

Nike Missile Base History – LA88 Chatsworth



3/21/2023

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Introduction

- This presentation was first shown in November 2011. In addition to the history of the Nike Missile Base LA88 at Oat Mountain, Chatsworth, it featured two videos, **“The Nike Hercules Story”** (1960, 27 min.), and **“Duck and Cover”** (1951, 9 min.).
- In 2019, we showed the presentation with some new history provided to us by Greg Brown, Nike Hercules Crewman LA 88, from 1968-1971. It featured a new video that Greg also told us about, a **1961 “Lassie” TV episode** (1961, 21 min.)
- Tonight, we will share the same history, but include excerpts from a newly discovered video, **1959 “Nike-Hercules, a Reality”** the 30-minute documentary movie filmed at the Chatsworth Nike Missile Base that includes interviews with Chatsworth Citizens.

Background – The Cold War

- The **Cold War**, between the Communist World (the Soviet Union and its allies) and the Western World (the United States and its allies), lasted from 1946 to 1991. The Berlin Wall fell in 1989.
- During this time of political, military and economic conflict, various strategies were undertaken by the United States to defend against a nuclear attack.
- Nike Missile bases provided that defense. They were initially equipped with anti-aircraft missiles (Nike-Ajax in 1953), followed by the Nike-Hercules in 1958, which was armed with nuclear warheads and could intercept ballistic missiles.
- The Nike Missile Base LA88 at Oat Mountain, Chatsworth was the First Missile Base in the Nation to go operational with Nike-Hercules Missiles.

Nike Missile Bases

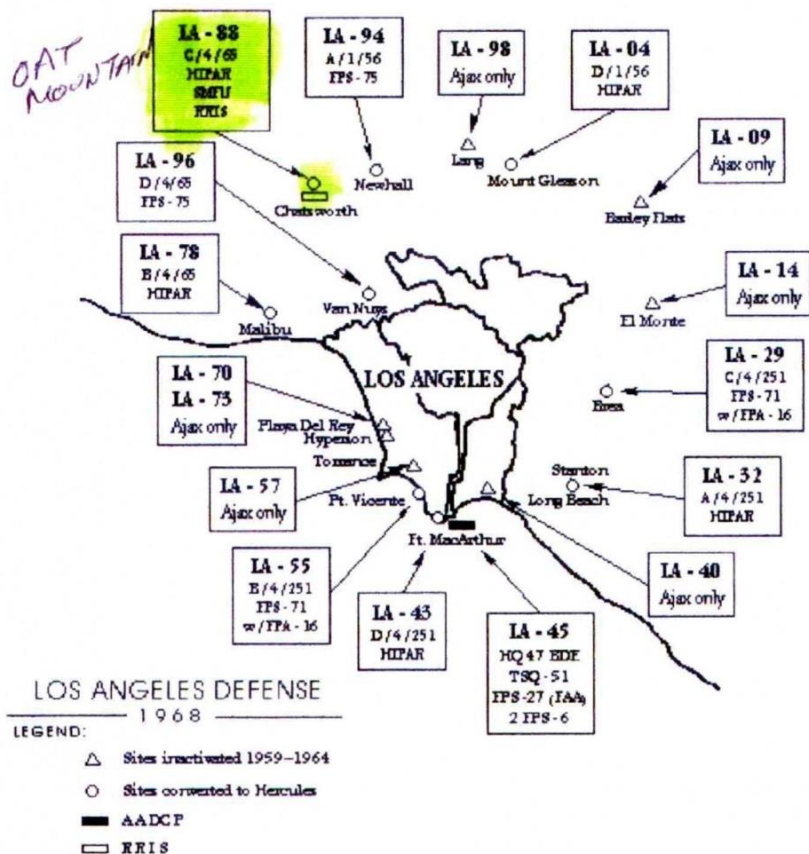
By 1958, the Army had established 200 Nike missile bases within the United States (including Alaska and Hawaii). 16 bases surrounded Los Angeles.



Nike Sites of Los Angeles

- Los Angeles was defended by a ring of 16 Nike sites, referred to as a "Ring of Steel"
- The Chatsworth Site on Oat Mountain was known as LA88.
- To protect its aerospace industries, Los Angeles received extensive air defenses.

