



2013-020

Gretchen Heefner, *The Missile Next Door: The Minuteman in the American Heartland*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012. Pp. 294. ISBN 978-0-674-05911-5.

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Few images of the Cold War have been as enduring as those of massive arrays of US and Soviet Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles, tipped with nuclear warheads, aimed each at the other's vital military and civilian infrastructures. Most discussion of these weapon systems has focused on the impact sites and the horrific destruction they could have unleashed. In *The Missile Next Door*,¹ Gretchen Heefner (Connecticut College) directs our attention to storage and launch sites and Americans' acceptance of these iconic images of destruction as quiet, even beneficial next-door neighbors. In doing so, she reveals the incipient militarism of post-World War II American society, even in locales as remote as the high plains of western South Dakota. Her well-researched study is a welcome addition to the growing scholarship on the Cold War and its social, political, and environmental consequences. It will interest scholars of the conflict, the American West and the Great Plains, and US society in general.

The book concentrates disproportionately on South Dakota and the missile fields surrounding Ellsworth Air Force Base (AFB), one of six operational Minuteman sites across the northern plains.² The narrative proceeds chronologically, beginning with detailed technical background on the development of the Minuteman itself as a response to the perceived "missile gap" vis-à-vis the Soviets; it describes the Air Force's efforts to win public support for a massive, costly construction and deployment program. Heefner examines the relationship between local communities and the elected political representatives who lobbied them to host the missile installations as well as the Air Force's site selection process in and around the northern plains. This section is illuminating, but would have benefitted from comparisons with the similar efforts during and after World War II that resulted in the building of military, especially Air Force, bases across the Great Plains. It traces the flawed land acquisition process and silo construction and the economic consequences for host communities and missile control and maintenance personnel.

Heefner then turns to opposition to the weapons both by a vocal minority of locals and, nationally, by members of the anti-nuclear movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Some farmers and ranchers resented the appropriation of their land and the transformation of their homes into ground-zero Cold War venues. But rural conservatism fostered a general acceptance of the often almost-invisible changes the weapons sites brought to the landscape, especially when accompanied by the improved, well-maintained roads and power lines that were essential to the missile fields. Heefner concludes with a description of the silos as scenes of protest and the eventual demobilization of three of the missile wings (Grand Forks, Ellsworth, and Whiteman) in the post-Cold War drawdowns.

The book's strengths include, first and foremost, its thus far neglected topic in itself, but also its analysis of the links between the weapon systems, the people of the rural west, and the rise of a national security state. It highlights Americans' tolerance of the many intrusions of the military-industrial complex upon their lives and their growing support for the global arms race, even in remote, previously isolationist regions of the country. Heefner notes the irony of the name "Minuteman" and the promotion of the rifle-carrying militiaman as a symbol of the weapons program (29). The original minuteman was a citizen-soldier who could quickly answer the nation's call in times of emergency and then return to his peacetime occupation. By contrast, the Minuteman missile was created and financed by an enormous, lavishly funded military infrastructure, staffed and maintained by a sizeable active-duty force; the missiles remained

1. Based on a doctoral dissertation (Yale 2009) supervised by John Lewis Gaddis, the doyen of American Cold War scholars.

2. The others are the Grand Forks and Minot Air AFBs in North Dakota; Malmstrom AFB near Great Falls, Montana; F.E. Warren AFB near Cheyenne, Wyoming; and Whiteman AFB near Knob Noster, Missouri.

perpetually “on duty” (36). Moreover, in the context of anticipated nuclear battlefields and the “pentomic” army³ of the late 1950s, such weapons systems as the minuteman made the rifle-toting infantryman appear obsolete, at least under President Dwight Eisenhower’s “New Look” deterrence-based defense strategy (38).

While other historians and sociologists have traced the Cold War-era, defense-driven development of an American “gunbelt,” Heefner stresses that the effect was not confined to large cities like Dallas, Los Angeles, and Seattle but also penetrated such places as Wall, South Dakota, and Butler, Missouri.⁴ This emphasis on changes in the panoramic grasslands of the plains states neatly positions the Cold War-era defense buildup within the history of the American West more generally (65).

