

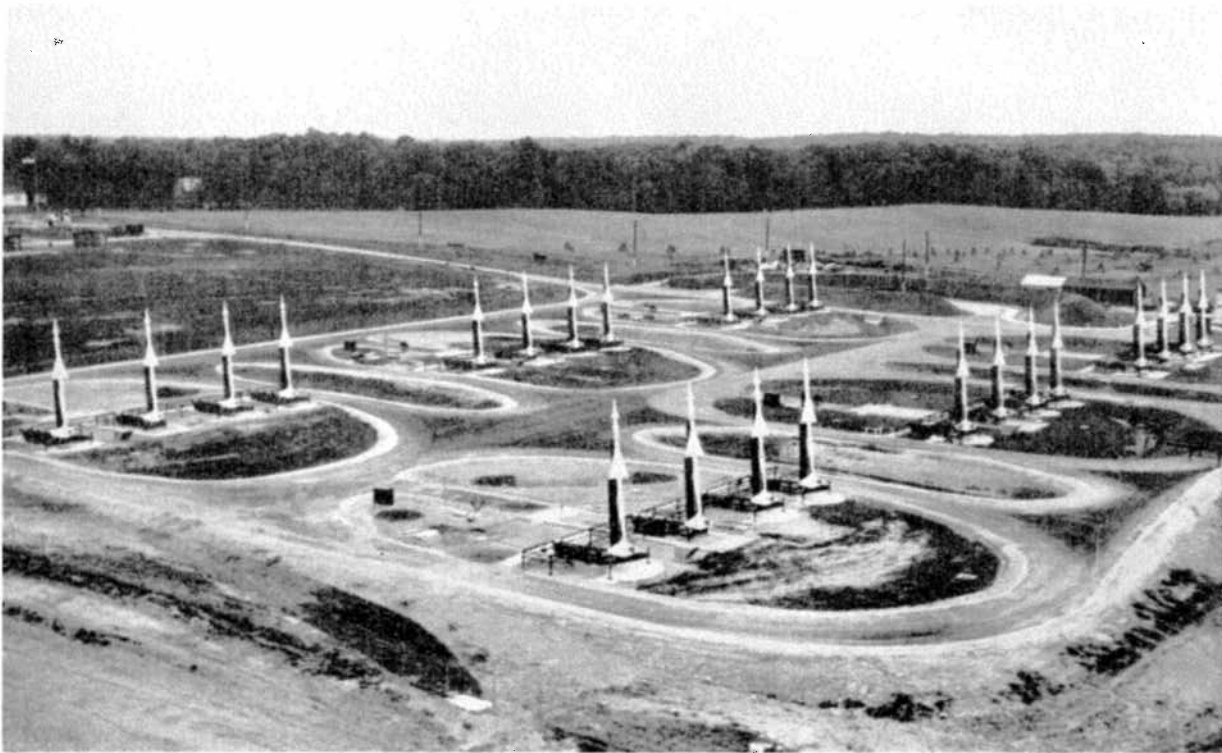


Fairfax

Chronicles

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Twenty-four Nike anti-aircraft missiles, in position for launch at the Lorton emplacement in December, 1956. Top military and government officials, and foreign dignitaries toured Lorton, as did many Fairfax County citizens. (Photo: copyright, Washington Post; reprinted courtesy of D. C. Public Library.)

THE QUIVER OF ZEUS:

NIKE ANTI-AIRCRAFT MISSILES IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

by Christopher Bright

(The author is a historical research volunteer with the Heritage Resources Branch.)

LIKE OTHER AMERICANS of the 1950's, many Fairfax County citizens worried about nuclear war with the Soviet Union. The United States and U.S.S.R., former allies, had become adversaries after World War II. National policy-makers worried that Soviet bombers might attack Washington, D. C. and other key cities. As a suburb of the nation's capital, Fairfax County could have been vulnerable in such an attack. Consequently, many Fairfax County residents participated in air raid drills, and some even built bomb shelters in their yards. The county school board also considered construction of

elementary schools built to withstand nuclear blast and fallout.