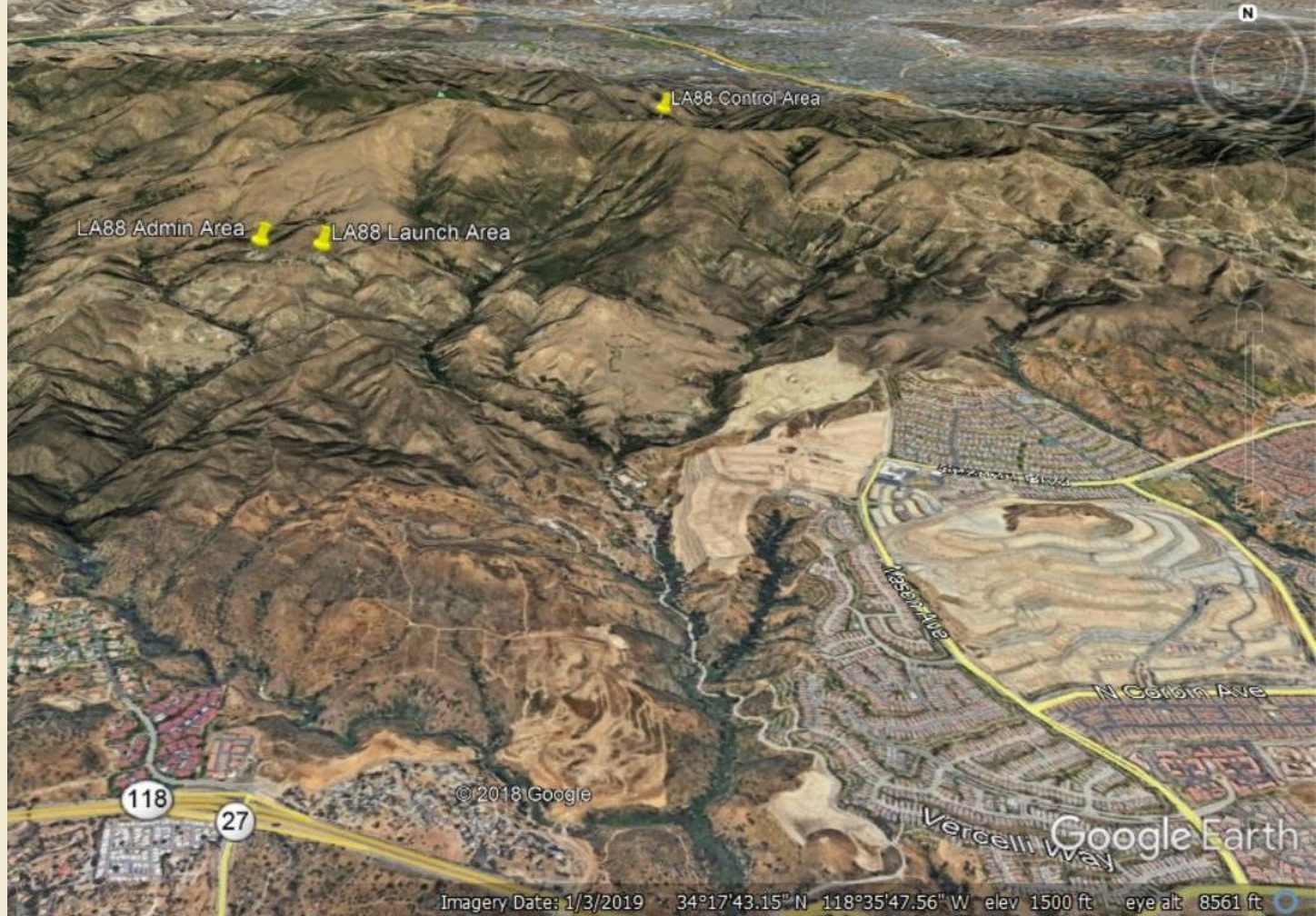
Nike Sites of the Los Angeles Defense Area



