CONCRETE, STEEL COMPLEX: NUCLEAR SITE RAPIDLY TAKING SHAPE AT NEKOMA

GFH 6-4-72 P 8 By Brad Brekke

Nekoma, ND (AP) - Rapidly taking shape in the fertile Red River Valley of North Dakota is a fantastically sophisticated complex of steel and concrete soon to bristle with nuclear-tipped projectiles designed to blast attacking enemy missiles out of the sky.

If you sneeze along the road to Nekoma, population about 200, you might miss the town, including a restaurant called Grandma's Goodies.

Just a stone's throw north of the prairie village the dirt road empties into a huge military complex alive with the roar of heavy construction.

Here the Army Corps of Engineers is building the nation's first Safeguard antiballistic missile system.

Work on the installation began two years ago and unless Congress authorizes similar construction near Washington, DC, as provided in President Nixon's agreement with the Soviet Union, it will be the nation's only ABM complex.

Safeguard ABM construction also was in progress in neighboring Montana, but it came to an abrupt halt this week as a result of the agreement.

Figures obtained Friday by Sen. Milton R. Young, R-ND, from the office of the budget calculate the total cost of the North Dakota installation including the missiles, at about $3 billion.

Young said the figures do not include an estimated $2 billion in research and development work that went into designing the system, which originally was planned for 12 locations around the nation.

The primary goal of the installation and its 98 projectiles is to shield from enemy attack Minuteman Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles buried in silos beneath the wheat fields of the central part of the state. The Minuteman weapons are designed to obliterate the enemy's homeland in the event of nuclear war.

The massive and rather ugly pyramidal building being constructed at Nekoma, about 35 miles from the Canadian border, will serve as the Safeguard system's center of operations, house its computers and one of its two radar installations.

In the immediate vicinity silos are being prepared for 16 Sprint missiles and 30 Spartan missiles. The Sprints are short-range weapons with high acceleration capability while the Spartans are designed to operate at ranges of several hundred miles and to intercept incoming enemy missiles high above the earth's atmosphere.

In addition, silos are being constructed at four remote launch locations for a total of 52 more Sprint weapons, officials say.

About 25 miles northeast of Nekoma is the town of Concrete, until recently almost a ghost town, where the system's other radar site is being constructed. This one, called the Perimeter Acquisition Radar (PAR), is supposed to begin tracking enemy missiles at long range, feeding the information to the main radar installation, or Missile Site Radar (MSR) at Nekoma.

As explained by an Army official at Nekoma, here is how the system is supposed to work:

In the event of nuclear attack, the PAR would be the first of two radar systems to begin tracking incoming missiles and would alert the Spartan batteries.

The MSR at Nekoma then would go to work, refining the data needed to control the launching of the Safeguard missiles and direct them to their interception points.

Army officials say the system is about 85 percent complete, and with construction running on schedule, is to become operational by late 1974.

The installation at Nekoma is surrounded by green fields sprouting newly sown grain. Inside the fence the land turns to hard, baked clay dotted with drab-looking buildings fitting of the system's grim purpose.

Tons of concrete have been poured, miles of steel girders laid into foundations, silo shafts sunk into the ground and the land scraped flat.

Some 2,400 workers are on the job eight hours a day, five days a week with welding torches, bulldozers, cranes, and other equipment.

Security arrangements seem somewhat lax to the visitor, but as an Army public affairs officer explained, "we won't be placing any of the weapons in until later this year, and then security here will be much tighter."

He said, "people ask us what our offensive capabilities are. The truth is that the worst we could do is drop a missile on Minnesota. We're strictly defensive."

Officials say that when the system goes operational, it will be manned by a force of 1,000 military personnel and 600 civilians.