ON A NATIONAL SCALE the U. S. Army was instructed to make defensive preparations in the event of such an attack. Those defensive efforts included the construction by the Army, in 1954 and 1955, of three anti-aircraft missile emplacements, or "batteries," in Fairfax County. Part of a network of twenty such batteries that formed a ring around Washington and Baltimore, three Nike missile batteries were located in Fairfax County, one at

Editorial Note

THIS ISSUE OF *FAIRFAX CHRONICLES* features two articles on the twentieth-century history of Fairfax County researched and written by Heritage Resources Branch historical research volunteers. **Christopher Bright** and **Paige Watson** donated to Fairfax County many hours of their time and talent to complete these articles. They brought to the projects expertise in twentieth-century history, and expended time the staff could not spend preparing the articles. These excellent articles that inform and enlighten the citizens of Fairfax County could not have been written without this volunteer assistance.

Both volunteers grew up and were educated in Fairfax County schools; Mr. Bright is a 1983 graduate of West Springfield High School; Ms. Watson graduated from Chantilly High School in 1990. Both went on to major in history at the College of William and Mary.

Fairfax County is fortunate, indeed, to have such talented, committed, and generous citizens, who are willing to share their time and ability with their fellow citizens. Heritage Resources is especially appreciative, and we thank these and all our many volunteers for their efforts.

Donald Sweig, Ph.D.
County Historian

Lorton, near the District of Columbia prison, a second southwest of what is now Fairfax City, and the third north of Route 7 near Herndon. These batteries of missiles were the twentieth-century counterparts of the ring of forts that were constructed around Washington during the Civil War. Nike batteries were built around other cities as well.

The Nike batteries were designed to fire at approaching Soviet bombers. They were different in both size, design, and purpose from the much larger intercontinental attack missiles that were deployed in deep silos in the American Midwest in later years. The Nike batteries soon became an obvious and tangible manifestation of American defensive determination and capability to the residents of Fairfax County.

THE NIKE MISSILE SYSTEM was developed in 1951 and received its designation because of an Army decision to name each of its various missile types after mythological Greek figures. It was revolutionary at the time because it involved using three separate but interconnected radar units and relatively complex equipment to direct the missile towards its target, even after launch. The Nikes had many advantages over the anti-aircraft guns previously used by the Army because of their long range, speed, and ability to be controlled in flight.