Nike Missile Site LA88 - Chatsworth

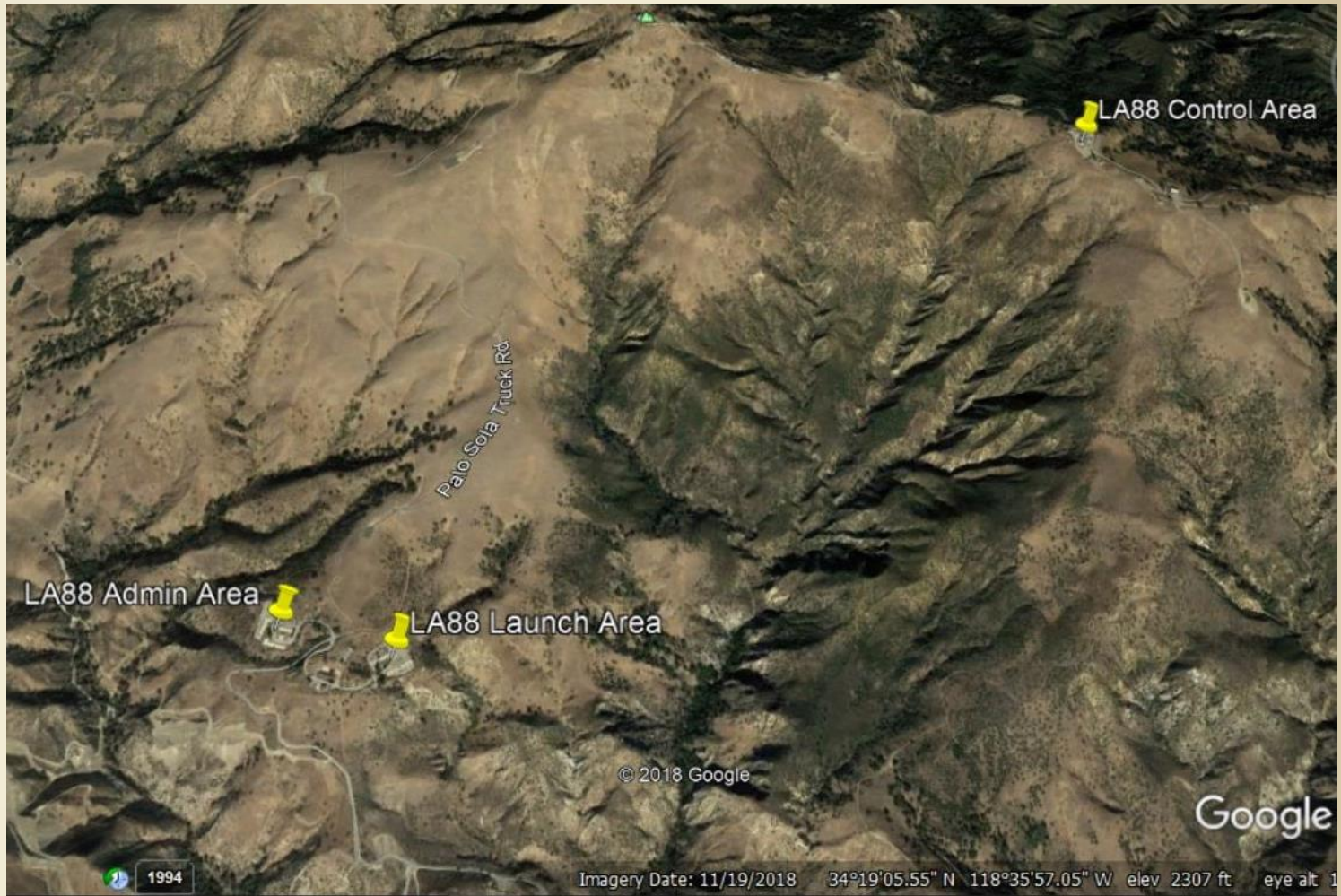
- Oat Mountain, the location of Site LA88, towers over the San Fernando Valley and provides visibility in all four directions and far out into the Pacific Ocean.
- It was the last of the scheduled 16 Los Angeles Nike sites to be completed due to the rugged terrain and only one usable road through Browns Canyon. Construction difficulties leveling a mountain peak and also digging deep into the ground for the three underground launchers caused delays.
- The site was completed and operational as of August 26, 1956.
- It was decommissioned in 1974 as one of the last sites covering the Los Angeles area.

- 2018 Google Earth 3D view of the three LA88 Sites, in relation to the 118 fwy and De Soto to Browns Canyon Road.
- The Launch and Admin areas are in the Michael D. Antonovich Regional Park.
- Parking is available 1 mile south on Browns Canyon Road.



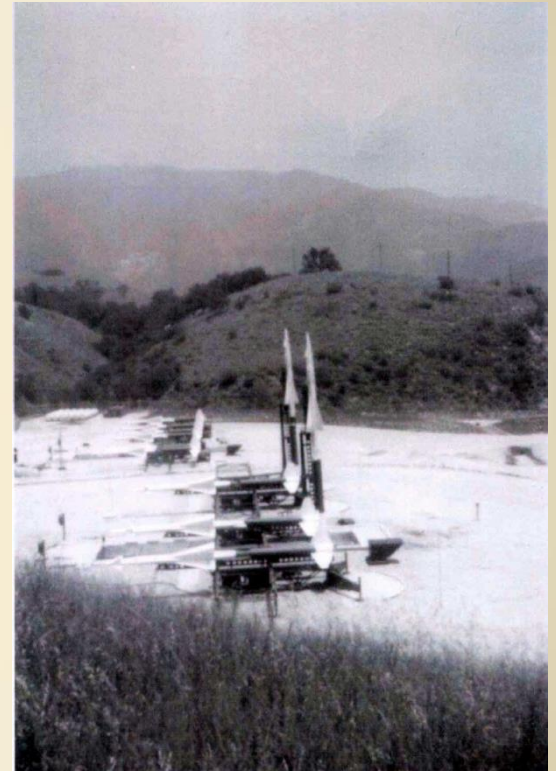
3/21/2023

- 2018 Google Earth 3D view of the three LA88 Sites.
- The Radar Control Area was 1.5 miles from the Launch Area (as the crow flies), via today's Palo Sola Truck Road.



Nike Missile Site LA88 - Chatsworth

- The LA88 launch site had three parts.
- One part contained the radar control systems to detect incoming targets and direct the missiles, along with the computer systems to plot and direct the intercept. It was on the ridge of Oat Mountain.
- The second part held three underground missile magazines, each serving a group of four missiles, for a total of 12 missiles. The site had a crew of 109 officers and men who ran the site continuously.
- The third part was the administrative area, which contained the battery headquarters, barracks, mess, recreation hall, and motor pool.

