

Nike Site B-55 - Blue Hills

Those that 'Trail Trace' are familiar with 'the Nike site', as we hike through part of it in the "Ponkapoag East" (Lantana) section. Here's a bit more of the story (w/ excerpts from sources in footnotes.) (I couldn't find many pictures of the Randolph facility, so some are of Burlington facility, or stock pics.)

For those that weren't around, or at least weren't old enough to worry about world wars in the 1950s, this was "The Cold War" era. The US and Russia had teamed up to beat Germany... but then things got tense. It was a time when school kids were taught to get under their desks in case on a nuclear attack. (Good thing one never came; I don't think those desks would have helped!); and people built bomb shelters in their back yards. (Another idea that wouldn't have solved the problem.) Would the Russians attack us? Who knew? All that was known was that WWII antiaircraft guns couldn't shoot down jets, because the jets were too fast. Something new was needed.

Project Nike was a U.S. Army project, proposed in May 1945 by Bell Laboratories, to develop a line-of-sight anti-aircraft missile system. The project delivered the United States' first operational anti-aircraft missile system, the Nike Ajax, in 1953. ("Nike" was named after Nike, the goddess of victory from Greek mythology).¹

The first lines of defense were Distant Early Warning (DEW) lines that stretched across the Arctic and Canada. They functioned as tripwires. If a Soviet jet crossed the Arctic and penetrated a DEW line, the Nike missile bases would have to swing into action.²

Each launch site had three parts, separated by at least 1,000 yards. One part of about six acres contained the IFC (Integrated Fire Control) radar systems to detect incoming targets (acquisition and target tracking) and direct the missiles (missile tracking), along with the computer systems to plot and direct the intercept. The second part, around forty acres, held 3 underground missile magazines each serving a group of four launch assemblies and included a safety zone. The site had a crew of 109 officers and men who ran the site continuously. One launcher would be on 15-minute alert, two on 30-minute alert, and one on two-hour alert. The third part was the administrative area, which was usually co-located with the IFC and contained the battery headquarters, barracks, mess, recreation hall, and motor pool.

The Blue Hills Nike site was active under control of the Army from Oct 1955 - Oct 1963. The housing area located on Army Street in Randolph was supposedly used by the government up until c.1991.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_Nike

² <https://burlingtonretro.com/2017/09/21/straight-shooting-about-nike-missiles/>

The three areas: **The Missile Launch Area:**



³ (Stock photo)



Nike Missile site, Burlington MA. Photo credit: Woburn Library Farino Collection.

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⁵ Another stock photo



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³ [ibid.](#)

⁴ <https://burlingtonretro.com/2017/09/21/straight-shooting-about-nike-missiles/>

⁵ http://coldwar-ma.com/Nike_Missile_Bases.html

⁶ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/alohadave/2740159484/in/photostream/>

Randolph missile launch area

This area is located off High Street in Randolph, directly across from Central Rock Gym. If you haven't hiked in there, it's an interesting place to see. There isn't a lot left, but the launch pads are still there, and you can see where the (underground) missile silos were. There isn't much interesting left of the rest of the site.

The IFC (Integrated Fire Control) radar systems

These were located off Chickatawbut Road, on the right, just before the overlook as you ascend from Rt 28. The radar units are gone of course, however the building remain, and are still used. The area is now used as an Education Center, and isn't normally open to the public. As you hike the Skyline Trail in the area you will hike along the chain link fence that encloses the area.



⁷ (1999 picture of Randolph IFC area)

⁷ <http://ed-thelen.org/J-McGrath/NBHILLS.HTM>

There were two radar installations: Target-tracking radar. This would lock in on enemy aircraft:



⁸ (This is the Burlington Radar installation)

Acquisition radar. This would bounce electronic signals off airplanes to determine “friend or foe.” Friendly aircraft would respond with a specific signal that functioned as a secret handshake:



⁹ (Again, the Burlington installation)

Control room. This coordinated the signals from the various equipment and also had the “fire” buttons. This was manned all day, every day:



¹⁰ (Once more, Burlington. I couldn't find Randolph pictures)

⁸ <https://burlingtonretro.com/2017/09/21/straight-shooting-about-nike-missiles/>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

The housing area: Army Road, Randolph



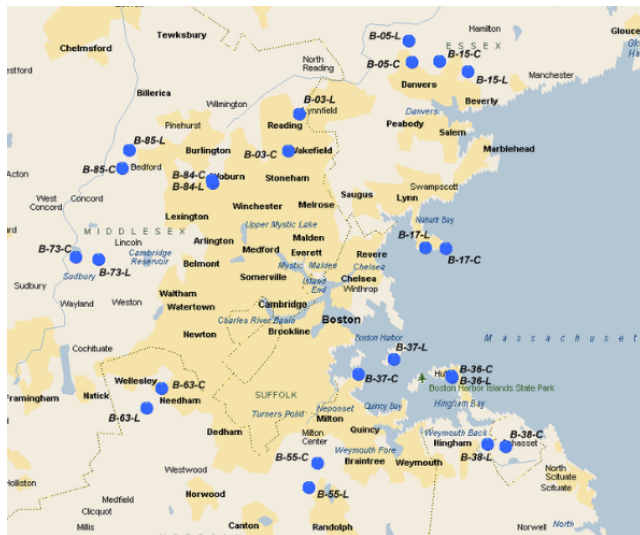
These days Google Maps street view shows this area looks much like a typical suburban development.

Decommissioning:

Soviet development of ICBMs (InterContinental Ballistic Missiles) decreased the value of the Nike (aircraft) air defense system. Beginning around 1965, the number of Nike batteries was reduced.

Nike Hercules was included in SALT I discussions as an ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile). Following the treaty signed during 1972, and further budget reduction, almost all Nike sites in the continental United States were deactivated by April 1974.

So, as you hike through the Blue Hills you can think back to the cold war, and the part the Blue Hills played in trying to keep Boston safe. There were many other Nike Sites around Boston:



When I was a teenager living in Burlington, C.1966, they converted the Nike IFC site there into a youth center. The Missile Launch Area? That became the Burlington campus of Northeastern University, which I attended my freshman year, 1966-67. We used to park our cars next to the missile silos, which were still there. (And still are, see current google maps image above right.)

¹¹ http://coldwar-ma.com/Nike_Missile_Bases.html