ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

WILLIAM BIELMAIER

AUGUST 22, 2005

WALL, SOUTH DAKOTA

INTERVIEWED BY ROBERT HILDEBRAND

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MINUTEMAN MISSILE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

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ABSTRACT

William Bielmaier is a local landowner and rancher that was born in Wall, SD on May 11, 1931 and eventually operating the family ranch. Mr. Bielmaier purchased the property where B-07 was placed during the land acquisition period during the 1960s. Mr. Bielmaier recounts his thoughts and experiences with the U. S. Air Force during the time period that these missile silos were active and his feelings about the closing of the missile sites in South Dakota.

EDITORIAL NOTICE

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INFORMANT: WILLIAM BIELMAIER
INTERVIEWER: ROBERT HILDERBRAND, PhD
DATE: AUGUST 22, 2005

SUBJECTS SPOKEN ABOUT IN INTERVIEW:
Robert Hilderbrand, William Bielmaier, Wall Community Center, Wall, South Dakota, Marine Corps, Marjorie Fritz, Veteran, Military, Commander, Post, American Legion, State, Local, Missile Sites, Interstate 90, B-7 Missile Site, Tony Oegerli, Switzerland, United States, Missile Site Property, Testing the Cover on the Missile Site, Security Patrol, Ellsworth, Air Force Base, MI Carbines, Control Headquarters, Missile Silo, Cold War, Soviet, Russia, Nuclear, War, ABC Television, The Day After, Japan, Pearl Harbor, B-52, Weapons, Radiation, Camp Pendleton, Cancer, Protests, Minute Man Missile Land Owner Association, Cheyenne River, Civil Defense, Bob Marsden, B7 Silo, Shelter, Berlin Wall, Cold War, Communism, Freedom, Richard Nixon, Native Americans

THE INTERVIEW:

[Beginning of side one, tape one]
[Interview begins]

ROBERT HILDERBRAND: Mr. Bielmaier would you please state your full name.

WILLIAM BIELMAIER: William Bielmaier.

HILDERBRAND: Your date and place of birth.

BIELMAIER: I was born in the Wall community and my birthday is 1931, May 11th. I lived in South Dakota all my life outside serving during the Korean War in the Marine Corps. I came back to South Dakota and operated my parent's ranch, my father was not in good health at that point and he never really recovered his health or got back to ranching life and died at sixty-eight years of age. I have always said that he died of physical exhaustion, simply worked himself to death. So, as the years went along, I married in 1956 and I married Marjorie Fritz from the eastern part of South Dakota. She came here as a Home Economics teacher after graduating from South Dakota State. We had three boys and three girls, six children and they are all grown and married now and have their own families. Marjorie had a heart attack in 1987 and passed away the next day, so it was a terrible time for the family and it's been a loss ever since.

HILDERBRAND: I'm sure Are you, are you a military veteran?

BIELMAIER: Uh-huh I'm commander of the post here...

HILDERBRAND: [Speaks over previous speaker.] Of course you're in the American Legion.

BIELMAIER: I've done all of the offices in the state and local. I would've ran for state commander, but that was the year Marjorie passed away and I actually just stepped away from the American Legion for a good ten years, didn't go to meetings or anything else because it was a, a whole different world I lived in then. But, I've now gone back and I might run for the state and local this fall.

HILDERBRAND: Did you tell me about the location of your property and how it relates to the missile sites.

BIELMAIER: Our ranch headquarters is two miles west of Wall on Interstate 90 at the 107 exit. We run cattle in the Cheyenne River breaks to the west of where our headquarters are and we farm the leveler land north and east and south of the headquarters. Our ranch involves other building sites that I have been able to purchase over the years and add to the original property that I bought from my parents that was thirty-one hundred acres and then as the years went along, I was fortunate enough to buy neighboring property and as the boys grew up we built a new house on one of them and that's where my son Kevin lives, with his wife and three children. And that is where the missile site is; the B-7 missile site is just across the road from their set of buildings. At the time the missile site was built I had a hired man living there in that house, that house was pretty old and we destroyed it and ended up building a new house.

HILDERBRAND: About how far is that house from the actual B-7 site?