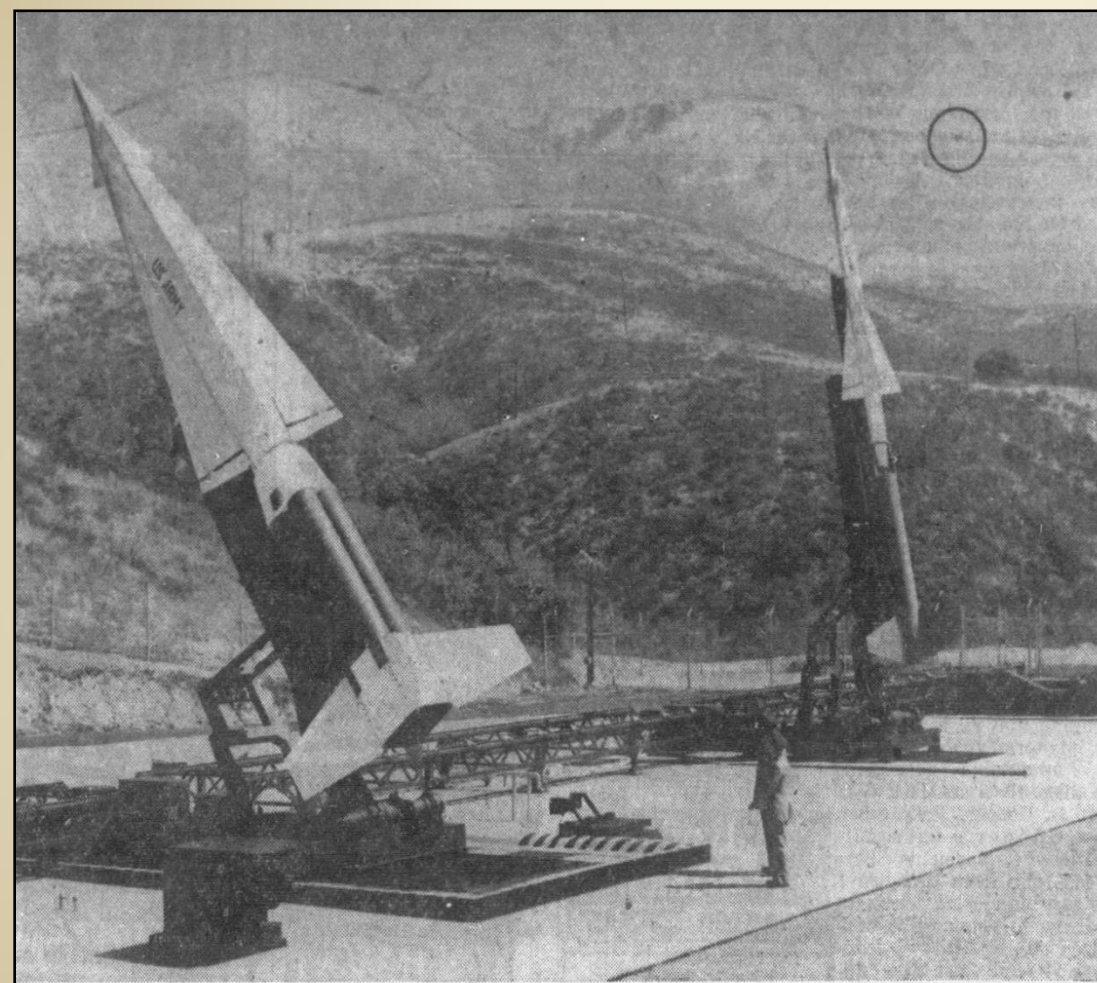




The August 30, 1958 photo caption from the LAPL Valley Times collection reads:

Dignitaries attending ceremony which marked **first Nike-Hercules base to go operational in nation** are dwarfed by huge weapon which can destroy entire enemy squadron of bombers with atomic warhead.

In foreground at Oat Mountain Base in Chatsworth are, left to right, Maj. Gen W. A. Perry, Donald Douglas Jr., Don Belding and Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz.



FIRST SHOWING—A Nike Hercules missile, left, capable of carrying an atomic warhead, rests on a

mountainside near Chatsworth beside an older Ajax. Circled is radar center that controls the launchings.

Times photo

The August 30, 1958 photo caption from the LA Times reads:

FIRST SHOWING -- A Nike Hercules missile, left, capable of carrying an atomic warhead, rests on a mountainside near Chatsworth beside an older Ajax missile.

Circled is a radar center that controls the launchings.



Photograph caption from the LAPL Valley Times collection dated December 19, 1958 reads:

Killer dogs guard Valley's only Nike-Hercules Base

Fierce sentries - M/Sgt. Ben Mullins excites his team of sentry dogs at Oat Mountain guided missile center near Chatsworth.

Missile in background is Nike-Hercules which has the capability of destroying an entire squadron of enemy bombers with one atomic burst.

Dogs are used to guard the base from possible night time intruders.

