



# Oral History Interview

With

**Rick Hustead**

August 22, 2005  
Wall, South Dakota

Interviewed by Steven Bucklin

National Park Service  
Minuteman Missile National Historic Site  
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## ABSTRACT

Born in Sioux City, Iowa May 17, 1950, Rick Husted moved to Wall, South Dakota in 1951. He has lived nearly all of his life in the small town of Wall. He is the grandson of Ted and Dorothy Husted, founders of the world famous Wall Drug. Rick, along with other family members, is a co-owner of the drug store. At the time of this interview, Rick was the chairman of the company and also managed the restaurant part of Wall Drug. During Rick's lifetime he saw the construction, operation and deactivation of the Minuteman Missile field in the area.

## EDITORIAL NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for Minuteman Missile National Historic Site. After a draft of this transcript was made, the park provided a copy to the interviewee and requested that he or she return the transcript with any corrections or modifications that he or she wished to be included in the final transcript. The interviewer, or in some cases another qualified staff-member, also reviewed the draft and compared it to the tape recordings. The corrections and other changes suggested by the interviewee and interviewer have been incorporated into this final transcript. The transcript follows as closely as possible the recorded interview, including the usual starts, stops, and other rough spots in typical conversation. The reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. Stylistic matters, such as punctuation and capitalization, follow the Chicago Manual of Style, 14<sup>th</sup> edition. The transcript includes bracketed notices at the end of one tape and the beginning of the next so that, if desired, the reader can find a section of tape more easily by using this transcript.

## RESTRICTION

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INFORMANT: RICK HUSTEAD  
INTERVIEWER: STEVEN BUCKLIN, PHD  
DATE: AUGUST 22, 2005

SUBJECTS SPOKEN ABOUT IN INTERVIEW:

Wall Community Center, Wall, South Dakota, Veterans, Missile Sites, Air Force, Construction of Missiles, Cold War Period, American Foreign Policy, Bomb or Fallout Shelter, Ted Hustead, Wall Drug Store, Nuclear Weapons, Western South Dakota, Ellsworth Air Force Base, Soviet Technology, B-Fifty Two Bombers, Missile Silos, Launch Control Facilities, Jensen Ranch, Minuteman Area Land Owners Association, Uranium, Plutonium, Missile Crews, Compensation for Land, Deactivation, Decommission of Missiles, Relationship between Community and Government, Civil Defense Measures (Defense Drills), October Missile Crisis in Cuba and the Soviet Union, Racial Issues, Berlin Wall, Defense in America, Brack Investigation, Minuteman Two's and Three's, Strategic Defense Initiative, ABM System

THE INTERVIEW:

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

STEVEN BUCKLIN: I'm conducting an interview with Rick Hustead in the Wall Community Center. The date is 22 August 2005, we're in Wall South Dakota. Rick would you state for the record your full name?

RICK HUSTEAD: My name is Rick Hustead, my legal name Richard Joseph Hustead.

BUCKLIN: Great, thanks, and at this point I'm going to stop and do an equipment check and make sure we're recording... [Recording ends.] [Recording begins.] Fine, both being recorded. Rick can you tell us your date and place of birth?

HUSTEAD: I was born in Sioux City, Iowa on May 17, 1950.

BUCKLIN: And when did you come to South Dakota?

HUSTEAD: In 1951.

BUCKLIN: So pretty much a life long residence of South Dakota?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Okay, no intervening time that you lived outside of the state after '51?

HUSTEAD: No, just that I did go to college a couple years in Montana.

BUCKLIN: And your educational background? You graduated from college?

HUSTEAD: South Dakota State with a Bachelors Degree in Psychology and then I got a Masters in Education from South Dakota State in Guidance Counseling.

BUCKLIN: Wonderful. Are you a veteran?

HUSTEAD: No.

BUCKLIN: Okay, any of your relative's veterans who served on the missile sites or with the Air Force?

HUSTEAD: No.

BUCKLIN: Alright. Any of your family or were they directly associated with construction of the missile sites?

HUSTEAD: No.

BUCKLIN: Okay, great. So you came in 1951 to Wall, South Dakota?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Go to elementary school here?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: And high school here.

HUSTEAD: No, I went to high school out of state at a Catholic Boys Boarding School, Campion Jesuit High School, in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin...

