October 2002.





**Figure 56: Site Summit, launch building. June 2004.**



**Figure 57: Site Point, launch building. May 2004.**



**Figure 58: Site Summit. Side elevation of launch building. June 2004.**



**Figure 59: Site Point. Side elevation of launch building. May 2004.**



**Figure 60: Site Summit. Warhead storage. June 2004.**



**Figure 61: Site Point. Warhead storage. May 2004.**





**Figure 62: Site Summit.** Launch control building, side elevation. June 2004.



**Figure 63: Site Point.** Launch control building, rear elevation. May 2004.



**Figure 64: Site Summit.** Launch control building. June 2004.



**Figure 65: Site Point.** Launch control building. May 2004.



**Figure 66: Site Summit, 2003.** Battery Control Building.



## Acronyms and Abbreviations

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AAA	Anti-aircraft Artillery
AADCP	Army Air Defense Command Post
AC&W	Aircraft Control and Warning
AFB	Air Force Base
ALCOM	Alaskan Command
ARADCOM	Army Air Defense Command
CONAD	Continental Air Defense
CINCAL	Commander in Chief, Alaskan Command
DEW Line	Distant Early Warning Line
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
HIPAR	High Power Acquisition Radar
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
IFC	Integrated Fire Control
LOPAR	Low Power Acquisition Radar
MTR	Missile Tracking Radar
NORAD	North American Air Defense Command
ORE	Operational Readiness Evaluation
RFTS	Radar Frequency Test Site
TRR	Target Ranging Radar
TTR	Target Tracking Radar
USAG-AK	U.S. Army Garrison, Alaska
USARAL	U.S. Army Alaska (historic)
USARAK	U.S. Army Alaska
USO	United Services Organization





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## Appendix A: Unit Histories

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The following is a unit history excerpt from Colt Denfeld's study, *Nike Hercules in Alaska* (p. 9, 10). It details the activities of Alaska's two Nike battalions from their activation, through Alaskan Nike service, and beyond.

"In CONUS as well as Alaska the development of Nike brought back to life many former coastal or other artillery battalions. The 43d Air Defense Artillery in Anchorage traced its lineage back to August 14, 1901 and the founding of the 107<sup>th</sup> Company of the Coast Artillery, Artillery Corps. In 1918, the 107<sup>th</sup> was redesignated Battery E of the 43d Artillery and on August 7, 1918, organized at Haussimont, France. Returning to the United States after World War I it was inactivated on August 17, 1921 at Camp Eustis, Virginia. Three years later, on February 20, 1924, it was redesignated Battery E, 43d Coast Artillery.

During World War II the 43d earned 11 campaign streamers to add to the three earned for World War I campaigns. Following distinguished World War II service the 43d was disbanded on June 14, 1944.

The 43d was reconstituted on June 28, 1950 in the Regular Army and broken up into various units with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion consolidated with the 43d Field Artillery Battalion, an element of the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. During the Korean War, another 6 campaign streamers would be credited to the 43d. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions were again deactivated on February 1, 1957.

On August 12, 1958 the 43d was redesignated as Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1<sup>st</sup> Missile Battalion, 43d Artillery, and activated 20 days later at Fairchild AFB, Washington. In 1958-1959 the 43d Field Artillery was reorganized under the Combat Army Regimental System with the 1<sup>st</sup> Missile Battalion assigned to Fort Richardson in 1958. The 1<sup>st</sup> was redesignated the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 43d Air Defense Artillery, in 1971.

Throughout its service in Alaska until its inactivation on July 31, 1979 at Fort Richardson the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion worked to fulfill its motto of, "Sustenimus" or "We Support". The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 43d ADA was again activated on May 1, 1982 at Fort Bliss, Texas.

The 2d Battalion of the 562d Air Defense Artillery assigned to the Fairbanks area batteries traced its lineage back to September 5, 1928 and the formation of Battery B, 562nd Coast Artillery of the Organized Reserves. Later, in 1928, the battery was redesignated as Battery B, 917<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery until its inactivation and reassignment to the Regular Army on October 1, 1933. The Regular Army redesignated and activated the unit as Battery B, 70<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery at Fort Monroe, Virginia on November 4, 1939.

