



**Above:** Apartment buildings towered over nearby Chicago Nike site C-03 which was active from 1955-1965. Here the site's crew is shown alongside a Nike Hercules prepping the missile during a readiness drill. Image courtesy of Michael Epperson, Ph.D., "Nike Missile Site C-41 Promontory Point Jackson Park, Chicago 1955 - 1971" (online).

entirety was obsolete as well, and therefore such sites were no longer necessary. Such assumptions coming out of one Nike defense area (especially one as high on the Soviet list of targets as Chicago) likely would have been detrimental to the overall Nike program.

Despite opposition, C-41 was not closed until 1971. Most people in Chicago, like everywhere else, eventually came to accept the deployment of the Nike missile sites as beyond their control. That does not mean they liked it though. One Promontory Point historian states that "Many neighborhood residents resented the radar towers and their placement on the Point, but protests became vocal only in the Vietnam era". In 1971 when the radar towers on Promontory Point finally came down, he says residents held a victory rally with the slogan "We've won our point". Given the fact that the Nike missile program was discontinued late in the Vietnam era, it seems only logical to suggest that some correlation exists.

## Conclusion

So was the American experience of the Nike missile more like that of Fairfax County, or that of Chicago? And was public outcry against the placement of Nike missiles, nuclear capable or otherwise, the reason for the removal of said installations around major U.S. cities? By itself the answer is almost certainly no. Was it a contributing factor? Quite possibly yes. As the perceived threat of an attack by Soviet bombers eased due to the rising threat of the Soviet ICBM, people became less willing to accept having the now less relevant Nike missiles placed in their "backyards". The role of the locations of the sites themselves in the decision to cancel the Nike program cannot be overlooked. Several cities along the Great Lakes like Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Detroit saw distributions of Nike sites similar to that of Chicago. Others, like Pittsburgh, most certainly saw distributions like that of Washington D.C. Chances are that there were people on both sides of the aisle in each of those cities. But chances also are that someone voiced their disapproval loud enough for someone with enough power to make a decision on the Nike missile to hear.

Public opinion is always difficult to quantify without raw data such as opinion polls, and it is likely that arguing one way or the other is probably a moot point. Nevertheless, attempting to do so provides us with a greater understanding of what it was like for the everyday person to live during such times. One of the cardinal rules of studying history is to take care as to not project the present into analysis of the past. We live in a world today where people become irate over having to walk through body scanners at airports. How would we react today to having to look out our apartment or office window and seeing a nuclear missile sitting in a public park and being told by our government that it is for our own safety? Are we that different now a half a century later? 🇺🇸

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