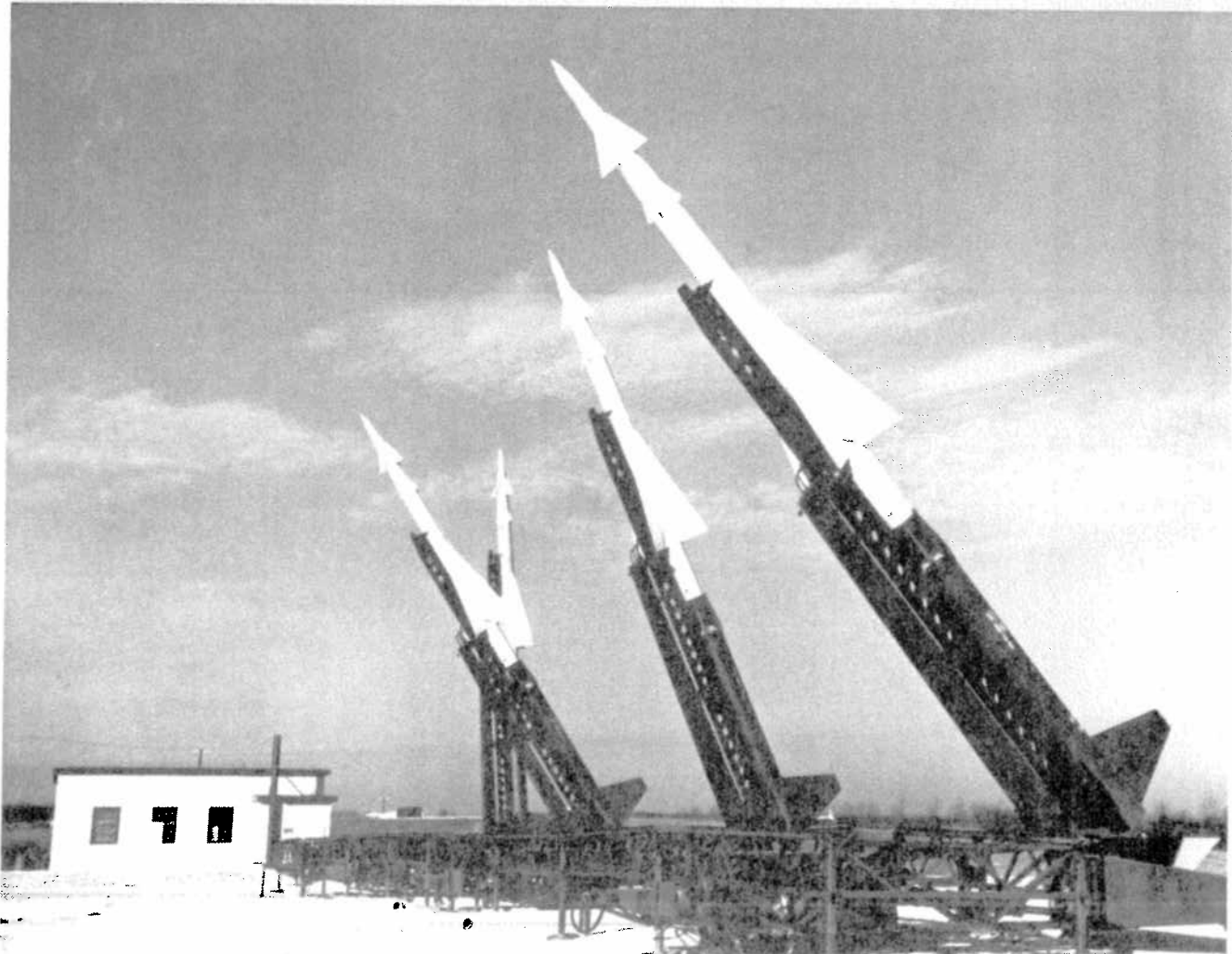
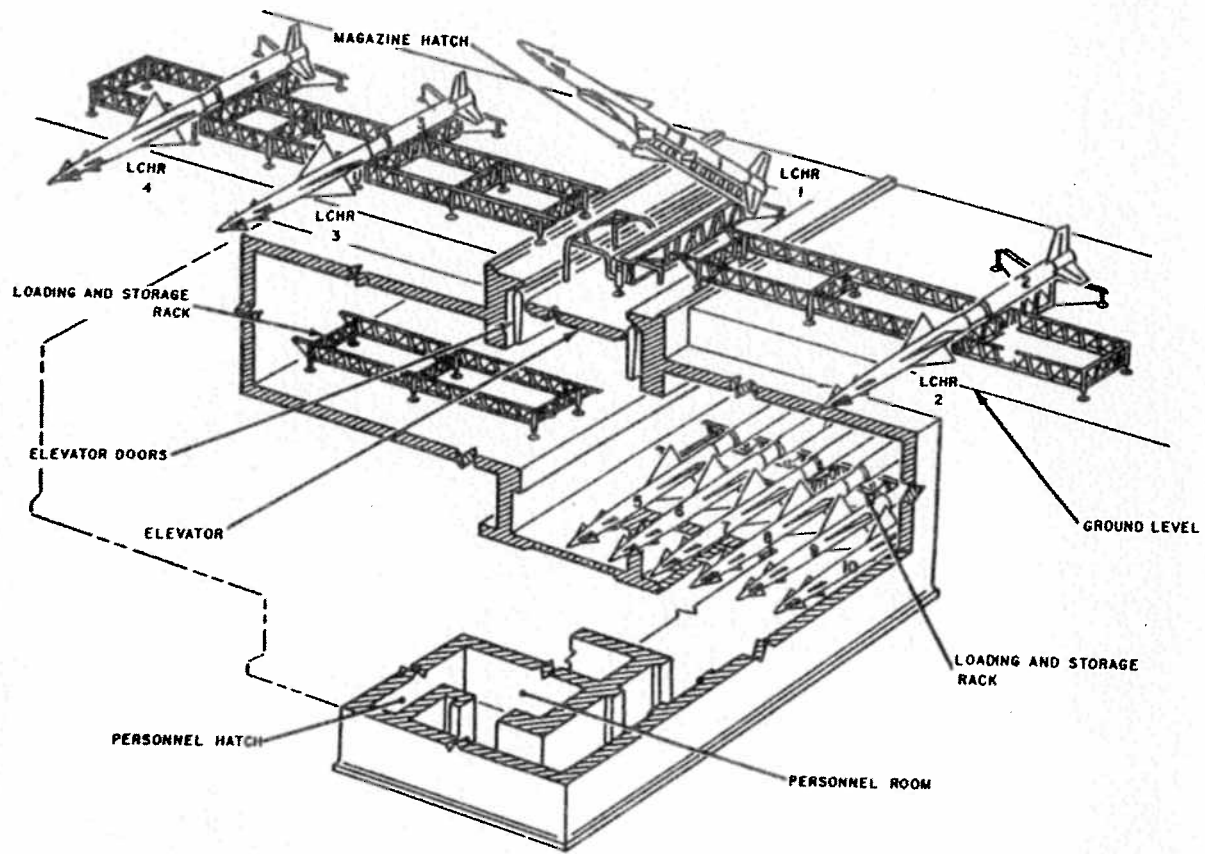
The Nike emplacements required two parcels of land for each battery. The radar and other guidance electronics were housed, along with simple cinder