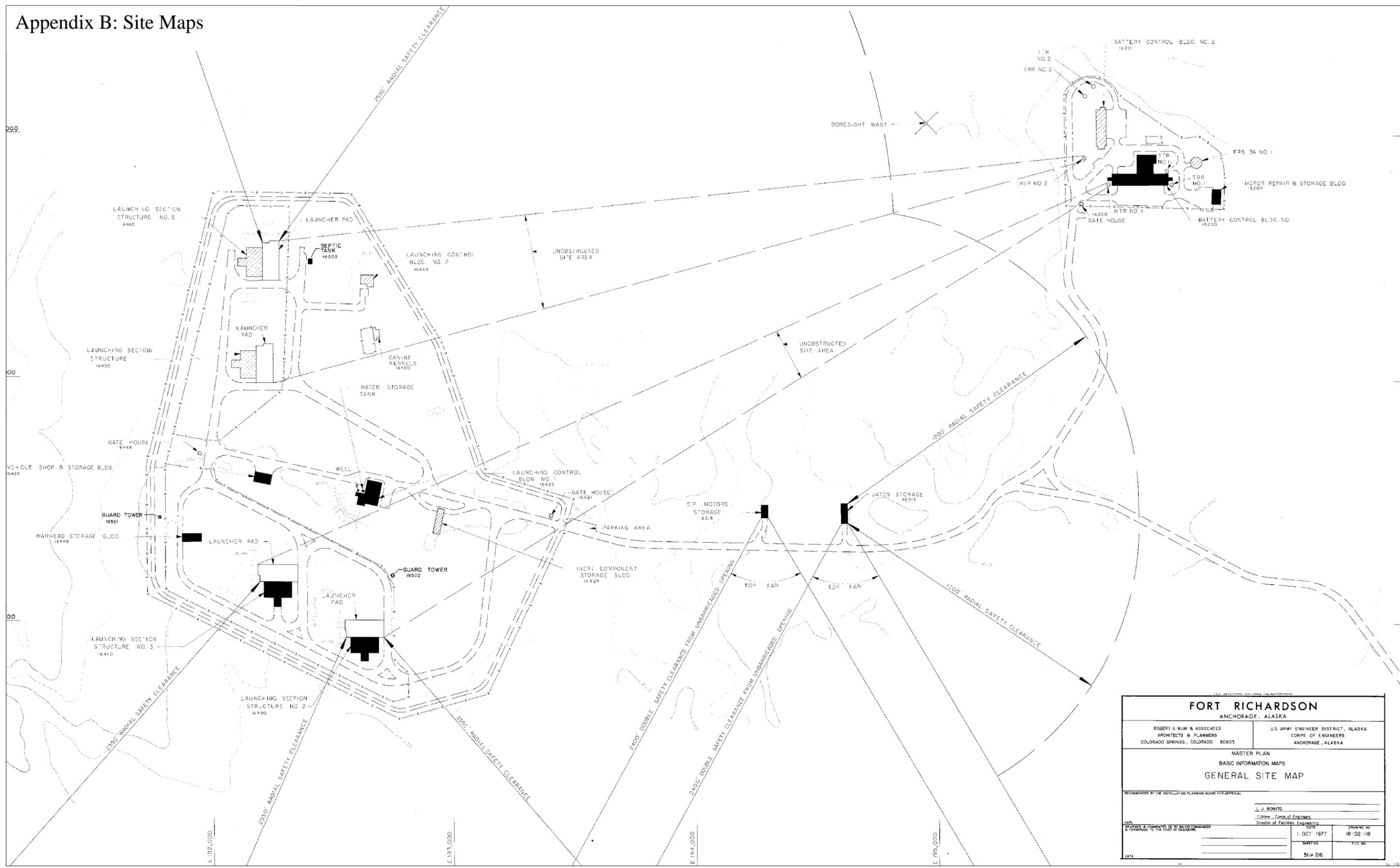
In World War II the battery was credited for campaign service in the Northern Solomons, Bismarck Archipelago, Leyte, and Luzon. In November 1943, the battery was reorganized and redesignated as Battery B, 70<sup>th</sup> Anti-aircraft Artillery Gun Battalion. Battery B would be inactivated in 1947 and activated January 15, 1949. For service in Korea eight campaign streamers were awarded. Battery B was again inactivated December 20, 1957.

The battery was redesignated on August 5, 1958 as Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 2d Gun Battalion, 562d Artillery and activated September 15, 1958, in Alaska. The next year, on May 15, 1959, it was reorganized and redesignated the 2d Missile Battalion, 562d Artillery. On March 31, 1968, it became the 2d Battalion, 562d Artillery and remained that until inactivation on Fort Wainwright on June 30, 1971."