A description of LA88 from crewman Greg Brown, 1968-1971

- In 2019, Greg reached out to us, as he noticed that we had posted an article on LA88 on our website.
- Greg was stationed at LA88 from 1968 to 1971 as a Nike Hercules Fire Control Crewman, and shared with us what life was like at the site. LA88 was part of our Air Defense system for the Los Angeles area from 1956-1974.
- Greg lives in the SF Bay area and interprets for the National Park Service, Historical Nike Site SF88, at the Marin Headlands in Golden Gate Park, along with many other Nike Missile Veterans from the Bay Area.
- Tours are offered periodically, [visit https://www.nps.gov/goga/nike-missile-site.htm](https://www.nps.gov/goga/nike-missile-site.htm)
- SF88 is the only historic Nike Missile Site in the US that is complete and functional.

Excerpts from Greg Brown's Nike Biography, LA88 crewman, 1968-1971

- On arrival in October 1968 to Chatsworth LA88, there were no open Nike crewmen positions, so I worked as a dining room orderly and a cook. When positions became available, I worked as an elevation tracking radar operator, acquisition radar operator and generator operator. During that time, the site experienced floods in 69, The Clampitt fire, that burned completely over our Nike Site, on Sept 25, 1970, and the Sylmar earthquake in 71.
- There were approximately 100 individual soldiers assigned to a Nike site. There were two main classifications, Radar Crewman, MOS 16C, referred to as a "Scope Dope" or if you were a Launcher Crewman, you were a "Pit Rat" MOS 16B. There are 3 main areas to a Nike Missile Site. The Launcher Area, which is the most secure, because the missiles were stored there. With armed guard roving sentry dog handler's. The IFC (Integrated Fire Control Area), Where the Search and Tracking Radars were, usually on top of a Hill. The other main area was the Administration area, where the Barracks (Living Quarters) were, the Mess Hall, Supply room, Administrative offices, and telephone switchboard operator room.

Excerpts from Greg Brown's Nike Biography, LA88 crewman, 1968-1971

- The daily routine was to do maintenance on the system, either radars or missiles, depending on where you worked. Other duties were Guard duty, which was done around the clock, Kitchen Police (KP). Mowing weeds, cleaning, painting, and other duties as required. The Army's job was to keep you busy.
- There were regular "drills" called ORE (Organizational Readiness Evaluation) that were simulated nuclear attacks and drills with the Air Force called RBS (Radar Bomber Scores) where Air Force aircraft attempted to penetrate our air defense area. They would try to jam our radars but we usually prevailed.
- In this type of warfare, there is a lot of electronic jamming known as ECM (Electronic Countermeasures).
- We are always testing our systems to be better than the Soviets.

Excerpts from Greg Brown's Nike Biography, LA88 crewman, 1968-1971

- Although we were Army, we were part of Air Force NORAD, (North American Aerospace Defense Command), Headquartered at Cheyenne Mountain Colorado. Then the regional Air Force SAGE (Semi Automatic Ground Environment) Headquarters at Norton AFB, then the Army Air Defense Command Post (ADDCAP) at Fort Mac Arthur. All of the above listed locations were part of the NORAD computerized surveillance network that watched the skies and tracked aircraft in our air space. The network consisted of the DEW line radar rings across the Arctic Circle and Canada, along with Air Force ground based Radar Stations and radar planes along with Navy radar picket ships.
- There were 8 Nike Hercules sites in the LA defense area during 68-71. Four were regular Army, four were National Guard. There were always 25 per cent or 2 sites that were on "Hot Battery" status, which is a condition of, all equipment was 100% operational with all personnel in place ready to fire a missile in 15 minutes.

Excerpts from Greg Brown's Nike Biography, LA88 crewman, 1968-1971

- The missiles were on the launcher ready to fire, it was 24 Hour duty and you could not leave the site. Hot status could last from 1 to 2 weeks at a time. If another site was the Hot Battery and their equipment failed, your Battery would be called to become the Hot Battery. You had 2 hours to do so.
- The security concerns at the time were domestic terrorists and Viet Nam war protestors at the time. Groups like the Weather Underground were attacking or sabotaging military installations.
- We also had to be on guard for Army security personnel who made attempts to breach our security.
- Our radars had a 150-mile view of Southern California. We also had a video feed from an Air Force Radar at Mt. Laguna that was near the town of Julian, in northern San Diego County. That radar had a 200-mile range, so we could see past Catalina, the Mexican Border, and up to Santa Barbara.