BUCKLIN: Okay, well I want to ask you just a little bit about high school then. Given your age, you were growing up and for the height of the Cold War period. Were you aware of the Cold War in high school? Did your instructors talk to you about the Cold War and about American Foreign Policy?

HUSTEAD: Yes, I was definitely aware. We had a bomb shelter fall out shelter in the drug store.

BUCKLIN: Here in Wall?

HUSTEAD: Yes, and my grandpa built it.

BUCKLIN: Okay, and that grandpa is?

HUSTEAD: Ted Husted.

BUCKLIN: Ted Hustead, so you have a fall out shelter?

HUSTEAD: In the drug store.

BUCKLIN: And it would hold how many people?

HUSTEAD: You know, ten. I mean with supplies and a ventilation system you crank by hand and...Yeah, I was very aware of the Cold War.

BUCKLIN: Okay, can you tell me a little bit more about the shelter or the supplies that were stocked there?

HUSTEAD: Well there was a locked cabinet and then there was food, water, medicine, flashlights, batteries, things that you probably would need in the event of a nuclear attack.

BUCKLIN: Um-hm, um-hm. And did grandfather and your father talk to you about this possibility or?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Okay, and showed you the bomb shelter, you knew how to use it and what was down there?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Alright, and the whole family was aware of that then?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: And is it still available in the...

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] Well, I'm sure it's like a lot of shelters like that. We no longer stock it, there's no longer supplies but ventilation shaft is still there.

BUCKLIN: It's still there?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: It's now become a storage room more then anything else.

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Yeah. Okay, that's kind of interesting to me, you were aware of the Cold War, you had a fall out shelter at the drug store, how about at home? Did you have anything at...

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] No.

BUCKLIN: Nothing at home, okay. You were about eleven years old when the construction begin?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Okay, as an eleven year old were you aware of what was being built and why?

HUSTEAD: Yes. I was aware that they were building missile sites.

BUCKLIN: Um-hm. And you were aware of what nuclear weapons did?

HUSTEAD: Sure.

BUCKLIN: Okay, so as, as an eleven year old how did that effect you? Did you think about it?

HUSTEAD: Well it's...

BUCKLIN: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] Was it cool? Was it, you know, something to be afraid of? What feelings did you have as an eleven year old?

HUSTEAD: Well, yes, I mean it was certainly something to give consideration and we had the weapons and we knew Russia did and there was certainly potential for serious problems. And then I also knew cause when they were building those sites we had a lot of construction workers in town and my dad had me come down with him at five in the morning and we were serving breakfast and I was washing and filling thermos bottles with coffee. For two or three hours before school.

BUCKLIN: And this was all during the construction phase, in 1962.

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: So you were extra busy as a young man?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: As a result of the construction crews. Did you ever think about whether or not the missiles would launch? Did it actively enter into your imagination or your

conscience thoughts in the early years? Did you speculate about what might happen if they...

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] Well, yeah, cause you know I'm sure I had a pretty active imagination and if they did launch it was gonna, you know what everybody thought that if they had the first strike or we did that would probably both gonna unload all our missiles on each other. So it was sure gonna change things.

BUCKLIN: Yeah, did you have an idea that you might survive? I know you had the fall out shelter, the bomb shelter as it, a young man even as an adult did you have the idea that you might survive?

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] Well, yeah, yeah, especially in western South Dakota. It wasn't gonna be really a place to attack. Ellsworth would certainly been a target but I don't think really back then they had the capability to drop a missile through a basketball hoop. So I don't they would of preemptively been able at that point in time to knock out our silos.

BUCKLIN: So you had an understanding that Soviet technology was not as advanced as ours? Did that give you comfort that if you did have that kind of feeling?

HUSTEAD: Well, especially as a little kid that I liked to think we were more advanced then they were. But they certainly were competitive.

BUCKLIN: Yes, okay, and of course when you get into massive, mega ton bombs, I guess a near miss is a hit any way, isn't it?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Yeah.

HUSTEAD: For sure, yes.

BUCKLIN: So your, your growing up in Western South Dakota and you have as you mentioned Ellsworth Air Force Base which is loaded with B-52 bombers and carry atomic bombs, you've got a hundred and fifty missile silos in Western South Dakota. You were there at the beginning of the missile silos of the Minuteman, did there come a time where you became less aware of their presence where it might have become just a normal part of everyday to drive by a missile silo on your way to work or on your way to some place else in Western South Dakota?