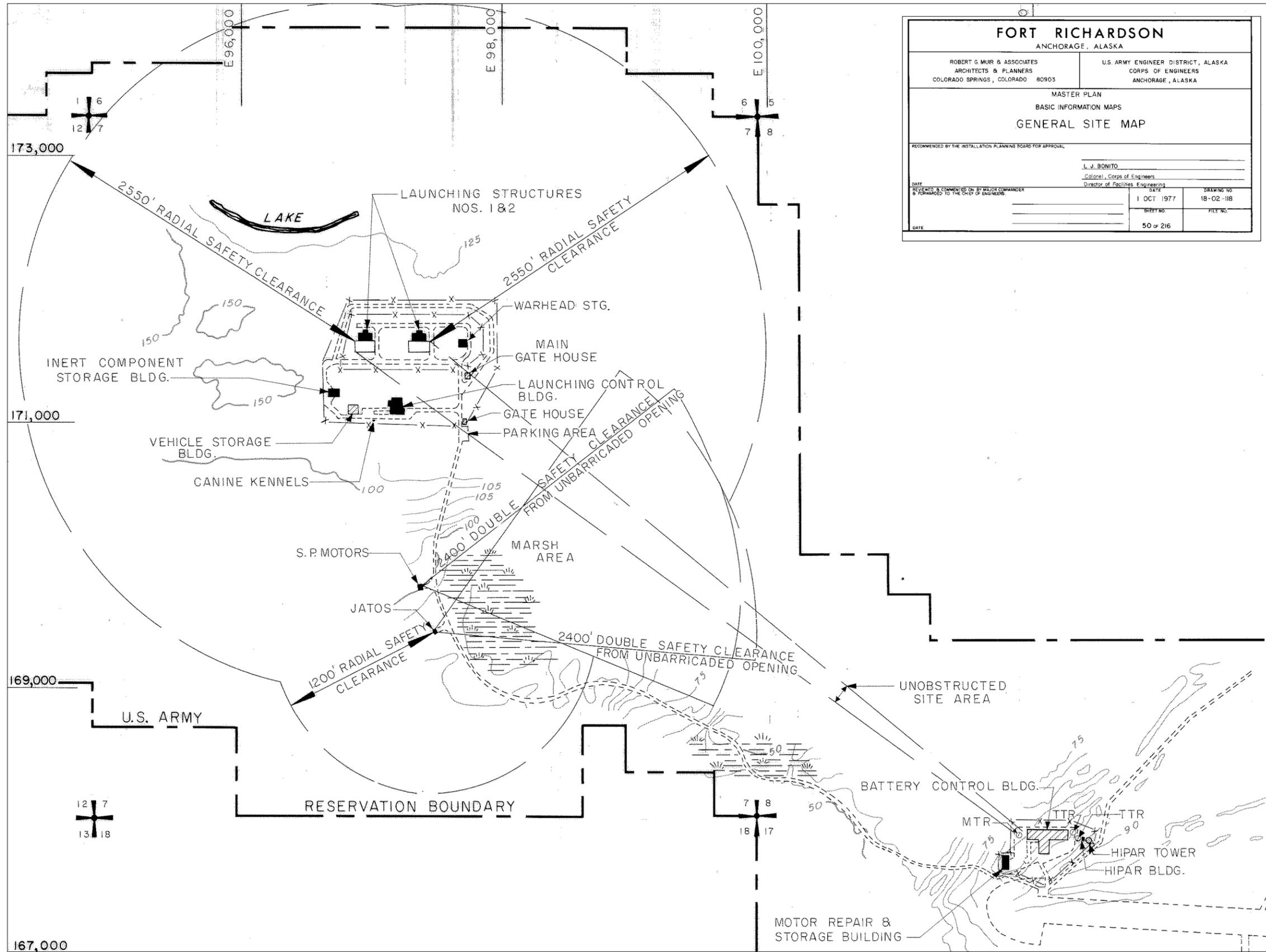




# Appendix B: Site Maps



<b>FORT RICHARDSON</b> ANCHORAGE, ALASKA	
ROBERT G. MUIR & ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS & PLANNERS COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO 80903	U.S. ARMY ENGINEER DISTRICT, ALASKA CORPS OF ENGINEERS ANCHORAGE, ALASKA
MASTER PLAN BASIC INFORMATION MAPS <b>GENERAL SITE MAP</b>	
RECOMMENDED BY THE INSTALLATION PLANNING BOARD FOR APPROVAL:	
L. J. BONITO Colonel, Corps of Engineers Director of Facilities Engineering	
DATE REVIEWED & COMMENTED ON BY ALASKA COMMANDER & FORWARDED TO THE CHIEF OF ENGINEERS	DATE 1 OCT 1977
DATE	FILE NO 18-02-118
DATE	SHEET NO 51 of 216



<b>FORT RICHARDSON</b> ANCHORAGE, ALASKA			
ROBERT G. MUIR & ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS & PLANNERS COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO 80903		U.S. ARMY ENGINEER DISTRICT, ALASKA CORPS OF ENGINEERS ANCHORAGE, ALASKA	
MASTER PLAN BASIC INFORMATION MAPS <b>GENERAL SITE MAP</b>			
RECOMMENDED BY THE INSTALLATION PLANNING BOARD FOR APPROVAL			
		L. J. BONITO Colonel, Corps of Engineers Director of Facilities Engineering	
DATE FORWARDED & COMMENTED ON BY MAJOR COMMANDER & FORWARDED TO THE CHIEF OF ENGINEERS		DATE	DRAWING NO.
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		SHEET NO.	FILE NO.
		50 of 216	
DATE			

Site Bay