BIELMAIER: It's just across the road and then the B-7 is down the road less than a quarter of a mile and maybe a lot less than a quarter of a mile. It's almost across the road.

HILDERBRAND: Is the site; is the site clearly visible from the house?

BIELMAIER: Yes.

HILDERBRAND: When you built the house did you think at all about views, or did that affect your building the house in any way?

BIELMAIER: The house was fairly new, we knew that the missile was gonna go, so that wasn't a concern. The concern we had originally was when they dug the hole they hit a vein of water that was pretty strong and they had to go back in to Ellsworth and had to get a stronger pump and pump the water they pumped it all night long the first day. It ran all the way down and into a scoop out. There was that much water and they really had to lower the water level. We had fairly good water at this location and I don't know if it's fair to say we haven't had good water since, but that might not be fair to say. Water wasn't perfect before, it was a little bit strong. But there is a feeling that it might of affected our water there and as we went along we stopped using that water when the rural water system came through about five years ago we were very glad to

hook up to the rural water. That is good water and we had two wells there and we totally abandoned both of those in favor of using rural water.

HILDERBRAND: You mentioned that you knew that the missiles were going to be taken out when you built the house. Would that have affected your decision to build the house?

BIELMAIER: Well probably not and the reason would be that, I had developed this place over the years, I had sheep back years ago in the '60s. When I first bought it, I got sheep with it. And I'd built a sheep shed there that was very, very usable. It was a hundred feet long and I had put water hydrants inside the sheep shed and a little storage oat bin and a spot where I could put baled hay. That took care of me for lambing time which was in February. In case of a storm I could be in the shed lambing and weather wasn't gonna hurt me. So then we had a good water system piped around the place. We had buried all the electric cables coming in, which I did on all the places for safety reasons and that was at a fair cost. So we had a lot of investment in the places. There was some very good old buildings there and very usable and the value of that was enough so that you really wanted to redo a house right there in that location.

HILDERBRAND: You where there on that property when they built the missiles, how did you feel about that?

BIELMAIER: Actually I bought that property from Tony Oegerli, who was a man who came to the United States from Switzerland, when he was nineteen years old. He had according to what I understand, just finished his one year military obligation in Switzerland.

HILDERBRAND: Uh-huh.

BIELMAIER: And he came to the United States alone and couldn't even speak the language and he worked as a butcher and worked in the forest cutting trees. Then he got to working in a dairy and that became the thing that he was interested in the most. I don't know how he came to buy this land, how he came to this area to buy land because he had been in the state of Washington and he had been in Iowa. But after he got to own this property, he got pure bred brown Swiss cattle. They were his pride and of course they caught the eye of all the neighbors and he milked those cows and he sold the milk around locally, he would grow the calves out and he butchered them and sold the meat locally.

HILDERBRAND: That's interesting.

BIELMAIER: But I bought the place from him and he was in the process then of negotiating for the missile site property that the government was buying. I said to Tony, don't negotiate with them, let me deal with it because I'm the guy

that's going to have to be living there afterwards and I need to know and understand a little bit more about their process. He did not turn over any papers to me, which I have regretted ever since because I think if I'd asked him to he would've. The reason he didn't want to turn that over was because he was being paid nine hundred dollars for the location and he wanted that money in his pocket and I understood that at the time. I think I'm correct in saying nine hundred dollars. That bought the missile site which is nine-tenths of an acre, but it also controlled the land around it to about twelve acres worth thereabouts, not exactly sure. And you couldn't do anything you want within that area. You could farm the ground, but you couldn't dig so that was the start of the, of the B-7 missile site.

HILDERBRAND: Did knowing that was going to be there have any affect on your willingness to buy the property?

BIELMAIER: Well, no it didn't because quite frankly, what did a missile site mean to I or to anybody else in 1964 when they were out trying to acquire locations? We didn't have a clear understanding of what it was and what it was going to be. And, so what did we have to fear at that point?

HILDERBRAND: When that, when you did acquire more understanding, did that change the way you felt about having a site on your property?

BIELMAIER: I think I reached a point where I understood pretty clearly what we had in our back yard. And I think one of the fears was if they ever had to fire a missile, we felt like we could very likely be incinerated they could've possibly burned all the buildings down, that was one of the thoughts. And there was a time when they were testing the cover on the missile site with explosives. There was a way, a process was to open the door, with explosive charges. And that attracted a lot of attention there was neighbors and individuals who would drive out because this was announced.