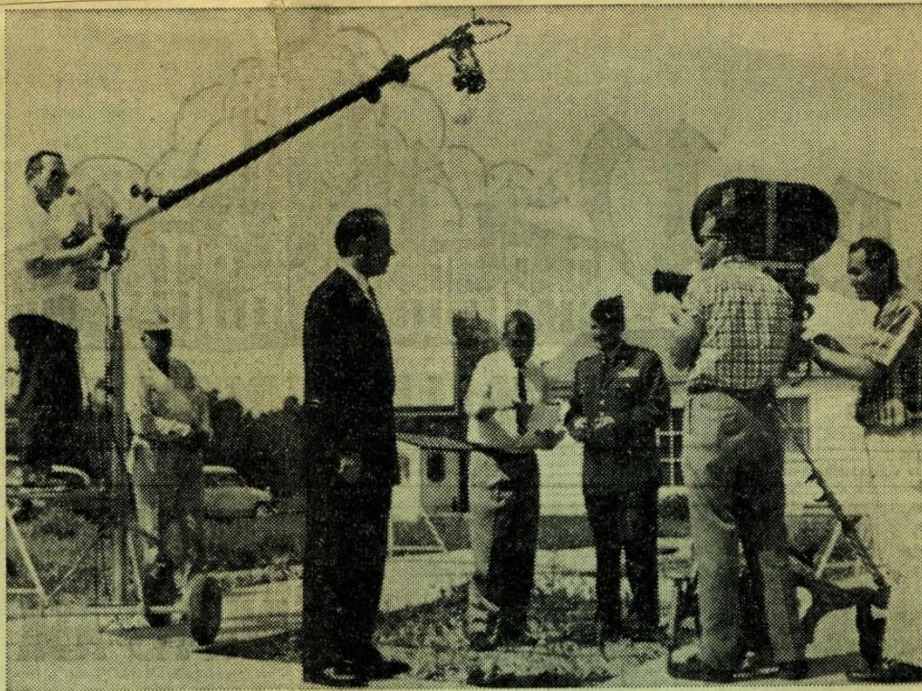
Excerpts from Greg Brown's Nike Biography, LA88 crewman, 1968-1971

- Our job was to protect the military installations, and military and aerospace manufacturing in Southern California from Airborne Attacks. Our Missile Battery was near the Rocketdyne facility in Chatsworth.
- I was standing in the ready room when the Sylmar quake hit on February 9 1971. I saw waves go across the floor. We checked to see if any missiles had fallen off of their launchers in the magazine. All 18 missiles were intact.
- The most exciting time on the site was being on the “SNAP” (**S**hort **N**otice **A**nnual **P**ractice) Crew. I was picked for a position as a Generator Operator on the Launcher crew for the 1971 trip to Mc Gregor Range, Ft. Bliss Texas, to fire several live missiles at a live drone and be evaluated in the process.
- All Nike sites were required to do a yearly “live fire” or SNAP, to show their proficiency and be evaluated by the Army Air Defense Command. The Ideal score was 100%. This also showed the Russians that we knew how to use our missile system.

Excerpts from Greg Brown's Nike Biography, LA88 crewman, 1968-1971

- Those of us who served in the Army Air Defense Command considered ourselves fortunate to be distant from the war in Viet Nam. Many of our peers had been there and none wanted to return.
- The Nike Missile system was not used in Viet Nam, as its intended targets were high altitude Russian bombers. The Nike Missile System was in service worldwide, in Germany and throughout Europe, Greenland, Korea, Okinawa, Taiwan and other countries including 40 cities the continental U.S. Alaska and Hawaii.
- By 1974 most of the Nike Hercules Sites were closed due to the SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty) with Russia, and obsolescence because of the reduced ICBM threat. Sites in Alaska and Florida remained in service until 1989. NATO Allies Taiwan and Italy kept their systems until 2003 & 2006. The successor to the Nike Hercules is the Patriot Missile system.

**1959, Making the movie
"Nike-Hercules - A Reality"
in Chatsworth**



ARMY AND CHURCH representatives rehearse scene for Nike Hercules missile film being made in Chatsworth. Location is First Baptist Church grounds on De Soto Ave. The Rev. Charles Hughes stands left center as director Phillip Callahan, and Lt. Col. Robert Fowler, chief of radio-television, Los Angeles branch, Army information, face him. Crew of Galway Productions, shooting picture, are handling equipment. Film will be part of video series called "Big Picture," with world premiere to be held in Chatsworth, site of missile base.

The News photo

Nike Hercules Missile Film being made in Chatsworth

Van Nuys News April 5, 1959

- Lt Col. Robert Fowler with Rev. Charles Hughes and church members Mr. & Mrs. John S. Whitmer shoot a scene for the Nike Hercules Missile Film at the newly completed First Baptist Church on De Soto.
- The film will be part of a video series called "Big Picture" with a world premiere to be held in Chatsworth, site of the missile base.

Nike Film With Chatsworth Scenes Nearing Completion

Completion of the shooting of local scenes in the Nike Hercules missile television film being made in Chatsworth is scheduled for Tuesday, according to an announcement by Lt. Col. M. R. Fowler, chief of radio-television for the Los Angeles branch of Army information.

Cameramen and Phillip Callahan, executive producer of Galway Productions, which is filming the segment, have finished that portion of the picture in which several local residents appeared and on Tuesday they expect to "pan" through the community for local scenery and places of business.

Principal Takes Part

Honorary mayor Roy Rogers was host to the film company and Army officers for scenes taken at his Chatsworth ranch.

Participants are Rogers, his two daughters, Dodie and Debbie, and dog Bullet Jr.

Mrs. LaVerne Lee, long-time principal of Chatsworth Park Elementary School and pupils Raymond Vincent and Nancy Ferrell were chosen for scenes at the school.

The Rev. Charles Hughes of the First Baptist Church was shown in a scene in front of his newly-completed church

on De Soto Ave. with members Mr. and Mrs. John S. Witmer.

