

1 **Introduction**

2 In 1999 Congress authorized the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site (MMNHS) as
3 a unit of the National Park System “to preserve, protect, and interpret for the benefit and
4 enjoyment of present and future generations the structures associated with the Minuteman
5 II missile defense system.” To that effect, a contract was awarded through U.S. Air
6 Force funding in 1999 to Dr. Steven J. Bucklin of the University of South Dakota to
7 conduct and secure ten oral histories of former military personnel associated with the
8 DELTA -1 and DELTA-9 sites that are the key sites of the MMNHS. Seven additional
9 oral histories were obtained in March 2002, using National Park Service funding for a
10 historic resource study. Informants included two former missileers, a local rancher, a
11 local businessman, two anti-nuclear activists, and a construction supervisor. These oral
12 histories are available at the park site where researchers have already used them for
13 publications.

14 Funds became available in 2005 for ten more interviews. Chris Wilkinson, an
15 interpreter at the MMNHS and then Park Ranger at Jewel Cave National Monument,
16 contacted Dr. Bucklin in February 2005 to apprise him of the interest in additional
17 interviews. Michelle Watson, Midwest Region Cultural Anthropologist of the National
18 Park Service, followed up the initial contact in March 2005. After a period of
19 consultation between Park Superintendent Mark Herberger, Ms. Watson, and Dr.
20 Bucklin, the three produced a detailed Scope of Work statement in July 2005.

21 Dr. Bucklin brought Dr. Robert Hilderbrand to the project as Co-Principal
22 Investigator. Hilderbrand was an interviewer in 1999 and Bucklin believed it was
23 important to the project that Hilderbrand’s involvement be continued. Bucklin and

1 Hilderbrand both hold Ph. D.s from the University of Iowa with primary fields in
2 American Diplomatic history. Their training lent itself well to this project and to the
3 previous set of interviews they conducted with military personnel in 1999. Both men
4 served in the United States Army and both are long-term residents of South Dakota. Dr.
5 Bucklin was born in Huron, South Dakota, and has been a professor at the University of
6 South Dakota for ten years. Dr. Hilderbrand is a native of Marshalltown, Iowa, but has
7 lived in South Dakota since 1980 when he accepted a professorship at USD.

8 After conducting the 1999 interviews, Bucklin and Hilderbrand urged the NPS to
9 fund a second and perhaps third phase of oral history collection. The second phase they
10 envisioned would focus on collecting the memories of civilians whose lives had
11 intersected with the missile fields and missileers. In phase three, they hoped to conduct
12 interviews with representatives of the Lakota peoples whose reservations are adjacent to
13 the missile fields.

14 The firm Meade and Hunt, Inc. of Lansing, Michigan, conducted the first set of
15 civilian interviews, but they were limited to seven informants. For the second set of
16 interviews Bucklin and Hilderbrand conducted, the MMNHS staff were assigned the task
17 of identifying residents of western South Dakota whose property or businesses were
18 directly influenced by the Minuteman Missile complex. Initially, they identified twenty-
19 five potential informants. Dr. Bucklin attempted to contact all of them. Interviews were
20 arranged with seven informants and were conducted at the Wall Community Center,
21 Wall, SD, from 22-25 August 2005. Informants included Bill Cissell, Kerry Davis,
22 Norman Fauske, David Fauske, Ric Hustead, Don Paulsen, and William Bielmaier. Dr.
23 Bucklin conducted four of the interviews and Dr. Robert Hilderbrand, three.

1 In order to meet the minimum requirement of ten interviews, Dr. Bucklin arranged
2 an interview with Senator Tim Johnson. Dr. Hilderbrand conducted that interview at
3 Senator Johnson's field office in Sioux Falls, SD. Dr. Bucklin also identified Pastor Joe
4 Villalobos of Vermillion, SD, for an interview. Pastor Villalobos served as a cook at
5 DELTA-1 and other Launch Control Facilities before leaving the Air Force to attend
6 divinity school. Reverend Joseph Vogel, parish priest of St. Katherine Drexel in Sioux
7 Falls, SD, was the final informant. Father Vogel was a captain in the Security Police
8 stationed at Malmstrom AFB in Montana, but conducted inspections of the 44th Missile
9 Wing in South Dakota.