block barracks, offices, and a mess hall for one hundred soldiers, on an eight-acre tract. A second fifteen-acre tract, located three quarters to one mile away, housed eight to twelve missiles in underground concrete storage areas or "magazines."

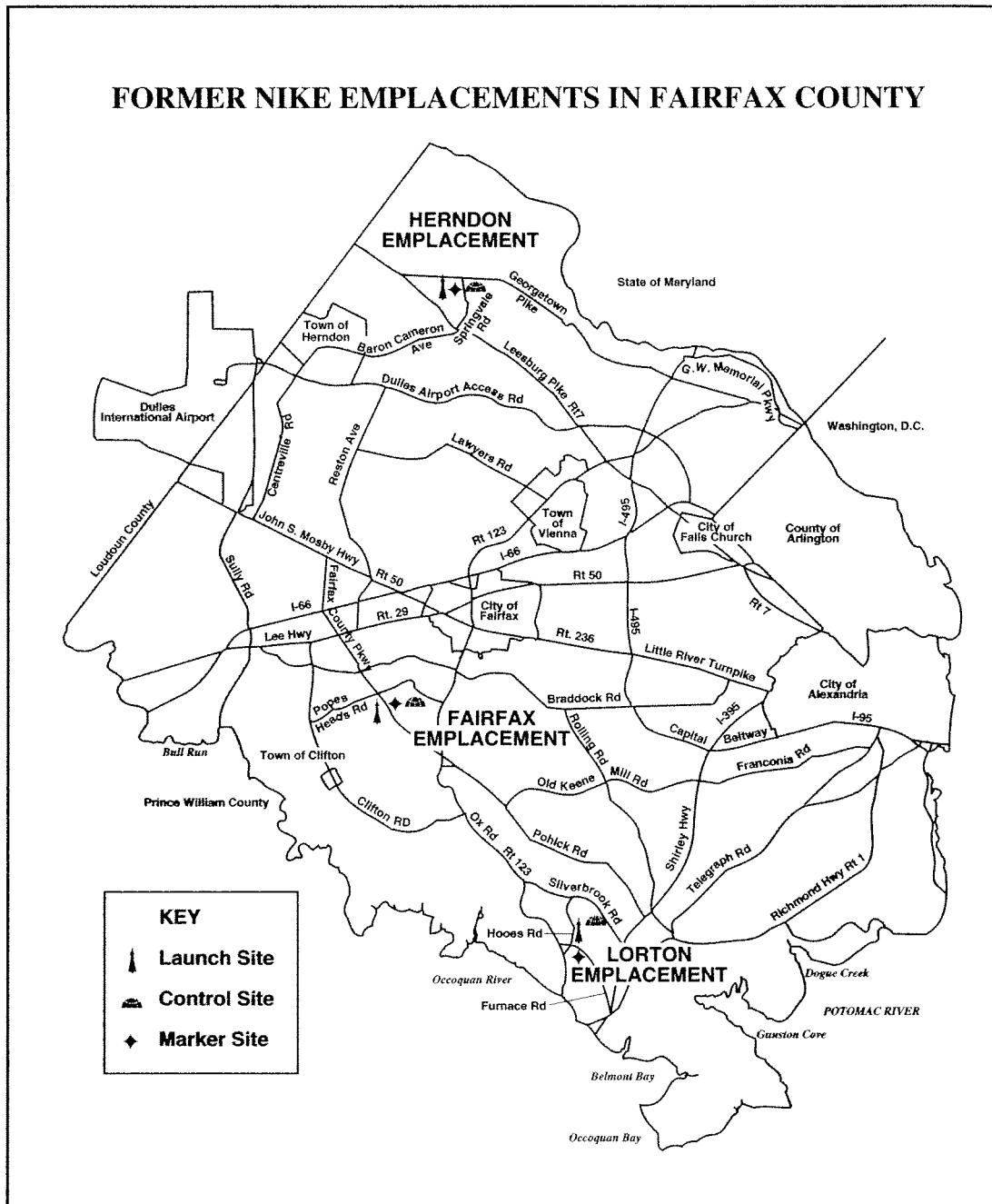
The missiles were stored horizontally on twin rails, similar to railroad tracks, which ran along the center of the magazine. On asphalt pads on top of each magazine were four evenly-spaced launchers connected by identical rails. A large rectangular platform elevator, similar to the hydraulic lifts used by service stations, could raise one missile at a time to the surface through metal doors which dropped open. Once on the surface and the doors closed, the Nike missile could be pushed along the rails to one of the adjacent launchers, or remain on the elevator where a launcher was also affixed. Thus, the missiles were stored flat and horizontal below ground, and then brought to the surface, placed on their launchers and raised to an 85-degree angle or

Top right - Nike missiles were stored underground and moved into position on the elevator along the twin-rails of the underground loading and storage rack. The elevator brought each missile to the surface, where it was moved to a launcher on the twin-rails above ground. This diagram taken from the Department of the Army Technical Manual FM 44-80, Procedures and Drills for the Nike I System.

Bottom right - Each missile was affixed to its own launcher and raised to the launch position of 85 degrees. (Photo: Lorton, Virginia., 1954. Copyright, Washington Post; reprinted courtesy of D. C. Public Library.)