HUSTEAD: Well I mean, we always had a pretty heightened consciousness of missile silos. I think there was, there were Air Force crew people down here at one point in time in the '60s that lived in the community. I can't exactly remember what

their jobs were, but we had security teams from Ellsworth stopping out and checking doing security patrols for years and years and years. And I came back in to the family business twenty four years ago and they were stopping here and we had free coffee and donuts for veterans and we had crews stopping by all the time.

BUCKLIN: Um-hm. I'm from South Dakota so I know what you do but for the record maybe we out to say what the family business is.

HUSTEAD: The family business is Wall Drug Store, operating in Wall, South Dakota.

BUCKLIN: Um-hm. So you would have seen these Air Force personal daily, practically?

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] Yes.

BUCKLIN: In your role with the family business?

HUSTEAD: Definitely.

BUCKLIN: Yeah. So they were an ever presence part of your lives? Construction crews, you talked about helping your father prepare the coffee and...

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] Yes.

BUCKLIN: And did you have other activities that were involved with the construction? Do you recall friends, does your family own land that was adjacent to any of the silos or launch control facilities?

HUSTEAD: No, but there were military personal in the area and I think it might have been more based with Ellsworth but they had an impact.

BUCKLIN: How about family friends, do you have any ranchers, amongst your friends that was, land who was effected by the silos or by the cables that was laid for communication?

HUSTEAD: Leonol Jensen, his son Paul was my age, operates the Jensen Ranch. There were missiles sites on the ranch.

BUCKLIN: Um-hm. And I think he was part of the Minuteman Area Land Owners Association.

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Is that correct?

HUSTEAD: Yes, I believe so.

BUCKLIN: Yeah, okay, great. Okay, so I'm kind of interested in getting back to this what did you think about having these missiles in your back yard so to speak. Did you understand and did the community understand what it took to launch these missiles? Were you aware that they couldn't be launched by the push of one button? That type of thing?

HUSTEAD: Oh, yes, definitely.

BUCKLIN: Okay, so was there much concern expressed about the possibility of an accidental launch?

HUSTEAD: Not really.

BUCKLIN: So the community, you in particular felt secure and confident in the process that it would take to launch those?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: How about any concern about the uranium or the plutonium in the warheads? Was there any concern expressed about accidental poisoning of the ground water?

HUSTEAD: No, I certainly wasn't worried about it. Doesn't seem like a lot of the people were, course I was pretty young at the time.

BUCKLIN: And then of course these missiles are here for thirty some years. So you were experiencing them from your youth all the way to 1993 or so. How did the church, did anybody talk about nuclear weapons? I guess the point I'm getting at is was the community actively concerned about any of the possible consequences or was the community accepting this as a part of everyday life?

HUSTEAD: Yeah, I think they were. There was a lot of acceptance and we certainly appreciated the additional business we had from construction workers, missile crews. You know, there was definitely an economic benefit and the impact from having the missiles out here. It's pretty hard to make a living out in Western South Dakota. So additional business is appreciated.

BUCKLIN: Absolutely! Pretty difficult until you get a calling card like free ice water... [Rick laughs.] No, I mean that's just a remarkable story in and of itself.

HUSTEAD: For sure.

BUCKLIN: Yeah, how about any of the Hollywood treatments of nuclear war, did any of those affect you? I'm thinking like ABC's made for TV movie the Day After, Fail Safe, Doctor Strange Love. Any of those things have an impact on you?

HUSTEAD: Well they certainly did cause you were thinking about it. And because all the missiles were there, we were aware that there could be an attack, it was just a part of life in those years.

BUCKLIN: Absolutely. Okay, I've heard from varying sources, different opinions about the way the government handled building the missile silos in terms of compensation for land. Would you have an opinion one way or another about how the government handled the acquisition of the land and then the second part of the question is how the government handled the decommission of it, the deactivation...

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] No, I don't really have an opinion.

BUCKLIN: Okay.

HUSTEAD: And I know a little bit about it but I don't know if they have, I know there was compensation. And I suppose any time there's compensation, people might question was it enough and you know, there's always land owners rights issues but certainly the Federal Government needed to, to protect our country and to have a strike capability so I would think that would take precedence.

BUCKLIN: So would you think that the general attitude of the community was that we are doing our part in the Cold War?

HUSTEAD: Definitely.

BUCKLIN: Yeah, so the community attitude again if you were going to characterize the relationship between the community and the government how would you in one word, characterize it?