10 **Project methodology**

11 Standards for conducting interviews were drawn from the United States Army
12 Manual for Oral History and from the University of South Dakota Oral History Center's
13 literature on the subject.¹ Standard equipment was the Marantz cassette recorder, omni-
14 dimensional microphones, and TDK normal bias 120 minute cassette tapes. Informants
15 were contacted and briefed as to the nature of the project, the need for them to sign a
16 release authorizing the NPS to use the product of the interview, and were provided a
17 general idea as to what the subject of questions would be. Dr. Bucklin authored a draft
18 list of questions and submitted them to Michelle Watson, Mark Herberger, and Dr.
19 Hilderbrand for comment.

20 Dr. Bucklin, Dr. Hilderbrand, Superintendent Herberger, Mr. Wilkinson, and Ms.
21 Watson met in Wall for a workshop on the project's scope and direction in July 2005.
22 Kerry Davis conducted a tour of the DELTA-1 and DELTA-9 facilities for the group.

¹ The Army standards are found at <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/oral.htm>. We also referred to Ramon Harris, et al., *The Practice of Oral History* (Glen Rock, NJ: 1975).

1 Dr. Bucklin had exhausted the contact list by this time and interviews dates and times
2 were now negotiated for the period 20-25 August 2005.

3 Upon completion of the interviews in Wall, Dr. Bucklin delivered the tapes and
4 signed releases to the Oral History Center of the University of South Dakota for
5 transcription. Staffing issues led to delays in transcriptions and an extension was
6 requested and granted to allow for a 1 March 2006 delivery.

7 **Analysis of the methodology and the research process**

8 Bucklin and Hilderbrand believed that the civilian interviews would bring a
9 different perspective to what it meant to live with nuclear weapons in your backyard.
10 The people of western South Dakota lived with not one, but two of the three arms of the
11 nuclear triad in their backyards: the nuclear delivery system of the B-52 and B-1
12 bombers stationed at Ellsworth AFB and the nuclear delivery system of the Minuteman
13 Missiles. The informants included a journalist, a United States senator, several ranchers,
14 a local businessman, a retired telecommunications worker, and two men who turned to
15 divinity school after leaving the Air Force.

16 Some informants expressed their concern that their stories were not that interesting.
17 As an example, Ric Husted thought he had “only ten minutes” worth of material.
18 Husted also joked about how such interviews might come back to haunt someone who
19 was interested in politics and mentioned the Senate hearings being conducted with regard
20 to the nomination of John G. Roberts as Chief Justice of the United States. Nonetheless,
21 all understood that what they had experienced was an important part of their nation’s
22 history and the interviewers sensed a sort of patriotic pride from most of them that they
23 had “done their part.”

1 There were significant differences in the experiences of the military personnel and
2 the civilians. One of these that became quickly apparent to Bucklin and Hilderbrand was
3 the fact that most of the civilians did not believe they were living in an area that the
4 Soviets had targeted. In nearly every interview, the opinion was stated that large
5 population or industrial centers were the targets, not the missile fields. That, of course, is
6 a mistaken conception. The missile fields *were* targeted, with multiple missiles assigned
7 the task to take them out in a first strike.

8 This may be the result of what John Smoley identified in his paper on public
9 memory of Cold War air defense systems as “psychic numbing.”² This is a condition
10 where people who live their lives bombarded with potential negative consequences from
11 something in their daily lives tend to minimize its potential to affect them. The
12 informants found it difficult to accept the fact that they lived on the brink of nuclear
13 extinction, so they dealt with it through a form of denial.

14 **Analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of individual interviews**

15 The civilian informants almost unanimously referred to the location of the missile
16 fields as an overall positive presence in their lives, although they also recalled some
17 problems. Norman Fauske, a farmer who lives in Cactus Flat and owns land adjacent to
18 Delta-01, recalled that the Air Force kept his roads cleared in the winter better than the
19 county does now. Ric Hustead, co-owner of Wall Drug and a former cook for missile
20 crews, talked about the business the Air Force brought to his community. Don Paulsen,
21 general manager for Golden West Telephone from 1964-1991, recalled good relations
22 with the Air Force personnel and the substantial contracts his company received as a