HILDERBRAND: They did that at the B-7?

BIELMAIER: Yes, so they'd drive out. They couldn't go in by the property, they'd park along the road and watch and when it blew, it was quite an explosion and this big heavy concrete and steel door had to be slid back at a point and it went back with a real thump.

HILDERBRAND: So, it didn't blow it away?

BIELMAIER: No, it blew it open only and it was able to be closed again.

HILDERBRAND: I see. Did that worry you?

BIELMAIER: Well, all that really did just get the door open, and of course that wasn't a concern because there was still part of the process to fire the missile that never came about.

HILDERBRAND: Do you think that having a missile on your property had an affect on you and your day to day thoughts? Did you find yourself imagining what would happen if the missiles went off or is there something you thought about, how often did you think about it?

BIELMAIER: Well, it certainly attracted our attention for all kinds of reasons. For example, the young guys that were there to guard the missile site, they had to walk the guard post within the boundaries of the missile site. And they carried rifles and live ammunition. But, for the most part they were young kids that were pretty new in the military and they were from main street USA, everywhere and very unaware of agriculture, what might be going on around them. They weren't good at shutting the gate and I had sheep and cattle both in that pasture and my hired man was laughing one morning, he said, 'you can't believe what I saw." He said they left the gate open over there during the night. When the sun come up this morning the sheep were out along the road grazing and he said here come this black guy. When he discovered the problem, he was going to go out there on foot and bring the sheep in. And he was running down the road as fast as he could. The faster he went the faster the sheep went in the wrong direction of course. So, he said I had to drive out there and get around the sheep and bring them in and just sit still. And another time these young kids they weren't very experienced drivers either and they were driving these security patrol vehicles, these blue pickups that came out of Ellsworth every day and every night. They changed the guard and so forth. A lot of those were the four door pickups, when they first started making them. These young guys came down the road and they were going too fast and they exited at 107 exit headed east and because of their speed they couldn't control their vehicle it went into a skid and it tipped over right in the middle of the exit road, laying right on the road. Can't remember who got there first, but one of the neighbors got there and he said that was one of the funniest thing. He said, here these two guys were crawling out of the pickup and one of them was saying to the other one, "now you were the driver, you were the driver and the other one was saying no, you were." And they argued about who was driving, so it boiled down to the fact that the kid who was driving, wasn't suppose to be, he didn't even have a drivers license from the military and so he knew he was going to get into trouble for that so he wanted the other guy to take the responsibility for it. Well, I don't know how that turned out. But, it was interesting and they had to bring a wrecker truck to take that vehicle back.

HILDERBRAND: Were those guards there all the time?

BIELMAIER: Day and night.

HILDERBRAND: Yeah, and for the entire time until the missiles were deactivated?

BIELMAIER: That's exactly right.

HILDERBRAND: And, and I take it kind of bothered you to have these people on your property all the time?

BIELMAIER: No, let me tell you what bothered me about it. Most of those kids where good kids, you could talk to them, which we didn't do very much else. I'll tell you what bothers me, on a Thanksgiving day we had relatives at our place and my home is South of the missile site about a half of mile, and we were out of doors, because it was a very nice day and I could hear bullets whistling over the top of my buildings. And, I said, "that was a bullet that went over," pretty soon hear was another one, and there was several of them. Well, I have been in the service, I know what a bullet sound like and that's bullets, where are they coming from. It turned out that the guards out there were totally bored, and so they were doing a little target practice and they were firing, they had M1 carbines, they were firing their, their weapons and that wasn't the only time that that happened. There were other times I could hear shots over there and come to find out about it, if there was a pheasant or a rabbit was out there, they would shoot at it. And I don't know whether they ever picked them up or took them back or what they did with them. And so I reported that. And I said this has got to stop and I figured that it is happening at other locations too. And so the officers at Ellsworth got a hold of it and so, when they issued the guard their rifles and ammunition, they would count the ammunition out and count it back in and if they were short, then the guards had to account for it, which was the right thing to do. That happened another time after they'd put the control on. And the guy that did it, who I don't know who he was. There was a car that came down the road and I think maybe it was an Ellsworth blue pickup and he'd been firing at what, I don't know, but he threw that M1 carbine into a rose bush and I think he was picked up and relieved of his post in a regular fashion. And he never did get back to retrieve that carbine. I hired a young guy one spring to help rebuild fence and we were building fence down through there and here that rifle was in there and the hired help picked that rifle up and said "look what I found." And I said, "gosh that's an M1 carbine." And he said "whose is it, is it yours or mine, I want it, can I have it?" I said, "well hey you found it, I guess it's yours, unless you want to," I said "I got a hunch where that came from." I said "I think that a guard here at the missile site threw that in there when he was afraid he was going to get caught." He may not have had the rifle checked out at Ellsworth, you know, there may not have been a record of it, I don't know.