Slate World Premiere

Scenes also were filmed with Al Brain, Ben Boydston, Gaston Coke and George Schoell. The picture will have its world premiere later in the summer in Chatsworth.

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Van Nuys News Article continued...

April 5, 1959

- Honorary Mayor Roy Rogers was host to the film company and Army officers for scenes taken at his Chatsworth ranch. Participants are Rogers, his daughters Dodie and Debbie, and dog Bullet Jr.
- Mrs. LaVerne Lee, long-time principal of Chatsworth Park Elementary School and pupils Ray Vincent and Nancy Ferrell were chosen for scenes at the school.
- Scenes also were filmed with Al Brain, Ben Boydston, Gaston Coke and George Schoell.

Military Motion Picture Film General Release Form C

April 6th, 1959

GENERAL RELEASE
FORM C

The United States Government has requested me to grant to the Government certain rights (hereinafter more fully set forth) arising from my participation in a motion picture film and/or telecast and/or film strip (hereinafter referred to as the Production) made by or produced for the United States Government.

The grant and release of said rights to the United States Government is made freely, and without expectation of recompense of any kind, in full cognizance of the risks inherent in the operational techniques employed in the Production, including, but not limited to, the focusing of lights on the individuals concerned herein, and in contemplation of reliance by the United States Government upon the rights herein granted and released to it.

THE RIGHTS hereby granted to the Government which form the substance of this instrument are as follows:

(a) To use the name, photograph, likeness, acts, poses, plays and appearances made in connection with said Production in any manner; to record, reproduce, amplify and simulate voice and all instrumental, musical, and other sound effects produced; and to reproduce, distribute, publish, exhibit, use and/or transmit the same by any mechanical and electrical means, either as taken separately from or as incorporated in the said Production or in any future use incorporating a part or the whole of said Production, in any manner and for any purpose whatsoever; and to use the same perpetually.

(b) The right to "double" or "dub" voice, acts, poses, plays, and appearances and all instrumental, musical and/or other sound effects produced to such extent as may be desired by the United States Government.

(c) The release and discharge of the United States Government from any cause of action of whatsoever nature arising from participation in the Production.

This grant and release will not be made the basis of a future claim of any kind against the Government.

This grant, release, and discharge, shall inure to the benefit of the United States Government, and its officers, agents, servants and employees when acting in their official capacities, and to persons, firms, or corporations contracting with the Government, and their heirs, executors, administrators, successors or assigns, and to any other persons lawfully reproducing, distributing, exhibiting or otherwise using the said Production or any portion thereof.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 6th
day of April, 1959.

PROJECT # P91 16916 _____ (L.S.)
CTV

WITNESS: Mr. R. Fowler
Lt. Col. Inf. _____ (Address)

- Project P91 16916
- Signed by Lt Col. Robert Fowler
- Release for Ray Vincent, initialed CTV by Charlene Vincent, Ray's mother

Businessmen Of Chatsworth Actors In Film

Chatsworth business and civic leaders have turned actors in a film produced by the Army for distribution throughout the world.

They are starred in a documentary movie for the Army series, "The Big Picture."

The film, which shows how the Nike-Hercules Missile Base above Chatsworth fits into the community will be shown to the stars and members of Chatsworth PTA groups tonight. The filming will be at 7 p.m. at Chatsworth Park Elementary School, 22005 Devonshire St. It was shown earlier today to pupils at the school.

It will be shown later over 295 television outlets in the United States, five in Puerto Rico and on 37 Armed Forces Television Network stations throughout the world.

Featured in the film are Chatsworth's main streets, its homes and schools and the Roy Rogers ranch. Rogers, honorary mayor of Chatsworth, has a leading role with his two adopted daughters, Debbie and Dodie.

Also appearing in main roles are Ben Boydston, former president of the Chamber of Commerce; Al Bain, restaurant owner and member of the Chatsworth Rotary Club; Mrs. LaVerne Lee, principal of Chatsworth Park Elementary School; the Rev. Charles T. Hughes, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Chatsworth, and Lt. Gen. Charles E. Hart, commanding general of the Army Air Defense Command.

M/Sgt. Stuart Queen is narrator.

The Valley Times Wednesday, September 30, 1959

- The newspaper article at left describes the Nike- Hercules Missile Base movie as a part of the Army series, "The Big Picture.
- It will be shown to the stars and members of the Chatsworth PTA groups tonight.
- It was shown earlier in the day to the pupils at the school.
- Featured in the film are Chatsworth's main streets, homes and schools, and the Roy Rogers ranch.
- Roy has a leading role with his two adopted daughters, Debbie and Dodie.

Chatsworth Introduction in the 1959 movie



The sign above was created for the movie, that duplicated the words on the greeting sign that was on the northwest corner of Topanga and Devonshire, in front of Chatsworth Park Elementary School.



