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THE CLAYTON/DEER PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Mortarboard © C/DPHS

Fay & Marilyn Reilly’s Photos of the Atlas ICBM’s March, 1961, Arrival in Deer Park

by Wally Lee Parker

as later learned, it would be another six months before the site was fully checked out and declared operational. In those days, the local newspaper was published each Thursday, which begs a question. Was the "noon" Mr. Cox was referencing the one occurring the day before the official publication date? Or was it the one occurring the day the editor was on the plane returning from the 567th Strategic Missile Squadron’s compound at Fairchild Air Force Base, and the last sight of the missile before it was loaded on the transport plane? If the latter, it’s possible the editor knew the date in advance.

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date his column was being written — that likely being a day or two earlier? We just don’t know. All we can currently say for certain is that the missile was paraded through Deer Park sometime during the last week of March, 1961 — likely around midweek, and likely around noon.

I say paraded since we do know that the missile’s arrival — unlike most everything else to do with the device — wasn’t a military secret. The unshrouded rocket was trailerered east on Crawford Street, and then parked in front of the then-current City Hall (now the Current City Hall) for close-up viewing by the locals, including students released from classes in the city’s schools.

Among the many adults crowding the sidewalks that day was Fay Reilly, himself a 1948 graduate of Deer Park High School. Fay brought his camera and snapped three slides of the missile and attending onlookers. In 2007, Fay and his wife, Marilyn, donated those color slides — severely degraded in the intervening 46 years — to the Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society. Soon after, a professional photographer donated his expertise in digital photo restoration to return the images as close as possible to their original clarity. The Fay Reilly photos seen on these pages are the result of that collaboration.

For Deer Park, the Atlas missile story began in 1958. The first notice local residents had that something was going to happen appeared in the June 12th edition of the Tri-County Tribune, when Bill Cox’ weekly editorial cryptically announced, “A group of men are working at the airport right now, taking samples for the Army. They obtained the right of entry from the town council to survey and explore for a period of six months. We don’t know any of the ‘Why’s’ — and, the men, if they know, are not at liberty to divulge it.”

What “Army” reference is to the Army Corps of Engineers.

Two weeks later the editor’s Wander with Bill Cox column added the following bit of data. “Apparently all this core drilling that was going on was to test for a launching pad site. What the outcome is won’t be known for a little while.”

Most everyone understood the meaning of the term “launching pad.” America’s belief in its technological superiority had been severely rattled the prior October by Russia’s surprise (at least to the general public) launch into near Earth orbit of a small metallic globe containing a radio transmitter. It would seem the addition of the word Sputnik to the American vocabulary, and the many reports in the following days of America’s efforts to catch up in what had suddenly become the space race, had made any further explanation of the rocket related term “launching pad” unnecessary.

In the July 3, 1958, edition of the Tribune, Mr. Cox stated, “Since we mentioned core drilling out here at the airfield some weeks back, there have been quite a few rumors going around.” The rumors the editor described seem to have divided into two camps, those who felt “the testing was being done to find a suitable site for a launching pad for an ICBM.”

Intercontinental Ballistic Missile — and those speculating it was to be the future site of “a short range ground to air missile” called Nike.

In 1956, construction was begun west of Spokane on four short-range surface-to-air Nike Ajax missile batteries intended to protect Fairchild Air Force Base from Russian bombers. Those four sites were designated F-7 — Spokane (Airway Heights), F-37 — Cheney (Four Lakes), F-45 Medical Lake, and F-85 — Deep Creek, were activated in 1957.

The Nike Ajax was a relatively small, two-stage rocket with a range of about 40 miles and a conventional explosive warhead useful only in proximity to its target. The typical launch site would stock twenty to thirty such missiles. Considering the nature of the rocket’s guidance system it’s ability to eliminate incoming aircraft without the addition of a nuclear warhead was always viewed as problematic.

Due to this, a larger two-stage solid-fuel rocket — the Nike Hercules — with a range of about 75 miles and fully capable of carrying a type of small, variable output nuclear warhead already in the...
The “E” series Atlas solved the radio link problem by adding a newly designed onboard guidance system centered around what may well have been the world’s first fully solid-state computer. This onboard computer would interpret the input from the rocket’s inertial guidance system, and then make the necessary calculations to keep the device on whatever trajectory had been uploaded into the missile’s memory during the launch preparation phase.

The blast vulnerability problem was countered by reclining each missile in a hardened, underground bunker with a weak point blast resistance of 25 pounds per square inch of overpressure. If orders to launch were received, the 400 ton reinforced concrete overhead door would be winched to the side, the missile elevated, fueled, and then launched.