HUSTEAD: Very good.

BUCKLIN: Okay. Alright, were there protests regarding the missiles that your aware of?

HUSTEAD: No.

BUCKLIN: Okay. No, groups, outside groups from...

HUSTEAD: None that I was aware of.

BUCKLIN: Okay. I'd heard about a story of a group that came out every Easter and I was wondering if you were aware of that but I think it was further east of here. Okay, we live in South Dakota, we've got eight point five percent of our population is Native American. Were you aware of any distinctly Native American view regarding the missile silos?

HUSTEAD: No, I wasn't.

BUCKLIN: Okay. Do you know any Native American peoples that were involved, any Native American ranchers who might have been outside of the reservation or...

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] No.

BUCKLIN: Okay, we've been trying to identify people like that and it's been difficult... do you have children?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Are they old enough to have experienced the removal of the missiles or been alive when they were still here?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Did they ask questions? Did you talk to them about it?

HUSTEAD: Not a lot, no.

BUCKLIN: Did they know about the bomb shelter? In the drug store?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Did they?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Yeah, and been, they've been down in it and seen it?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Okay. Well they didn't ask many questions, why do you suppose that might have been?

HUSTEAD: Well, I think my son John is twenty and my daughter Sarah is seventeen. So by the time they were pulling them out we didn't have the Cold War going on so much and it wasn't such a, you know, I don't think we felt as threatened and...

BUCKLIN: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] Um-hm. That's sort of a feeling I've been getting from a number of the people that we've interviewed that it was our generation, the baby boomers who really experienced this more so than the generation before or after and that we were aware of it in elementary school and beyond. So, yeah, your children actually were not conscience of this you'd

say essentially, right? The missiles were gone by the time they were five cause you've got a twenty year old?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Yeah, so you've talked to me already about civil defense measures. Did the community have civil defense measures in Wall? Were there civil defense drills that you can remember? Was there a designated spot in the community to go in the event of an attack or a natural disaster?

HUSTEAD: You know, I'm sure there was some more sites, shelters in town but I can't really remember. And because I didn't go to high school here.

BUCKLIN: Right, you were in Prairie du Chien.

HUSTEAD: Yeah, so I don't know that if they had shelters in the school facility or, hey, I just don't know.

BUCKLIN: Did you go through duck and cover drills when you over in Wisconsin?

HUSTEAD: I don't remember going through them. I started in, let's see, '63.

BUCKLIN: I was thinking about the October Missile Crisis in Cuba and the Soviets...

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] That was '63.

BUCKLIN: '62.

HUSTEAD: '62.

BUCKLIN: Yeah, no recollection?

HUSTEAD: Well, yeah, I do kind of remember that time, cause it was certainly in the news.

BUCKLIN: Yes, and a couple other times I'm going to ask you about in just a moment to. You mentioned that you had interaction with the Security Police Teams.

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: And of a variety of other Air Force personal?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: How would you characterize the relationship with the Air Force personal who were out here and with the community?

HUSTEAD: Really good.

BUCKLIN: Good relations?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: How about the racial component? Western South Dakota isn't a particularly diverse racial population or there aren't that many African Americans here in the 1960s and I'm assuming and correct me if I'm wrong that the Air Force probably brought the first large number of African Americans to Western South Dakota?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Good relations, difficult relations?

HUSTEAD: Good relations but mostly the young men and women, and during those days it was mostly young men that stopped by were on duty, on patrol, taking a break, getting a bite to eat and continuing on. It was very nice, professional.

BUCKLIN: So really nothing stood out other than a sort of normal relationship?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Alright, I want to jump forward to the 1980s and the end of the Cold War. You were here in Wall in 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down? You were here I'm assuming to when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, what did you think about those events?

HUSTEAD: Pretty spectacular.

BUCKLIN: Can you elaborate?

HUSTEAD: Well, when you spend a large part of the time when your growing up worried about the Soviet Union and Communism and world domination and nuclear holocaust and when your big adversary in Russia comes unraveled, it's stunning.

BUCKLIN: Absolutely. Did you relate it to South Dakota and the missile silos? Did you relate the victory in the Cold War to these silos?

HUSTEAD: Well, I might not of necessarily made that connection, but certainly those missile silos were part of the Cold War.

BUCKLIN: So did it make you feel and again you can speak for your self or sort of the community at large that you played an important role by being the site where these hundred and fifty missiles were located and where Ellsworth was located? Did it make you feel like you played an important role in the Cold War?