The Missile Next Door would have gained by a comparison of the Minuteman sites to other weapons systems deployed in the Great Plains. The Air Force placed three of the eight Titan missile sites and eight of the eleven Atlas missile sites as well as many nuclear-capable bombers in and near the plains. Inclusion of these would have lent greater force to Heefner’s analysis of the “garrison-state” mentality prevalent in many western communities. While the missiles sat quiet in their silos, bombers and fighter interceptors streaking overhead were more conspicuous reminders of the region’s front-line position in the Cold War.

Such a fuller consideration of weapons systems could also have led on nicely to an expanded assessment of the environmental effects of the garrisoning of the plains, which Heefner accords only cursory attention. She does explain how Air Force-applied herbicides leached from missile sites into surrounding fields and pastures and how carcinogens deep within the silos and launch control facilities complicated deactivation procedures. But she does not adequately discuss the environmental impact of, for example, the degreasing facility at the Schilling AFB on the water supply at the nearby community of Salina, Kansas. Former Defense Department facilities across the plains, including the Pantex plant near Amarillo, Texas, where nuclear weapons were assembled and deactivated (175), are now EPA-designated Superfund sites, having caused far more environmental damage than the silo sites themselves.⁵

Heefner’s argument that consideration of the missile sites and the populations near them “demonstrates how Americans have contested and shaped the national security state in both practical and ideological terms” and that “local response to the national security state matters” (8) is not strongly supported by the evidence. Certainly there were local successes: Air Force officials removed Pease AFB in New Hampshire from basing consideration after opposition emerged across New England, and Leonel Jensen got a planned silo location changed from a productive field to some “relatively useless prairie land” a mile away (95). But, in fact, the Air Force generally went where it wanted and stayed as long as it liked. As Heefner herself observes, Vernon Taylor “ultimately lost” a property-rights case in Montana (61), and, despite grassroots organizational efforts, “there was simply nothing [affected landowners] could do to effectively challenge the national security state” (108). Even protest groups like Montana’s Silence One Silo made no headway—“the money couldn’t be raised and the missiles wouldn’t budge” (162). In short, the many and varied local and national adversaries of missiles in the heartland were rarely successful.

Heefner’s well-written⁶ study cogently establishes that the Minuteman’s widespread deployment helped Americans “embrace the arms race as a legitimate means of waging war.... [T]racing the Minuteman system provides a distinctive lens on the creation and maintenance of what President Eisenhower would

3. “Pentomic Division [was] a public relations term designed to combine the concept of five subordinate units (‘penta’) with the idea of a division that could function on an atomic or nonatomic battlefield”—see Jonathan M. House, *Combined Arms Warfare in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2001) 208–11; also Ingo Trauschweizer, *The Cold War U.S. Army: Building Deterrence for Limited War* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2008).

4. See, e.g., Richard White, *It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own* (Norman: U Oklahoma Pr, 1991), Ann Markusen et al., *The Rise of the Gun Belt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1991), and Kevin J. Fernlund, ed., *The Cold War American West, 1945–1989* (Albuquerque: U New Mexico Pr, 1998).

5. See J.R. McNeill and Corinna R. Unger, eds., *Environmental Histories of the Cold War* (NY: Cambridge, 2010); since Heefner (or her publisher) does not include a bibliography, it is not easy to tell if she consulted this work.

6. Apart from an overuse of the passive voice, the writing style is fluid and readable, featuring frequent pop culture allusions (e.g., to *Dr. Strangelove* five times) and deft turns of phrase: e.g., speaking of Missouri Senator Stuart Symington’s fleeting presidential candidacy, she observes that “The year 1959 was a good one for dark prophecies, if not dark horses” (63).

call the military-industrial complex” (9). Her acute critiques of militarism and nuclear brinksmanship—briefly undermined by her concession that “to be sure, the nation’s nuclear arsenal worked in that nuclear war was avoided” (13)—usefully remind us that the roots of America’s current fiscal crisis reach far back into the Cold War period. The predicament of opponents of the massive defense infrastructure implanted into the northern plains is well put by South Dakota rancher Marvin Kammerer, who lamented that the Pentagon had become “a giant welfare program” (197) for both local communities addicted to defense dollars and the military contractors who devised and deployed nuclear weapons like the Minuteman across the nation’s heartland.