These changes meant all nine of Fairchild’s ICBMs would be airborne less than fifteen minutes after a launch order — still slow when it comes to ballistic missiles, but better than the prior system.

Though often referred to as silos, Fairchild’s ring of Atlas bases are more accurately described as coffin bunkers. The only portions of the base complex proper exposed aboveground were the massive slide-to-the-side blast door shielding the launch bay, the very large missile entry door at the bottom of the paved ramp that descends to the launch bay, and the crew entry door near the same. The rest of the complex, except for topside escape hatches, ventilation stacks and the like, were covered with a layer of earth. Also note, all Atlas E bunkers were oriented with the missile loading ramp and door pointing north.

The smaller structure in the diagram housed the launch center, crew quarters, and electrical generators. The larger structure contained the central missile bay, the logic units (computers), missile erection support mechanisms, fueling systems and so forth. Tanks for liquid oxygen, propellant, and compressed gases were buried outside the bunker’s walls.

... construction of the bunker ...

The October 15th, 1959, issue of Deer Park’s Tri-County Tribune listed a set of bids that had been opened for a water supply system to be installed for the local missile bunker, leaving the impression that construction would begin that autumn, and continued on through the winter. That impression was bolstered by the following remarks appearing in the Tribune’s April 28th, 1960, Wandering with Bill Cox column.

“Convair is beginning to install the
real technical stuff at the missile base, and will be doing so for about the next year.”

The Convair Division of the General Dynamics Corporation was the aircraft design and manufacturing company responsible for developing the Atlas series of ICBMs and their associated systems.

An indicator of the closing phase of construction was published in the January 12th, 1961, edition of the Tribune, under the heading, “Dummy Missile Delivered to Local Site.” In part the article stated, “Before the delivering of the Atlas, a dummy one was sent ... last Friday. The dummy missile ... was only a framework, but was the actual size of the Atlas.

“A convoy pilot car, state patrol cars, sheriff’s vehicles, and military personnel vehicles made the transportation of the ‘dummy’ into quite a procession.

“Although a specified approach had been built by the highway department to get the missile into Deer Park, the dummy was delivered via South Main and was able to turn the corner at Main and Crawford in a short while.”

The “specified approach” mentioned above was the summer, 1960, restructuring of the intersection of West Crawford Street with Highway 395 that included rebuilding the bridge over Dragoon Creek in order to create a

The First Atlas Missile Arrives in Deer Park.
Elements of Fairchild Air Force Base’s 567th Strategic Missile Squadron on route to the local launch complex east of Deer Park with the town’s first Atlas E Missile in tow. The photo shows the transporter passing Perrins’ Park on East Crawford Street. Immediately after this photo was taken, the missile was parked in front of the old high school (current city hall) for viewing.

(Photo by Fay Reilly.)

The launch bays on all Atlas E bunkers were aligned north/south, with the missile entrance to the north.

Tanks shown outside of bunker walls are normally subsurface.

The ramp from the surface to the launch bay door.

Crew’s access door and tunnel.

Illustration from USAF technical manual “T. O. 21M-CGM16E-1-1.”

Tunnel north to the launch control bunker.

The launch service building shown above was divided into three parts, each separated by a blast door. In order to attach the missile to the launch bay’s combined boom/gantry, the 400 ton overhead blast door was slid to the side and the bay’s boom partially raised. The transporter was backed into bay, aligned with various indicators and mechanical devices, and the boom lowered over the rocket. Once the missile was securely slung beneath the boom, both were partially raised and the transport removed. The crew quarters and lounge, kitchen facilities, electric generators, and missile launch consoles were in the bunker to the north, and accessible only by tunnel.
The Missile on Crawford Street.

Besides area residents, students released from classes in the local schools can be seen milling around the parked missile. (Photo by Fay Reilly)

sweeping curve to accommodate any missile arriving from Fairchild Air Force Base. The layout of this new intersection whisked away the difficulties for civilian vehicles turning onto Crawford from the south bound lane of Highway 395 — a difficulty made even more aggravating to local motorists when the above noted “dummy” missile avoided the rebuilt intersection altogether.

The January article also suggested that the first operational missile would be arriving shortly after the adjustment made with use of the dummy missile. That appears to have been in error since the real missile didn’t arrive for another six weeks.