FORMER NIKE EMPLACEMENTS IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

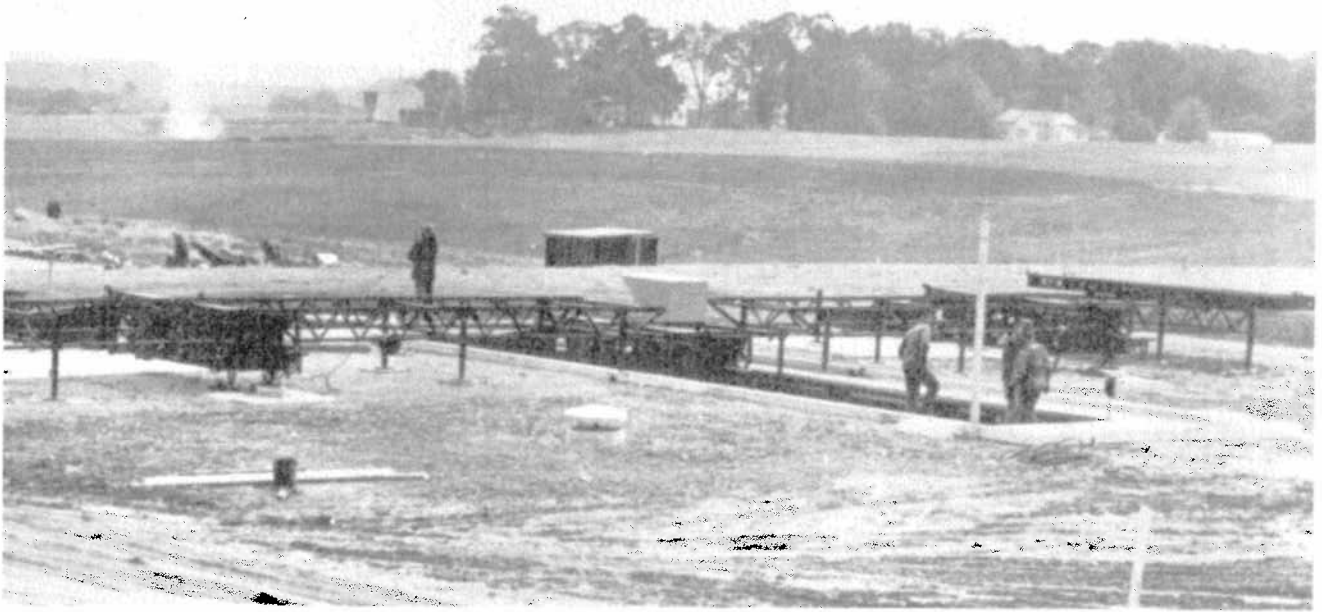


The three Nike anti-aircraft missile emplacements in Fairfax County were part of a network of twenty such sites that formed a defensive circle or ring around the Washington-Baltimore area. Other cities in Virginia and across America were also protected by Nike missiles.

attitude for launch.