² John Smoley, “Public Memory of America’s Cold War Air Defenses.” A paper presented at the Northern Great Plains History Conference, 29 September 2005, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

1 result of the missile site construction.³

2 The Fauske brothers discussed the Minuteman Area Landowners Association and
3 recalled that it helped negotiate better prices for rights-of-way and for field disruption
4 from the laying of communication cable, and also helped farmers who wanted the Air
5 Force to locate a silo or launch control facility at a different corner of their field.⁴
6 Father Joseph Vogel expressed some concern prior to the interview that he might reveal
7 classified information, but very quickly began to provide thoughtful commentary
8 interspersed with a sense of humor typical to the Air Force and other military personnel.
9 Vogel recalled experiences of “jacking up” personnel who did not follow standard
10 operating procedure and had valuable insights into what it meant to be a “cop” or security
11 policeman.⁵

12 Of greater interest are Father Vogel’s views on the weapons the missiles carried.
13 He supported the deterrent mission of the missiles and said that the Bible and Catholic
14 doctrine justifies strong national defense. In addition, although noting the terrible
15 destruction and loss of life it would entail, Father Vogel also believed that there are
16 certain circumstances under which both his faith and his church’s doctrine would justify a

³ Norman Fauske Interview, conducted by Steven J. Bucklin, 23 August 2005 in Wall, SD. Transcribed and digitized at the University of South Dakota Oral History Center. Available at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, SD; Ric Husted Interview, conducted by Steven J. Bucklin, 22 August 2005 in Wall, SD. Transcribed and digitized at the University of South Dakota Oral History Center. Available at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, SD; Don Paulsen Interview, conducted by Steven J. Bucklin, 25 August 2005 in Wall, SD. Transcribed and digitized at the University of South Dakota Oral History Center. Available at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, SD.

⁴ David Fauske Interview, conducted by Steven J. Bucklin, 22 August 2005 in Wall, SD. Transcribed and digitized at the University of South Dakota Oral History Center. Available at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, SD; Norman Fauske Interview, conducted by Steven J. Bucklin, 23 August 2005 in Wall, SD. Transcribed and digitized at the University of South Dakota Oral History Center. Available at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, SD;

⁵ For another security police interview, see Ken Bush Interview conducted by Steven Bucklin, 19 May 1999 in Rapid City, SD. Transcribed and digitized at the University of South Dakota Oral History Center. Available at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, SD.

1 first strike.⁶ The other member of the clergy interviewed, Joseph Villalobos, also
2 suggested a connection between his reaction to the possibility of nuclear war and his
3 faith. Pastor Villalobos stated that he never really feared a nuclear war because his
4 reading of Biblical prophecy indicated that the end of the world was still some time in the
5 future. Dr. Hilderbrand felt that this point of view limited Pastor Villalobos's ability to
6 be reflective in the interview. Although this was frustrating for the interviewer, Pastor
7 Villalobos provided a great many valuable details about daily life at DELTA-1 and the
8 experience of serving as a cook.⁷

9 Senator Tim Johnson's interview reflected both the importance of a politician's
10 perspective as well as its limits. Johnson was instrumental in supporting the legislation
11 that created the MMNHS, so he had insights to that process, but as an elected politician,
12 and one who is likely to run for re-election, there are limits to what such a person will
13 freely express regarding his opinions about nuclear war, nuclear weapons, and nuclear
14 delivery systems. Dr. Hilderbrand expressed a sense of his own unwillingness to press
15 Sen. Johnson with follow-up questions that might have political ramifications. This
16 potential may be the reason that we were unsuccessful in getting former Senator Tom
17 Daschle to agree to an interview.⁸

18 William Bielmaier's interview demonstrated that even those individuals who
19 think that they have little of significance to add can contribute a rich store of details about

⁶ Joseph Vogel, Interview conducted by Steven J. Bucklin, 9 February 2006 in Sioux Falls, SD. Transcribed and digitized at the University of South Dakota Oral History Center. Available at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, SD.

⁷ Villalobos, Joe. Interview conducted by Robert Hilderbrand, 6 February 2006 in Vermillion, SD. Transcribed and digitized at the University of South Dakota Oral History Center. Available at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, SD.