HILDERBRAND: Did your feeling about the low of confidence of the people at the site make you worry about an accidental launch?

BIELMAIER: Not really, because I had the opportunity to tour the missile site. I went to the control headquarters up along the Dart property, and was able to go down in there. There was a time when they invited the land owners to come in and look. That was very helpful, because I had a clearer understanding you don't just take some high school kid out there, and when they launch one he can't do it. I found out that you had to go through a process and switches had to be flipped and then switches down in Omaha or someplace else had to, the actual launch was done at some faraway place. It wasn't something that could happen by mistake it didn't appear.

HILDERBRAND: Did the presence of that missile silo on your property make you feel more or less secure as an American living in the cold war with the threat of Soviet missiles.

BIELMAIER: Well, I think that it was more of a concern to us, because if we were headed for nuclear conflict and of course Russia was our concern at the time, they were in an arms race. If Russia decided to do some kind of an attack, first thing they would want to do was to disarm us and the first target would be missile sites that could be launch towards them. So I think we were in the area of prime targets all around us at all of these sites and if there was going to be a conflict I think we were, in the very likely spot to be hit first.

HILDERBRAND: Were there times when you were aware of the heightened international tensions and you were more worried about that then others?

BIELMAIER: Yeah, there was you know, I have a brother-in-law who has a doctorate degree in electrical engineering. Years ago he went to Bozeman University and set up their research department and headed it for all his years until he retired. We used to visit about missile likeliness of a strike of some kind. He said, "can you believe that one of the projects that the government has handed me to develop is a system to intercept missiles coming in." And he said we're going to do it, we can do it. It's going to take a little time, but he said our government evidently believes strong enough that we could be facing a missile attack and we're desperate to produce a defense system of some kind. The idea is that we would detect these missiles coming in before they get here and be able to explode them in the air. So that was interesting to know, but we talked about that possibility off and on, we talked about it with him and he was so knowledgeable and so interesting. He later retired and went to work for the government after retirement for a year or two; he developed some kind of a project that was pretty high secret.

HILDERBRAND: Were you aware of movies or novels or anything about missiles and nuclear war that you see or read those things….

BIELMAIER: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] I can tell you that starting when I was in the service out there I use to go to the John Wayne movies, and they were so

unauthentic, they were so wrong, very few of them had actual fact stories in them. I reached a point were I wouldn't go to them anymore and when they came on TV, I'd turn it off, because it wasn't true to fact. It didn't go along with the military training that I experienced. One of the things that those movies did is use foul language. I mean they identified these young soldiers in combat swearing and using vulgar language. That isn't what happened in the military you would never encourage to embarrass other people or embarrass yourself with lousy language and another thing one of the biggest opportunities you had in the military was to attend church services on Sunday. If you were, for example, if someone in the brig, that's the only reason he could get out of the brig all week long was to go to Sunday services. And the ideals that the military put out in there is part of a military code of justice back in the early '50s, it was how to conduct yourself socially and, and all kinds of ways. And I still respect that and I never agreed that the young soldier that comes home full of liquor and says the military did this to me, no they didn't, he did it to himself.

HILDERBRAND: Did you ever see the films about the consequences of the nuclear war; this is what we're trying to get at, things like the movie on ABC television in 1983, "The Day After", which went in some, very deep detail about what would happen to people in the war?