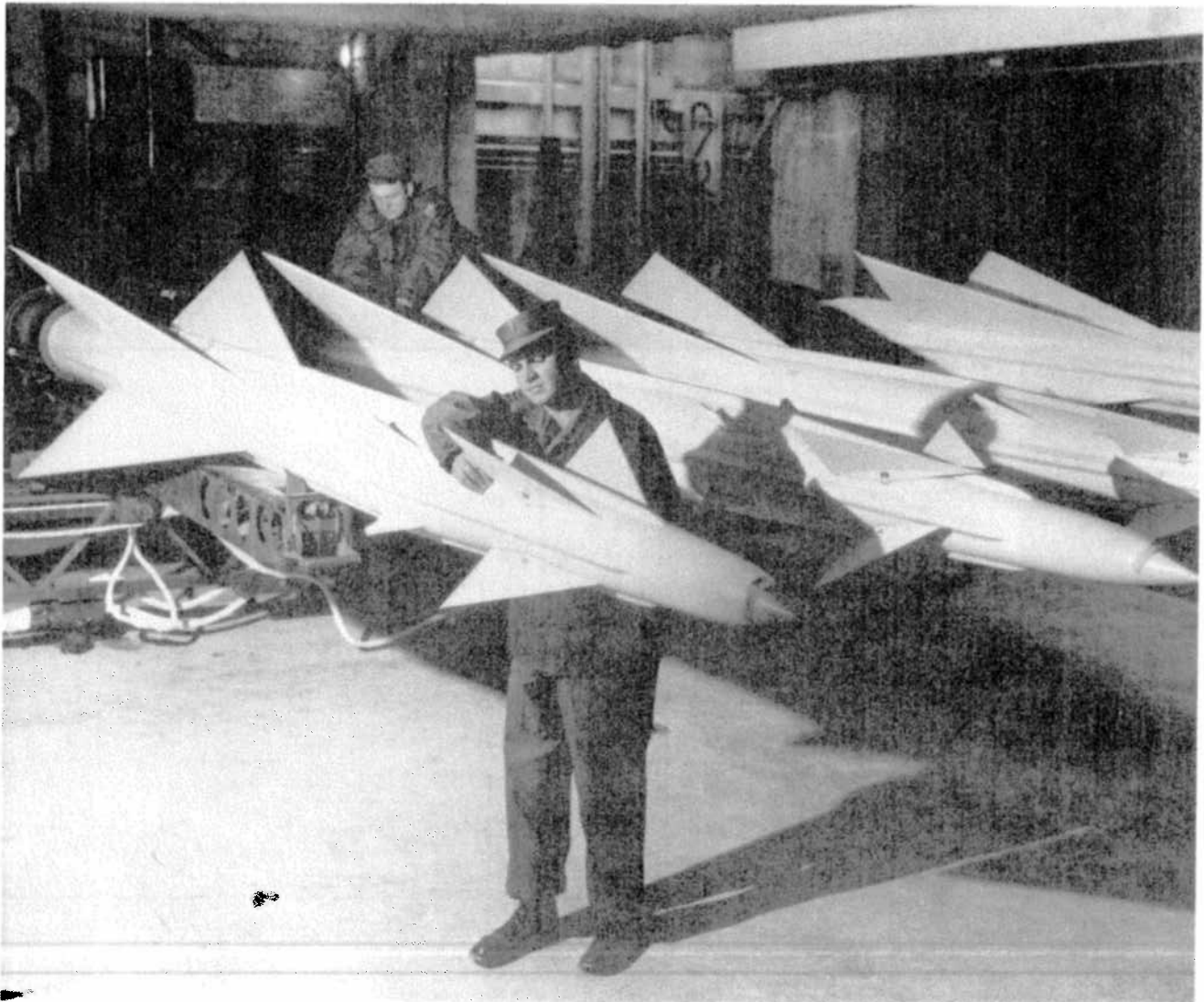
The Army Corps of Engineers identified the locations for the Fairfax County missile batteries in 1953. In addition to the land for the actual sites, various easements on adjacent property were often required in order to maintain safe distances from dwellings or to prevent vegetation or other objects from blocking the radar. Purchase of land in Fairfax