... eyewitness accounts ... When the real thing was brought through town in late March, Rick Hodges, a 1964 graduate of Deer Park High School and current associate of the Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society was on hand. As Rick relates, “I don’t know how I got down there to watch the missile negotiate the turn from Highway 395 onto Crawford Street, since I was supposed to be in school like everyone else, but there I was, camera in hand. I recall the State Patrol had to block traffic on 395 to give the transport team time to back the big rig across both lanes and try again. It was something all the citizens that had gathered to watch were commenting about — how the government spent all that money to reshape Crawford Street’s portion of the intersection and widen the bridge, but still somehow managed to not have enough room.”

Having negotiated the turn, the transport team should have traveled east on Crawford Street for another four miles, then north on Missile Site Road another mile and a half to reach the guarded security of the officially named “site C.” But, as a matter of public relations, a stop was to be made.

Students at Deer Park High School were informed the Atlas missile would be parked in front of Crawford Street’s middle school (the former high school, and now city hall) for several hours, and that we were free to leave the building during assigned study halls to inspect the rocket. In fact, all the district’s students would have a chance to see the rocket — this included students bussed down from the old Clayton grade school.

For me — at the time a sophomore at the high school — it was much more than a chance to dump study hall on a bright and reasonably warm early spring day. Both science and science fiction had long been an interest of mine, and the Atlas seemed a blending of both. That said, the rocket didn’t appear particularly impressive — meaning it was primarily a fully cloaked shell with little else to see. I understood its potential. Still, with the rocket lying mute on the trailer, its mechanics shrouded beneath stainless steel, fabric, and fiberglass to the point where even the interiors of the engine throats were covered, the missile’s inner workings remained a mystery.

The trailer, a maze of pipes and plumbing, could be independently steered at the rear wheels by onboard tillermen. As for the viewing, I can vaguely recall a few fatigue-clad airmen keeping watch. The one notable thing was that most didn’t seem that much older than the high school students milling in the street.

A good collection of students and local residents had gathered when, all of a sudden, the airmen, along with Deer Park’s chief of police and the various schoolteachers — just about everyone with any authority — began yelling for us to get out of the way.

Within seconds of brushing us all onto the sidewalk — kids and adults alike — the engine on the tow truck bellowed, and the missile was whisked away to the east.

“What happened?” I asked. “They were supposed to be here for another hour.”

A voice from in the crowd replied, “Some little kid just threw a rock at the missile!”

As then student Joseph ‘Buddy’ Farris recalled, “I was in the fourth grade — Mrs. Noble’s class — when we marched up to see the rocket. After we’d all been herded up on the sidewalk and the rocket taken away, I saw Mister Hegre, my grade school principal, had a second-grader pinned up against a tree and was reading him the riot act.”

Asking around, the version I heard said these two second graders got to daring each other as to whether either could throw a rock all the way over the missile. When the answer was no, and the rock bounced off. Their defense was that it wasn’t the missile they were aiming at. But that didn’t seem to make much difference to the airmen, along with Deer Park’s chief of police and the various schoolteachers — just about everyone with any authority — began yelling for us to get out of the way. Despite their defense, that didn’t seem to make much difference to the airmen, along with Deer Park’s chief of police and the various schoolteachers — just about everyone with any authority — began yelling for us to get out of the way.

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Up Close on Crawford Street.

Each of the two outboard booster engines produced 194,500 pounds of thrust. The center sustainer engine produced 57,000 pounds of thrust. Together they created the 446,000 pound used to accelerate the rocket’s fully fueled 267,000 pounds off the ground. Once enough fuel and oxidizer had been consumed that the sustainer engine’s smaller thrust alone could complete the mission, the outer engines were shut down and — along with a good portion of their support assemblies — jettisoned.

The pipes seen angling away from the base of the rocket are exhaust tubes for two of the rocket’s three high-output fuel pumps — those feeding the booster rockets. The exhaust from the pump feeding the central sustainer engine entered the muffler seen encircling that rocket’s nozzle. It was then directed into the blast emitted from that nozzle. These pumps, turned by a stream of combustion gas generated by what were essentially small rocket engines in themselves, moved fuel and liquid oxygen toward the rocket’s main and steering engines at a rate measured in gallons per second.

The missile carried two small steering rockets, two thousand pounds thrust each, located several yards above the missile’s base. One, covered in clear plastic, can be seen protruding above the rocket. The other, normally mounted on the opposite side, was removed whenever the missile was placed on the transporter. The black tube descending the side of the rocket was one of two that brought liquid oxygen from the upper tank.

Photo by Fay Reilly.
have made the officer in charge of transporting as mad as hell. And I would suspect that’s exactly what happened.”