BIELMAIER: Well, I didn't see that in particular, but you know, the strike in homeland Japan after Pearl Harbor showed great devastation.

HILDERBRAND: The first bombing of Japan, not the…

BIELMAIER: Yeah

HILDERBRAND: …nuclear weapons?

BIELMAIER: Well, the nuclear weapons, but the bombing of Japan, that was shown on film and I don't know how authentic that was because they have to restage all that stuff. But, that was a scary thing, but of course the nuclear drop, it devastated so much territory there I don't even know the numbers any more, killed so many people. I think the feeling that I have, back when we thought we might be vulnerable was if it happens, that's the end, at least for those that live around here. It's no use worrying about it or thinking about it, because it will be a flash and that's the end. But, you know, you did think about it.

HILDERBRAND: Yeah, did you ever worry about accidental radiation leaks from the nuclear weapons that were in these missiles?

BIELMAIER: Well, that's an interesting question. No, I don't think we worried about that very much, but, if we talked about radiation, when I was stationed at Camp Pendleton, my unit was scheduled to go to the desert for the nuclear test in the desert, I can't remember the name of it though.

HILDERBRAND: What year was that?

BIELMAIER: Oh, about 1951 probably. And, I ended up not going. The rest of my outfit went, but I got transferred down to the dispersing office at that time and I was working with the battalion pay account. So I didn't go out to that nuclear test, but you know, those that did, a lot of them had bad radiation effects from it. So, I knew enough about what happened to some of those, and of course, a lot of that didn't come about for quite a few years with cancer and other things. And so I often thought about, well, I maybe lucked out not being a part of the unit at that time. So, I did understand what the radiation effects could be. Yeah, it was a concern.

HILDERBRAND: Did you worry about radiation and cancer, just on a daily basis from being around the missile sites? Not some big leak, but just over the long haul?

BIELMAIER: I don't think so, but you know, we talk about cancer, this area has an extreme amount of cancer, maybe more than the average, other places, I'm not sure that's right. And, I had a lady tell me just recently that our cancer in this area is more so than other places, theoretically, is because of nuclear tests, there was certain winds that brought those air particles, or whatever, they were nuclear stuff and scattered them in this area. Well, I don't know how true that is, but if you think about it and realize all the chance that there is, maybe there's something to it.

HILDERBRAND: Were you ever aware of protests about the missiles in the area?

BIELMAIER: Well, there were protests, but our area didn't really get affected by that partly because our numbers here were pretty small but there was in other places. I took it and left it alone on the basis of I think my military background told me we got to defend this country at any cost and so whatever it is, its decided to go forward with it and won't stand in the way.

HILDERBRAND: You, you didn't react to them in any way, you weren't angry about them or..

BIELMAIER: Oh, I don't remember, there was, it was one of those things that went on. It wasn't a matter of developing an angry attitude.

HILDERBRAND: Were you aware of the existence, of the, of the Minuteman Missile Area Land Owner Association?

BIELMAIER: Yes.

HILDERBRAND: How did you react to that? What did you feel about that?

BIELMAIER: Well, I think that the Missile Area Land Owners Association is misconstrued. A lot of what they were all about was getting a fair price for their land, being protected on the problems that developed and having some say in, discussions that would compensate them in the event of problems, and they weren't very successful at it. One of the things that, well a lot of the things that happened. I'll give you a couple of them. Was an open ditch that was burying the cables that crisscrossed this area, tying all these units together. I had a neighbor that had a cow fall into one of those and, I think they got the cow out alive but in very bad shape and not sure whether she died or that they kept her alive, but it was a loss there. Another example, where we graze our cattle in the Cheyenne River Breaks to the west of us there were quite a lot of, of cables going through those breaks and when they did, they opened the ditch and laid the cable and then they bladed it back shut again. And that left an exposed area that did not get reseeded to grasses. We had just built a new stock water dam down in those breaks and it was one of the better locations that we had and we had spring rains that washed great big ditches back into where they had dug. It washed the ditches so bad that they had to come back out with equipment and cover them back up. In doing so they bladed more dirt in, a wider area and then it increased the erosion. That dam absolutely filled with silt and it ended up with a capacity of only three or four feet. I assume that June and July, the hot part of the summer came along, it would be dry. I always felt like we lost the value of that dam just simply due to erosion, it had developed because of the those…

HILDERBRAND: Did you get rid of those cases, was there compensation?