Chatsworth Citizens in the 1959 movie



Ben Boydsten, Chatsworth Lumber
northeast corner of Topanga and Marilla



Chatsworth Elementary School Principal
Mrs. LaVerne Lee
Ray Vincent, Nancy Ferrell
Devonshire entrance looking west

Chatsworth Citizens in the 1959 movie



Al Brain's Horn In Restaurant with George Schoell
northeast corner of Devonshire and Owensmouth



Reverend Charles Hughes - First Baptist Church
DeSoto south of Devonshire

Chatsworth Citizens in the 1959 movie



Honorary Mayor Roy Rogers
and Debbie and Dodie, with
Bullet in the back.

Next up excerpts from the
1959 "Nike-Hercules, a Reality"
28-minute documentary

- The first 4 minutes introduces Nike-Hercules, and the town of Chatsworth
- The next 10 minutes take us to Colorado Air Defense Headquarters, assembly in North Carolina, test firing in Texas and New Mexico, and training in Texas.
- The final 14 minutes are filmed at the Chatsworth Missile Base, and ends with interviews with local residents in the community of Chatsworth.
- Tonight, we will watch the first and last sections of the documentary, filmed in Chatsworth (18 minutes)
- The complete video is available on YouTube, <https://youtu.be/UYUevSxGTec>

**More videos
Available on YouTube**

Lassie Ep241 “The Patriot”

Season 7, Episode 22 Filmed at LA88 Chatsworth, air date Feb 12, 1961, 21 minutes

Summary: After finding out the local Army base needs dogs to guard their missiles, Timmy adopts Homer, a German Shepherd from the dog pound to give to the Army, but the dog has become so cowed from abuse that the family wonders if he can ever be trained.

[Lassie Ep241 “The Patriot” 1961](#)



Duck and Cover – 1951, 9 minutes

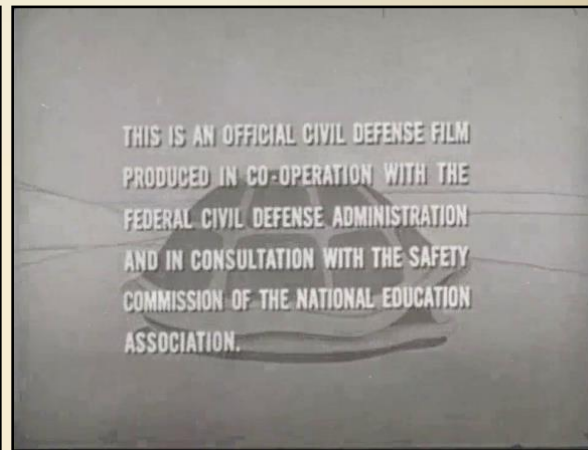
The film was funded by the US Federal Civil Defense Administration, and is available from the Library of Congress.

It teaches students what to do in the event of a nuclear explosion.

Scenes at right..

This video is available at our YouTube channel, chatsworthhistory1, from the Library of Congress.

[Duck and Cover 1951](#)



Growing up in the 1950-60's with the threat of a nuclear attack

- Fallout Shelters were an enclosed space specially designed to protect occupants from radioactive debris or fallout resulting from a nuclear explosion.
- Many such shelters were constructed as civil defense measures during the Cold War. They were built underground or within existing basements of homes.



Growing up in the 1950-60's with the threat of a nuclear attack



Duck and Cover Drills were practiced at schools across the nation to protect yourself from a nuclear blast. They continued past the 60's as standard practice for earthquake and other disaster protection procedures.

The status of Nike Missile Base LA88 today

- A 13 minute YouTube video, [“Inside the Abandoned Nike Missile Site LA-88L”](#), was filmed in 2017. Snapshots from the video are seen below and on the following slides



The status of Nike Missile Base LA88 today



The status of Nike Missile Base LA88 today



Recap / Summary

- This presentation is available for viewing and download at chatsworthhistory.com, Digital Archives, Presentations.
- The videos associated with this presentation are available on our YouTube channel “chatsworthhistory1”. A [playlist](#) has been created showing all four videos:
 - Nike Hercules - A Reality 1959 (filmed in Chatsworth)
 - Lassie Ep241 “The Patriot” s7e22 Feb 1961 (filmed in Chatsworth)
 - Duck and Cover 1951 (not filmed in Chatsworth)
 - The Nike Hercules Story 1960 (not filmed in Chatsworth)
- Also on YouTube, [Inside the Abandoned Nike Missile Site LA-88L](#) - 2017

Sources/Acknowledgements

- Thanks to Greg Brown, Nike Hercules Crewman at LA 88, Chatsworth CA 1968-1971, for his 2019 contributions of historical articles and information from the era. Including his August 2019 Biography of his four years at LA88.
- Nike-Hercules, a Reality, 1959, filmed at LA 88 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYUevSxGTec>
- Lassie Episode 241, 1961, filmed at LA 88 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOCqW5GxJ28&t=5s>
- Duck and Cover, 1951 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDCPTscV7dM>
- The Nike Hercules Story, 1961 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDwK0GySOwI&t=24s>
- Inside the Abandoned Nike Missile Site LA 88, 2017 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mwgp70_2Kck&t=40s
- LAPL Valley News collection

- Prepared by Ann & Ray Vincent, November 2011, revised November 2019, Mar 2023