After reaching the missile base, the transporter would be backed down the paved ramp descending from ground level to the entrance to the missile bay. The entrance to the bay was blocked by 47 tons of fabricated-steel blast door. As Dick Mellor, a missileer with Fairchild’s 567th SMS recalled, “The blast door slid sideways into a pocket in the wall behind the logic units (early computers). The door was hung on rollers, and was moved by a chain drive and hand crank. It took some six hundred turns to slide the door all the way back. We never figured out why they hadn’t installed a motor to do that. Maybe they figured airmen were cheaper.”

At this point the launch bay’s overhead blast door was pulled to the side so the bay’s boom/gantry could be partially raised — allowing enough room for the trailer to be backed beneath. Guide rails in the floor of the bay mated with guide castors on the trailer to position the trailer exactly beneath the over-hanging boom. Once alignment was achieved, the boom/gantry was lowered, the nose of the missile was secured by the boom/gantry’s nose ring, and the rear of the rocket was secured by two clamps at the base of the boom/gantry.

With missile attached, the boom/gantry was once again partially raised and the trailer extracted. The missile was then lowered to its storage position — slung between the nose ring and base clamps — and the launch bay buttoned up.

At some point the nuclear warhead would be delivered to the bunker and installed on the missile. That was accomplished by a separate ordnance team.

The Strategic Air Command’s 567th Strategic Missile Squadron was activated at Fairchild Air Force Base on April 1st, 1960. The squadron reached operational status on the 28th of September, 1961, with each of its nine launch sites reaching full alert status during the next several months.

Over the next three years, Deer Park’s bunker underwent an endless stream of drills and exercises — sometimes requiring the missile be raised, fueled, and everything but launched.

Further Reading

“Standing Watch: The Story of Deer Park’s Atlas ICBM.” by Wally Lee Parker
(http://www.cdphs.org/deer-park-atlas-ibm.html)

“Ruminations Regarding the Business End of Missile Site Road.” by Wally Lee Parker
Mortarboard #6, October, 2008 — page 68 — Collected Newsletters, Volume 2.

Atlas Ballistic Missile
Launch Complex No. 1 (C), Deer Park.
The Atlas standing upright and free of the gantry during a dual propellant loading exercise carried out on August 18th, 1961.
The white plume is a cloudlike condensation formed by the chilled oxygen venting as gas from the liquid oxygen tank’s pressure relief valve. The portion of the missile comprising the liquid oxygen tank appears white due to a surface accumulation of frosty condensation.
(Photo courtesy of Dick Mellor.)

Over the next three years, Deer Park’s bunker underwent an endless stream of drills and exercises — sometimes requiring the missile be raised, fueled, and everything but launched.

It would be interesting to know if any of the locals ever saw the tip of the rocket standing upright above the trees, as was done during fuel loading exercises — standing upright with a cloud of white vapor streaming away from the liquid oxygen tank’s pressure valve located just below the warhead. If so, it would be interesting to know what was going through the observer’s mind at that moment.

The various sites began coming offline in January of 1965, with all being mothballed by March 31st. The squadron itself was deactivated on the 25th of June, 1965.

——— end
Minutes of the
Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society
—— April 8, 2017 ——

In attendance: Bill Sebright, Pat Parker, Wally Parker, Don Ball, Mark Wagner, Roxanne Camp, Lorraine Nord, Marilyn Reil-ly, Betty Burdette, Sue Reichnus, Burt Ernst, Casie Ernst, Stella Ernst, Chuck Lyons, and Ella Jenkins.

Society President Bill Sebright called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. He reported that: 1) Casie Ernst emailed Bill for pictures and information on her Grandmother, Nona Hutchins Ernst. Nona graduated from DPHS in 1955. Nona was married to Burt Ernst for almost 60 years before her death last year. Casie, Burt, and Stella were at today’s meeting. Bill is lending three DPHS Antlers, and giving a DVD of the 1954 Antler, to Casie. 2) Bill received a phone call from Jesse Klemish of Valley, WA. Jesse has sewer pipe with the “WaCo” trademark stamped on them. He also has a canvas covered cream can from the Deer Park Creamery. Bill has pictures of both (see photos to right). 3) He also received a phone call from Michael Jaeger who has lived on the Clayton and Ila Erickson farm for 2 years. He found a “love letter” from a young “Donna” to a “Johnny.” He would like to get it back to the family, if not to Donna. He took down a chimney and found the letter between a brick and 2 by 4. 4) After a conversation, Joe Long-ly brought Bill 4 unbroken Roman bricks and a brick that says, “BUILDERS MADE IN CANADA” on it. The Ben Renner house is sided with Roman bricks.