BIELMAIER: No,

HILDERBRAND: Did you ask for compensation?

BIELMAIER: No, on the cow thing this neighbor got something on that cow. I don't remember how satisfied he was, but this dam thing and I brought it to the attention of somebody back then, and they said well, that's pretty hard to determine, you know, maybe it is. But there we are with a new dam that probably had a depth of twelve to fourteen feet and ended up with about a four foot water capacity, you know.

HILDERBRAND: Could they have prevented that by seeding?

BIELMAIER: Oh, they could have, the timing wasn't going to be good you would hope if you seeded it, you would get some growth before you got one of those heavy washing rains, other then that would have been the only thing. Those shale banks wash easily anyway.

HILDERBRAND: Were you involved in the land owners association at all?

BIELMAIER: I went to some of the meetings.

HILDERBRAND: But then did anything useful come from it? I mean did you feel that your property or your rights were better protected because of the land owners association?

BIELMAIER: I really didn't think so. I felt like the government had an agenda and that was priority and what the land owners were saying they would listen and if it was convenient they might have a good response otherwise it was _____.

HILDERBRAND: Do ever remember having conversations with any of your six children about those, about the missile or what it meant?

BIELMAIER: Oh, we use to talk about it off and on. But, you know they grew up with it there and it was all common place with us. It wasn't anything we worried about on a daily basis.

HILDERBRAND: Did you have a feeling that they knew what these missiles were and you know how powerful they were?

BIELMAIER: I think so, especially after they got old enough to realize.

HILDERBRAND: But none of them expressed a particular fear or concern?

BIELMAIER: Not necessarily.

HILDERBRAND: Did you have any special civil defense kind of measures that you had as a family to protect yourself in case there was a nuclear war?

BIELMAIER: Well, that's something we thought about a lot, in fact the city of Wall at one point there was a group that proposed going out-of-town where the Wall of the Badlands drops off and bulldozing a big trench and covering that over and filling it with several feet of dirt on top as a, as a nuclear shelter. So, that was proposed in several meetings, in fact Bob Marsden who was one of our good legion veterans, dead and gone now, was sort of the head of that and he really believed in it and he thought we had to do it. It never came about and I think everybody thought it was a good idea, but the cost of it was going to come out of the community pockets and I think that's what slowed down.

HILDERBRAND: People would have to been more afraid of what was really happening I suppose to make it worth spend money on.

BIELMAIER: Yeah, that's probably right.

HILDERBRAND: Did, did you ever think about what you would do next, if you were, you know, say driving toward home and you saw one of these missiles take off. Did

that thought ever cross you mind, what would I do if I saw a missile being launched?

BIELMAIER: Well, I don't, there certainly wasn't any plan because we couldn't plan for something that was basically unknown. Actually, if a missile would have left this B-7 silo, I think would have lit up the country side, it would have burned these buildings down and, would have done enough fire ball damage. At least that's my understanding of those missiles. The whole thing would have been extreme.

HILDERBRAND: Did you ever think about building a shelter for yourself and your family?

BIELMAIER: Well, we gave that a thought, but I tell you we were so concerned about money and so far in debt, that we, and times weren't good and there was no extra money to do anything like that. I did have a neighbor that did get a concrete underground shelter and stocked it with food and water and had it all prepared and...

HILDERBRAND: Did you think that was a good idea, if you would have extra cash setting around.

BIELMAIER: I thought it was a great idea, then partly he had indicated that the good thinking of this individual and he was concerned enough to do something like that and yeah, I thought it was a good idea.

HILDERBRAND: How did you feel when the cold war came to an end and there was all this stuff on television on the Berlin Wall, was there a sense of relief?

BIELMAIER: Well, of course, the Berlin Wall was a terrible thing it set there with many people killed trying to go from communism to freedom and from freedom to visit friends on the communist side and all that and the crumbling of the Berlin Wall we can look up to Ronald Regan pretty well for our thanks and I don't know if he was directly responsible, but his trip to Berlin and telling, who was it Gorbachev, telling him to tear down his wall, that's a famous quote that will go down in history. You'll always hear about it.

