

## Cold War Hardline Communications Pit 1961-1965

In 1961, Dyess Air Force Base, of Abilene, Texas, was one of six United States Air Force bases selected to host the Atlas F Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) system. Twelve launch sites, complete with launch control centers and silos, were constructed in a pattern that encircled Abilene. This was a massive construction project that bolstered military defense during the Cold War and established the base's legacy in Texas and U.S. history. Dyess AFB was the only site selected in Texas. The silos could house and protect the Atlas F missile, America's first operational ICBM, from all but a direct nuclear strike.

Beneath this concrete block is what remains of one of the many, now abandoned, underground "hardline communications pits." These pits, each about 6-feet deep, contained a sophisticated system of "hardline" communications cables and tunnels that connected the 12 silos to each other and to the control center at Dyess AFB. The process of protecting the missiles, their subterranean launch complexes, and the connecting communications infrastructure from physical and electronic attack, was referred to as "hardening". The "hardline" network was protected from electromagnetic pulse (EMP) that could be generated from a Soviet nuclear attack. However, failure of the network to "harden" could result in EMP entering the sites and disabling all electronics.

The 12 silos formed a 35-mile radius around Dyess AFB. Each silo was 180-feet deep and 52-feet wide and contained an 85-foot Atlas missile built by General Dynamics. Each missile carried a 4.5 megaton nuclear warhead that had the capability of reaching Russia in approximately 30 minutes.

Though the Base never had to engage its 12 missiles, highly-trained personnel of the Strategic Air Command's 578<sup>th</sup> Strategic Missile Squadron, who operated the system beginning in 1962, were always prepared for action. All silos were armed and prepared to launch during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. The Atlas ICBM mission was terminated by the Air Force in 1965, and the underground silos and communications pits were salvaged and abandoned.