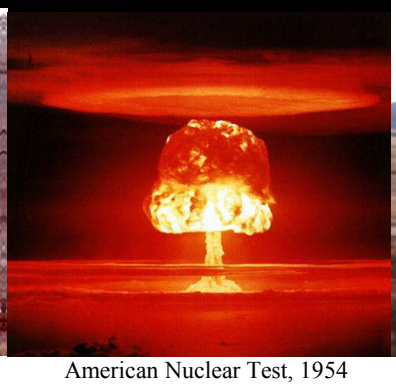
The Cold War

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Minuteman Missile
National Historic Site
South Dakota

The Berlin Wall: Symbol of a Divided Europe



American Nuclear Test, 1954

Mutually Assured Destruction Under a Peaceful Prairie

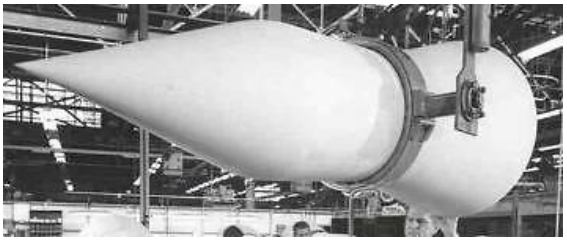
What was the Cold War?

The Cold War began just after the end of World War II. Conflict arose between the United States and Soviet Union - the remaining superpowers - because of their different economic and political systems. The Soviet Union was based on communism, the U.S. promoted democratic capitalism. Neither side ever fought the other directly in a hot or "shooting war," due to the looming threat of a nuclear war. Instead, each side tried to gain an advantage in a variety of ways. These included an intense political competition, economic rivalries, propaganda, and a massive arms buildup that dominated foreign policy and international affairs. The two distinct ideologies divided the world. In 1946 British Prime Minister Winston Churchill called the division line in Europe the "Iron Curtain", with capitalism to the west and communism to the east.

The Arms Race

The buildup of nuclear weapons was one way the Cold War was fought. Between the opposing sides, over 80,000 nuclear weapons were constructed.
While none of these were detonated in a hot war, over 1,800 tests were conducted. The arms race nearly led to World War III several times, one of which was the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.
At one point, the world's nuclear stockpiles totaled a chilling 18,000 megatons. By comparison, the entire explosive force of all the bombs used during World War II was 2 megatons.
Reflecting on the impact these weapons could have on the world, former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara once said, "nuclear weapons have no military utility whatsoever, except to deter an enemy attack."

SS-18 Satan Warhead



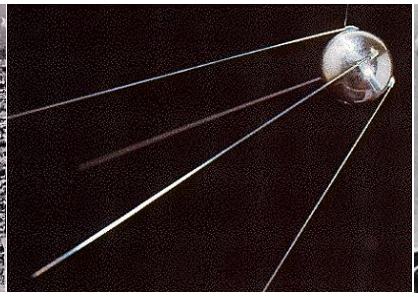
Minuteman II Warhead

Cold War Timeline

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site
Located 70 miles east of Rapid City,
South Dakota off I-90 Exit 131
605-433-5552, www.nps.gov/mimi
mimi_information@nps.gov

1945 - Atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end World War II
1946 - Churchill gives Iron Curtain Speech
1949 - Soviet Union explodes atomic bomb
1952 - United States explodes hydrogen bomb
1953 - Soviet Union explodes hydrogen bomb
1956 - Khrushchev tells U.S. *"We will bury you."*
1957 - World's first satellite, Sputnik, launched by Soviet Union
1959 - Nikita Khrushchev visits USA

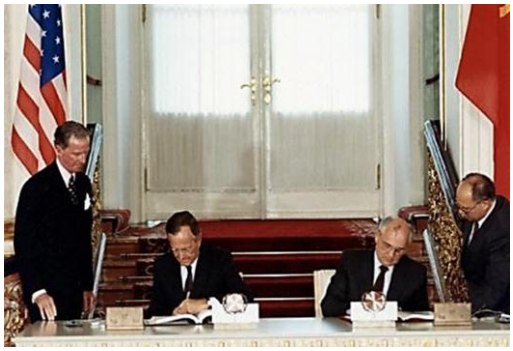
Destruction at Hiroshima


Sputnik satellite

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev

Watching a missile test launch

1961 - Soviet Union places first man in space, Yuri Gagarin
1961 - Berlin Wall built
1962 - Cuban Missile Crisis
1962 - First Minuteman Missiles become active on October 27th in Montana
1969 - U.S. lands on moon
1972 - SALT I agreement signed - first treaty limiting nuclear arms
1972 - U.S. President Richard Nixon visits Moscow
1973 - Yom Kippur War, U.S. forces go on worldwide alert
1975 - Soviet hydrogen bomb creator Andrei Sakharov gets Nobel Peace Prize
1983 - U.S. President Reagan proposes Star Wars
1986 - Chernobyl nuclear power plant meltdown disaster
1987 - Reagan gives "Tear Down that Wall" speech in Berlin
1989 - Berlin Wall comes down
1990 - Germany reunifies
1991 - START Treaty signed by U.S. President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev
1992 - Declaration ending the Cold War signed by the Soviet Union and the U.S.
1999 - Minuteman Missile National Historic Site designated


Signing of START Treaty in 1991

Minuteman Missile National Historic site is the only unit of the National Park Service designated to tell the story of the Cold War. Minuteman Missile NHS commemorates the role of the Minuteman Missile System in preventing nuclear war and preserving peace for over 30 years, and the men and women who made it possible.