Society Treasurer Mark Wagner reported the main checking account ended the month at $7,130.16. There were deposits of $64.00. One check was written to Taffy Long for 100.00 for Eagle maintenance. The web hosting account ended the month at $755.70, with a withdrawal of $10.95 for web hosting.

Society Vice President Pete Coffin reported by email that: 1) I will not be able to attend Saturday’s meeting. 2) I have emailed a short paper to Editor Parker about Peter Meyers. He and his family were some of the earliest settlers in the Deer Park area. His homestead was about a mile north of the future site of Deer Park and became a wagon freighter stop, a school, and a post office. 3) I have been finishing research on a manuscript about Lewis Cass Gemmill. His homesteaded 3 miles south of Deer Park and ran a large sawmill operation on the south bank of Dra-goon Creek and was a very early settler on Wild Rose Prairie. I have been interviewing his Grandson, Gerald Gemmill, for detailed information. 4) In relation to the Gemmill biography, Gerald Gemmill allowed me to scan his Grandfather’s picture for use in the manuscript from a large book written by Jonathan Edwards titled “An Illustrated History of Spokane County, State of Washington.” It was originally published in 1900 and has been reprinted. As it has many short biographic
entries of Deer Park citizens, I have ordered one for personal use.

Print editor Wally Parker reported: 1) One hundred and ten copies of the April Mortarboard (#108) have been printed for distribution, and the online version has been submitted for posting. This sixteen page issue contains an article by Pete Coffin titled “The Deer Park Motors Company.” The Letters/Brickbats segment contains materials related to Clayton’s Spokane Pottery Company, the Deer Park school board’s response to the 1918 flu pandemic, the Open Door Congregational Church’s vintage pastor, the Reverend William Worthington, the Arcadia Orchards Company’s Albert G. Craig, and the editor’s musings regarding a museum for the society. 2) Ten copies of Collected Newsletters, Volume 30, have been printed. This volume combines Mortarboards #106, #107, and #108. 3) I’d like to mention that seven members of the Editorial Group submitted corrections and revisions for the April Mortarboard. This continuing level of participation insures that our amateur magazine is as close to professional quality as we can make it. Each person responding to our ongoing plea for volunteer proofreaders deserves the thanks of everyone who reads our publication. And anyone who would like to become a member of the Editorial Group — membership in the society not being a requirement — only needs to contact the editor.

Webmaster Marie Morrill reported by email that I have uploaded the April Mortarboard without complications. (Maybe it helps that I am staying with my son who has fast internet!) A Summary by Month chart for the Website is attached. (We will discuss it at the May meeting.)

Betty Burdette reported Settlers Day meeting is every third Monday in the Ambulance Building at 4:30pm.

The third Brickyard Day Committee meeting will be April 12, 6 PM at the Real Estate Market Place in Deer Park.

Next meeting: Saturday, May 13, 2017, at 9 AM at the Clayton Drive-In.

Meeting adjourned at 9:39 AM.

The Society meeting minutes submitted by Mark Wagner, acting Secretary.

——— end ———

Society Contacts
We encourage anyone with observations, concerns, corrections, or divergent opinions regarding the contents of these newsletters to write the society or contact one or more of the individuals listed below. Resultant conversations can remain confidential if so desired.

C/DPHS, Box 293, Clayton, WA 99110
Bill Sebright, President — sebrightha@gmail.com — (509) 276-2693
Peter Coffin, Vice-President — pcffn@q.com
Wally Lee Parker, Editor of Print Publications — bogwen100@msn.com — (509) 467-9433

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——— C/DPHS ———

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See Yourself in Print.

The Clayton/Deer Park Historical Society’s department of Print Publications is always looking for original writings, classic photos, properly aged documents and the like that may be of interest to our readers. These materials should be rooted within, though not limited to, northern Spokane County, southeastern Stevens County, and southern Pend Oreille County. As for types of materials, family or personal remembrances are always considered. Articles of general historical interest — including pieces on natural history, archeology, geology and such — are likely to prove useful. In other words, we are always searching for things that will increase our readers’ understanding and appreciation of this region’s past. As for historical perspective; to us history begins whenever the past is dusty enough to have become noteworthy — which is always open to interpretation. From there it extends back as deep as we can see, can research, or even speculate upon.

Copyright considerations for any materials submitted are stated in the “Editorial and Copyright Policy” dialog box found on page 1468 of this issue. For any clarifications regarding said policy, or any discussions of possible story ideas or the appropriateness of certain types of material and so on, please contact the editor via the email address supplied on the same page.

——— the editor ———

A print copy of this issue of the Mortarboard is or soon will be available in booklet format.

Ask about “Collected Newsletters: Volume Thirty.”