HILDERBRAND: Did you feel that this was going to have some affect on the missile silos and did you feel that now its not so likely that we're going to be incinerated, any of that?

BIELMAIER: Well, I don't think tearing down the wall necessarily changed from the idea of a nuclear attack. I think we still were vulnerable to that.

HILDERBRAND: Well so, shortly after that, I mean the cold war pretty much came to an end. I guess I'm just trying to get at, did things seem to change in some way for you when there was no longer a threat from the Soviet Union?

BIELMAIER: Well, when the Soviet Union, when communism crumbled and the Soviet Union knew that it had failed. I think that was the turning point of our fears of a nuclear war, at least with Russia. And yeah, I think there was a relievement, our attitude was different and I just never followed that and believed that the nuclear war was probably not going to happen, at least not at this time.

HILDERBRAND: How has the fact that the missiles aren't here anymore changed things for you?

BIELMAIER: Every time I look at that location and see that security fence still in place and see that five or six foot of gravel still in place. I realize that the silo itself is filled steel and concrete that was imploded and dropped down the hole. I've got different feelings. One of them is that over time, remembering how the water flowed out of that hole and it was pumped out when they built it. What is the deterioration of all this material in that hole going to cause to the water, underground water system which we still use a great amount of at our headquarters ranch. And the other thing that bothers me a lot is that when the government came in to take this land for missiles, one of the quotes was "when we are done using this land we will return it to the prairie." I think that is a quote, that can be backed up, I can't back it up with anything. And, of course they did not return it to the prairie. We've got these spots out there wherever they were as a constant reminder, a constant scar on our landscape. The kind of money that the government spent to put them there and maintain them. They ought to go another step and remove them and return it back to farming or grazing land. I think they have that obligation and I think, I have hostile feeling because of that and I would really like to see it still come about. I think the government should come out and remove all that material.

HILDERBRAND: So, why is the fence still there and the gravel still there?

BIELMAIER: Somebody within the system determined that that is the extent that they're going to remove and therefore the fence stayed and, it isn't a matter of going out there and taking the fence down, it's I think it's eight feet of fence and, and it's built in such a fashion that you can't crawl the fence. The thing that a lot of people don't know is that it's six feet in the ground also. They did a backhoe trench and placed it down in there and put gravel and soil around it. So it wasn't a matter of just taking the fence out. If you were trying to farm through that area and taking the fence out you would have that concern.

HILDERBRAND: You could take it out at your own expense?

BIELMAIER: You could take it out at your own expense, but when you're trying to reclaim nine-tenths of an acre you could spend more money then you could ever, the only satisfaction that you would have, is that the visible part would be gone if you were able to do that.

HILDERBRAND: Do you ever have another feeling when you look at that there and the sense that this helps us remember that we won the cold war, that we played a part in this?

BIELMAIER: I think my feeling is that was this really necessary to maintain our defense position at a time when the cold war was on and we're very concerned about the aggression on the part of Russia. If it was, then we all better be glad we had it, and in spite of the fact that I happened to be one along the with a lot of my neighbors, victims, if I can use that word, of the location.

HILDERBRAND: Did you ever hear anything about the way the Native Americans feel about the missile sites?

BIELMAIER: Probably not very much, I know that Native Americans tried to hang on to mother earth without disturbing it and I know that they do not want railroads for example across their reservations any more than, uh, absolutely necessary. They resist extreme things like this as a basis of their, could we say religion. They have a belief of not to disturb mother earth.

HILDERBRAND: If, to preserve Ellsworth Air Force base, missiles or something like them had to come back and be replaced on land in this area, would you be willing to do that?

BIELMAIER: You know, that's goes back to what I said earlier about, if this is what it takes to defend our country and our people and supposedly head off a major conflict, I think we have to, from a patriotic stand point we have to be available to that kind of thing.

HILDERBRAND: Do you have anything else that I didn't cover that you would like to add?

BIELMAIER: Oh, I don't know, wait I might have something I might have to.

[Pause]
[Tape begins again]

HILDERBRAND: This is Bob Hilderbrand, I've been interviewing William Bielmaier

[End of tape]