

SANDY HOOK, GATEWAY NRA: DISAPPEARING GUNS AND NUCLEAR MISSILES

Thomas Minton: Sandy Hook is a six-mile barrier beach that juts into lower New York Harbor from Monmouth County, New Jersey, and because the two channels run so close to Sandy Hook, this was the perfect location to protect New York City from naval attack. You can trace the exact story of how New York Harbor has been protected and defended for over two-hundred years, just on this one little peninsula alone.

Directly down below us is Nine Gun Battery. There were 9 10- and 12-inch guns emplaced here from 1898 through the mid-1940s, when the obsolete guns in the emplacements were salvaged out for scrap metal for the war effort. It is the highest concentration of guns in a single emplacement in the world.

Al Zwiazek (pointing to photograph): This was in 1937 when I wore this uniform. That's full-field uniform, with the campaign hat, which they did away with in World War II. (Pointing to photograph to the right). And this one, I was going on guard in 1939. It was just moments before I marched onto the guardhouse to be inspected by the officer of the day, so everything was spic-and span.

We drilled almost every day, close order drill, extended order drill, and marksmanship. It was a thrill. I never saw anything like this in civilian life as a kid, you know.

Thomas Minton: The old Sandy Hook proving ground, the Army's weapons testing facility from 1874 to just after World War I. Every machine gun, mortar, howitzer, artillery piece, landmine, chemical compound, fuse, was all brought out here to be developed and tested to see if it would actually work and if the Army wanted to use it.

By the 1950's, with the coastal guns obsolete, the threat now is from aircraft.

Dated Recording: the NIKE Hercules is a system developed to term a shadow of dread which hangs over us all, into a shield that would protect us all.

Thomas Minton: In 1954, the United States Army installed a Nike air defense battery here at Sandy Hook. The configuration was with conventional missiles, and in 1958 to '59, these were supplemented with 26 nuclear-tipped long range Hercules missiles. These particular missiles were state of the art at the time that they were deployed, and the system was continually upgraded until this system was closed out in Sandy Hook in 1974.

We are now standing inside of the battery commander's van, and he and his personnel would've been stationed right here. You have the launching switch and the manual detonation switch for the nuclear warhead. It is in here that a launch sequence would've begun, the battery commander would've been in continuous contact with his men all over the site and down inside the launch area, one mile away from here. He would make manual selections as to which type of missile he wanted to use. And at the moment of readiness, he would throw the switch and release the warhead. Missile would be on its way down range, and then when the interception clock clicked to zero, you would throw this switch here, manually detonating a nuclear warhead over American home soil.

Many of the emplacements here at Sandy Hook are one-of-a-kind and are open for most of the year. If you would care to visit us, we always offer tours of these emplacements.