⁸ Tim Johnson Interview, conducted by Robert Hilderbrand, 10 October 2005 in Sioux Falls, SD. Transcribed and digitized at the University of South Dakota Oral History Center. Available at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, SD; Dr. Bucklin contacted Tom Daschle's principal aide, Steve Hildebrand, via email in August 2005 about an interview on several occasions, but no interview was scheduled.

1 daily life in the presence of the Minuteman missiles. The Bielmaiers lived across the road
2 from a missile site and experienced its construction, operation, and decommissioning.
3 Although at times the interview revealed the intermingling of memory, myth, and
4 imagination, Mr. Bielmaier turned out to be a valuable source.⁹

5 The interview with Bill Cissell focused on the experience of growing up in
6 proximity to the Minuteman missiles. It was evident that the missiles made less of an
7 impact on him than it did on adults living in the area, which is in itself a valuable finding.
8 Mr. Cissell had fewer memories to relate and rarely related “stories” about his
9 experiences.¹⁰

10 The opposite was true of the interview with Kerry Davis. Not only was it obvious
11 that Mr. Davis’s experience as a missileer had made a great impression on him, but his
12 work as a tour guide at DELTA-1 had transformed his experiences into set-piece
13 “stories.” These recollections and reminiscences made for a fascinating interview,
14 although the fact that they had obviously been repeated and even developed for effect
15 may make them somewhat less reliable than most oral history.¹¹

16 **Recommendations for future studies or topics requiring further study**

17 There are at least two groups whose memories have not been preserved that
18 require a focused effort to identify individuals from within them: women and Native
19 Americans. Dr. Bucklin sought Native American voices and contacted two Native

⁹ Bielmaier, William. Interview conducted by Robert Hilderbrand, 22 August 2005 in Wall, SD. Transcribed and digitized at the University of South Dakota Oral History Center. Available at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, SD.

¹⁰ Cissell, Bill. Interview conducted by Robert Hilderbrand, 25 August 2005 in Wall, SD. Transcribed and digitized at the University of South Dakota Oral History Center. Available at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, SD.

¹¹ Davis, Kerry. Interview conducted by Robert Hilderbrand, 23 August 2005 in Wall, SD. Transcribed and digitized at the University of South Dakota Oral History Center. Available at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, SD.

1 American tribal elders for advice and contacts. This was not successful. More time is
2 needed in the next phase, should one be funded, to allow for Bucklin to seek contact with
3 the leadership of the Cheyenne River, Pine Ridge, and Standing Rock Reservations.

4 The entrance of women in the missile fields was not without controversy. As one
5 example, additional construction was required in the Launch Control Facilities to
6 accommodate female personnel. There was, too, significant debate among the males as
7 to whether females were qualified for missile duty. The Air Force could identify the first
8 woman to serve in the missile fields and at DELTA-1 and DELTA-9 specifically. A list
9 of additional women who subsequently served should be created and provided to the park
10 superintendent and the researcher who conducts the next set of interviews.

11 In an effort to reach missileers and interview them, we recommend that the
12 MMNHS host a reunion of the missileers in Rapid City in the near future. A team of
13 interviewers should be present at a central site and be prepared to conduct interviews. A
14 screening process could be used to identify targeted individuals through the registration
15 process, as may not be necessary to interview informants whose duty assignments are
16 already represented in existing interviews.

17 We also recommend that the staff of the MMNHS participate in regional history
18 conferences. The Northern Great Plains History Conference and the Missouri Valley
19 History Conference are two such conferences that would provide the opportunity for the
20 staff to meet scholars and extend efforts to identify potential informants.

21 **Contacts with potential donations for interpretation or museum exhibits**

22 Ms. Kathleen Fitzgerald, a Historical Landscape Architect in the Cultural
23 Resources Division of the Midwest Regional Office identified her brother Bret Fitzgerald

1 as a potential donor to the MMNHS. Major Fitzgerald served as a Flight Deputy as well
2 as other duties in the missile fields. Ms. Fitzgerald noted that her brother was
3 considering donating his uniform and an U.S. Air Force manual. He also suggested that
4 Mr. Gary Gunther would be interested in this project.¹²

¹² See email from Michelle Watson to Steven Bucklin, 14 July 2005