HUSTEAD: Well we certainly were in the Cold War and if you drove around the country side that there were many, many missile silos located in our area and definitely we knew there was a Cold War going on.

BUCKLIN: So you think the community had a sense of pride and accomplishment in '89 and '91 that area? When the wall came down, the Cold War ended do you think there was a special feeling, we played a special role?

HUSTEAD: You know, I don't know. I just don't know. I don't really make that connection but it's certainly when those events did happen it seemed like we wouldn't need the military strength that we had in the past.

BUCKLIN: That's a sort of natural segue way to another question then. When the talk begin about limiting our nuclear delivery systems in the early 1990s, what was the feeling in the community and what was your personal feeling when they started talking about deactivating the missile sites?

HUSTEAD: Well, I personally hoped that we always had ,weapons wise, certainly matched up as well or better then Russia or anybody else for that matter.

BUCKLIN: So parity at least and maybe a little bit more?

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] Oh, definitely, yes.

BUCKLIN: At least. So were you concerned when they started talking about removing the missiles...

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] Yeah, definitely.

BUCKLIN: In South Dakota?

HUSTEAD: Cause I, you know...

BUCKLIN: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] Were you in a minority or do you think there were other people who felt the same way you did?

HUSTEAD: Well I don't know how other people felt but certainly having a strong defense in America has been something that we believed in.

BUCKLIN: So did anybody locally, I guess what I'm thinking about is right now were going through the BRAC investigation of Ellsworth and other bases, recommending whether they should be closed or not. Was there any sense among, um, the citizens of Wall or Western South Dakota or even your own sense that maybe these things shouldn't be bargained away? That maybe we should keep these missiles?

HUSTEAD: Well I think at the point in time they pulled them out, they were outdated. I mean I think that they were obsolete.

BUCKLIN: You're absolutely correct. The Minuteman IIs needed to be brought up to speed with the Minuteman IIIs, plus there was new technology down the line but I'm wondering was, we got this sense right now in South Dakota, we want to fight to keep Ellsworth. Was there any similar sense that we got to fight to keep either of these missiles or a newer version?

HUSTEAD: I don't think so. I mean not that I know of, there might have been.

BUCKLIN: Yeah, yeah, well that's alright, I was wondering if you had thought that way to? So with Ellsworth now, do you have any feeling in particular about the issue whether Ellsworth should remain open?

HUSTEAD: Well I don't think it's good that to have all our B-1 Bombers at one Air Force Base and they say that there isn't going to be much of a cost savings and I think to have all our strategic bombers in one Air Base is a poor deal. I think Ellsworth should stay open. And then we should have those B-1s at two bases. I don't know it's gone but I think it should.

BUCKLIN: Sort of sounds like common sense, doesn't it?

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Maybe you don't have all your eggs in one basket or...

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] For sure.

BUCKLIN: All your bombers in this case.

HUSTEAD: Yes.

BUCKLIN: Rick, if they developed another system that could play a similar role as the missiles played in the Cold War should South Dakota house it?

HUSTEAD: Oh, as far as missile defense or?

BUCKLIN: I say the Strategic Defense Initiative if we could develop the weapons to take out a first strike from an opponent whether it's Russia, Peoples Republic, what ever, would South Dakota be well served to house a system like that, like an ABM System or something of that nature?

HUSTEAD: Well I think that ABM Systems would be more of population centers or big targets but I think we were certainly receptive, I know the military planners and

the Pentagon thought that we had a very good location and I think they thought that again we're receptive.

BUCKLIN: And South Dakota has been generally supported of locating military installations in South Dakota, is that right, South Dakotans?

HUSTEAD: It definitely, I think South Dakotans are very patriotic. Just like World War II statistic that for our state we had the highest per capita serving in World War II. I think South Dakotans are very patriotic.

BUCKLIN: And you think that feeling still remains to...

HUSTEAD: [Begins to speak over previous speaker.] Yes.

BUCKLIN: This day? Okay. This was quicker than I thought Rick. Can you think of anything that I haven't asked you that I should?

HUSTEAD: No, I think we've covered it well.

BUCKLIN: Okay, wonderful. Well then on behalf of the National Park Service I want to thank you for your time and this concludes our interview.

HUSTEAD: Thank you.

[End of side one, tape one.]

[End of Interview.]