

**Missiles in Chicago's Backyards**  
**The US Army Nike Missile Defense System of 1950-1975**



*A Presentation by Mark Berhow for  
Worth Historical Museum & Historical Society*

*Worth, IL,  
April 10, 2010*

The rise of strategic air power and the development of nuclear weapons during World War II brought about the demise of the old seacoast artillery defensive system used by the United States to guard her borders. It was apparent in 1945 that any future attack on the United States would come first from the sky. Thus, new weapons were needed to defend against streams of enemy bombers and missiles potentially bearing nuclear bombs.

New defensive networks, initially employing anti-aircraft artillery and later surface-to-air missiles, were developed and deployed by the US Army and the new US Air Force. The US Army's Nike missile system was utilized under the same tactical considerations as the big seacoast guns had been during the previous century—as a deterrent against an attack by another nation. Nike was deployed around key civilian, military, research, and government centers, such as Chicago. The Nike system succeeded in this role for over two decades of the Cold War and paved the way for our modern Patriot missiles and other anti-ballistic missile systems.

The Chicago-Gary area was one of the major defense areas in the Nike program. The “Windy City” constituted the single largest grouping of government, financial, business, industrial, and military activities in the upper Midwest. To guard this complex, ARADCOM (Army Air Defense Command) constructed twenty-two firing sites in upstate Illinois and Indiana, under the operational control of one brigade, three groups, and several battalions.

The command center, a part of the US Air Force CONAD and later NORAD commands, was located at Arlington Heights; the facility also provided command and control for other Nike batteries in Milwaukee to the north. Long-range radar detection and tracking data was provided by a co-located Air Force radar squadron and a ring of ARADCOM air defense radars. The SAGE command post was located at Truax Field, Madison, WI, and the Air Force also maintained interceptors at O'Hare International Airport.

This presentation will focus on the development of the Nike missile system, its deployment in the Chicago area in the 1950s and the developments leading to its demise in the 1970s.



*Mark A. Berhow is a research chemist with the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, currently in Peoria, Illinois. Mark's avid interest in military history has led him to research extensively on topics concerned with American seacoast artillery defenses, anti-aircraft defenses, and missile defenses. An active member of several historical organizations, including serving chairman of the board of directors and as publisher with the Coast Defense Study Group, Mark has authored several articles on American military defenses and more than 90 scientific articles and book chapters. He is the author of *American Seacoast Defenses, A Reference Guide*, *Rings of Supersonic Steel*, *Air Defenses of the United States 1950-1979* (with Mark Morgan), *Guardian at Angels Gate*, *Fort MacArthur Defender of Los Angeles*, *American Defenses of Corregidor and Manila Bay 1898-1945*, and *US Strategic and Defensive Missile Systems 1950-2004*.*