

# Memories of the Richboro Nike Base

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My husband and I had just purchased ground in Richboro, Northampton Township, Pa., in March of 1954. Here we were going to build our home. It was a Friday afternoon, and a very happy moment. Then two days later, the Sunday newspaper carried this headline, "NIKE MISSILE BASE TO BE BUILT IN RICHBORO"! What was a "Nike Base," and where was it going to be built? You guessed it -- just up the hill from where we were planning to build. The Army was to construct housing and radar facilities on 10.13 acres on Twining Ford Road, while down on 18.96 acres of their ground on Newtown Road, they were going to construct the dining or mess hall and other facilities, including the missile launch pad. It seems we were going to be near the area between the two sites. I don't think that made me feel any better.

A few contentious meetings were held in the old Richboro firehouse (on the northeast corner of Newtown Road and Second Street Pike) to explain just what a Nike Base was and what to expect when it opened. Finally, a high-ranking army officer explained that the Richboro Nike Missile Defense Base was one of twelve that circled around Philadelphia (during the "Cold War" with Russia 1950's--1970's). They were the last line of defense. "If the enemy airplanes got by them, Philadelphia was going to be nuked," said Robert Kramer, a radar operator. Each base was named according to its position on a circle divided into 100 degrees, with north at zero degrees. Richboro was PH-07, manned by Regular Army from about 1954--60. Most other bases were manned by National Guard units.

The American strategic defense plan was for the Air Force to engage incoming Soviet bombers over the Atlantic Ocean. If any bombers did get through, the Nike defense would be activated before they reached land. The Philadelphia command center would track the plane or planes, and alert the appropriate Nike site to lock onto the target and fire missiles. This was a real doomsday scenario. Although doomsday never happened, the soldiers always had to be ready in case it did. There was drilling, drilling drilling, plus maintenance and repair, cleaning, and even mowing grass.

The army requested Northampton Township supervisors to pave Twining Ford Rd, since it was a dirt road, which became quite muddy during periods of rain or snow. The township, however at that time could not afford to do it. The army then agreed to pave the road, if the township would maintain it. Then came the blizzard of 1958, and the township could not keep its end of the bargain. The snow was so deep that even the army's equipment was unable to get out. The base was isolated. The Johnsville Naval Air Station came to the rescue, with some of the largest equipment ever seen at that time. By coming to Richboro, they opened parts of Jacksonville Road, Almshouse Road, and Second Street Pike on their way to open up Twining Ford Rd. to the upper base, and then down Second Street Pike to Newtown Rd. to the lower base. The heavy equipment was soon followed by a few cars driven by people who hoped to find food and

*Scouts Visit Nike Base Mess Hall*



NEWTOWN BOY SCOUT TROOP 20 at the mess hall of the 506th Guided Missile Battalion, Twining Bridge road, near Richboro. The boys chaperoned by their leaders and members of the Troop Committee were taken on a conducted tour of the Nike

site by Captain Powell Way, extreme left, and his assistant Lieutenant Treadwell. Kenneth H. Beck is scoutmaster, and Walter Mammel, assistant scoutmaster.

staples. It was Sunday, and normally stores were closed in the 1950's. At the request of the supervisors, however, Luff & Traub's General Store agreed to open.

Once the Nike base was built, the public became accustomed to seeing truckloads of soldiers traveling up and down local roads, going to their duty stations. Most soldiers, however, did not have private transportation out of town when they had "leave time." With no malls built yet, most leave time was spent at the Spread Eagle Inn, in Richboro. Soon dinner or lunch invitations by various families appeared on the bulletin boards of both Addisville Reformed Church and the Nike Base. Many long time friendships were made. Just a few years ago, the young Mississippi lad with whom we had become good friends, surprised us by bringing his family to Richboro for a visit. We had met his wife earlier when she came to Richboro to visit him at the Nike base. It was December, and she was shivering when she and her husband came to our home for dinner. She was wearing just a light summer suit, not realizing how cold our winters could be. A heavy sweater and a seat in front of the fireplace soon stopped the shivering. An extra coat in the closet was put to good use when she left.

On a summer afternoon, my mother, who wore a hearing air, was sitting on the back porch enjoying the garden and the birds at the feeders.. Suddenly she gave a loud call for me -- her hearing aid was beeping at close regular intervals. What could it be? This happened off and on all the weekend. I mentioned it to the Mississippi soldier we knew. He thought about it for a short time and began laughing. Every time the army base trained on the radar, it sent out high intensity, radar charged waves that my mother's hearing aid picked up. I wonder how many other people had the same problem, but never got the answer.

About 1960, some of the Nike bases, including the one in Richboro, received notice to shut down. Soon the operating personnel left, and the dismantling of the base began. Outside crews moved the missiles and deactivated the launch site. The Federal government began to offer the sites to other agencies. At this point, the U.S. Navy obtained the two sites without cost. Its intention was to install high-density housing for Johnsville Naval Air and the Willow Grove Navel Air Stations. Northampton Township did not object to the navy presence, but asked that any residential building conform to the then rudimentary zoning laws.

After several meetings between Northampton Township Supervisors and local Department of the Navy executives, it became apparent that the navy would not meet the township request. The township appealed for a hearing before the Congressional Armed Services Committee. The request was granted, and the Vice Chairman of the Board of Northampton Township Supervisors and several interested citizens were heard in Washington, D.C. on June 14, 1966, (details in "Military Construction Authorization -- Fiscal Year 1966, Hearings Before the Committee on Armed Services. S.17771 (H.R. 8439)" (p. 821) The Armed Services Committee then ruled against the Navy, prompting the Navy to drop their building plans. Following this event, the township immediately appealed for the ownership of both the upper site of 10.13 acres, and the lower site of 18.96 acres. In very short order, the township took ownership, and transferred the ownership of the upper site on Twining Ford Road to the Council Rock School Board.

The mess hall on the lower site on Newtown Rd. became the first home of the Northampton Township Library on October 3, 1970 with just 3000 old and new books. Athletic fields of all varieties have gradually been added on most of the remaining property. Whether interested in baseball, football, Halloween parades or listening to music in front of the "shell," there was and is something for everyone. It is a far cry from its first use as a farm, than as an Army Nike Missile Base.