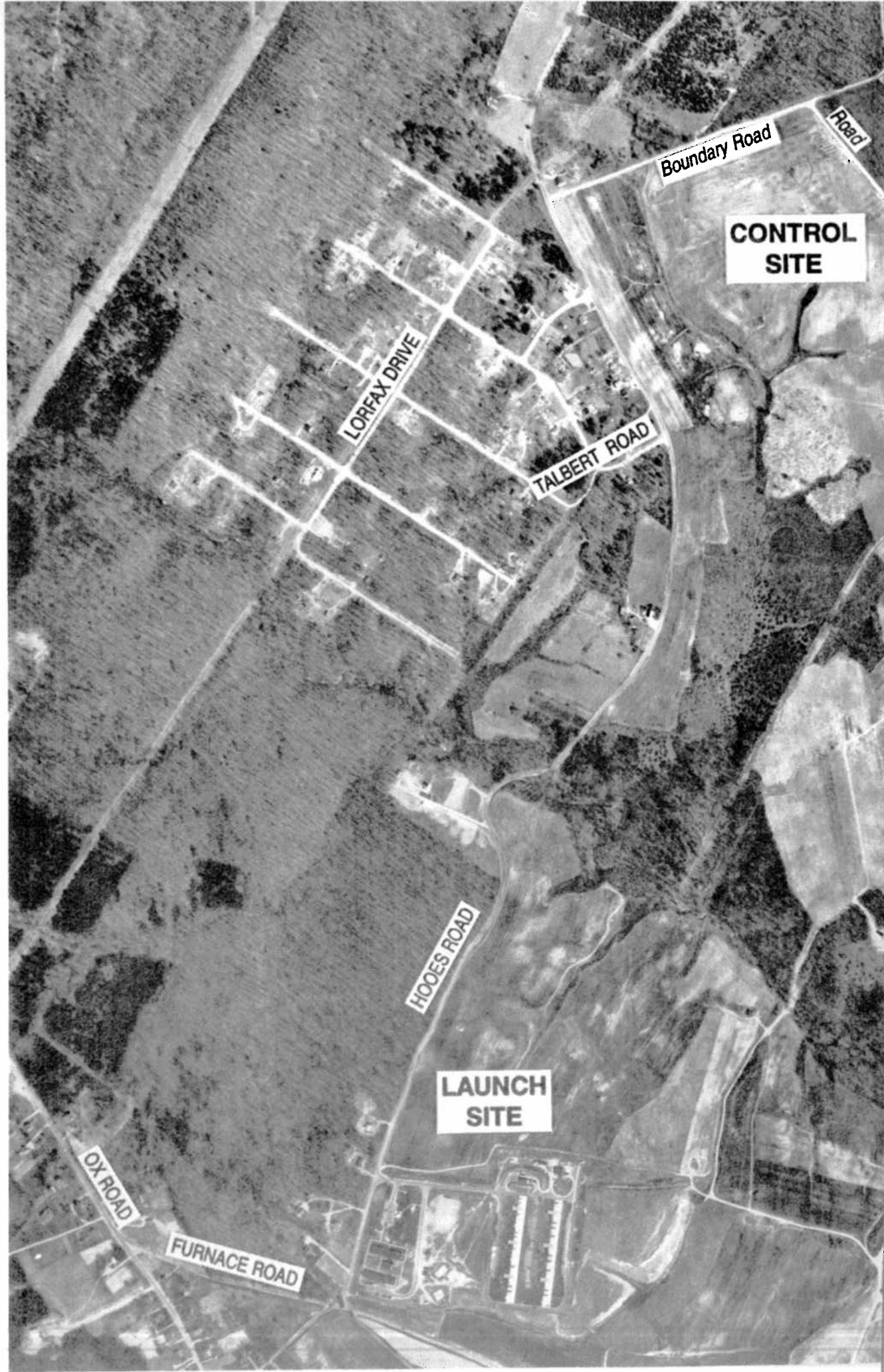
County for the batteries garnered little attention, perhaps because the areas acquired were in scarcely-populated rural sections of the county. It may also have been that Fairfax County residents were preoccupied at the time with resisting another, much larger proposed federal land purchase: twelve-thousand acres in Burke for a new jet airport to serve the District of Columbia. (The airport was



Three soldiers, in center right, are standing on the slightly lowered elevator that brought the Nike missiles from underground storage to the surface for mounting on launchers at rear of elevator. (Photo: Lorton, Virginia, December 1954. Copyright, Washington Post; reprinted courtesy of D. C. Public Library.)

The Nike missiles were stored underground and inspected frequently by U. S. Army personnel to assure proper function. Light entering the underground storage area, through the open elevator shaft that brought the missiles to the surface, can be seen in the upper right. (Photo: Lorton, Virginia, December 1954. Copyright, Washington Post; reprinted courtesy of D. C. Public Library.)





Boundary Road

Road

CONTROL SITE

LORFAX DRIVE

TALBERT ROAD

HOOES ROAD

LAUNCH SITE

OX ROAD

FURNACE ROAD

Aerial photo taken on April 10, 1960 shows the Lorton Nike emplacement when in full operation. The control site complex and the launch site complex are approximately 4,500 feet apart. Facilities of the District of Columbia Department of Corrections appear at the right.
(Photo: Air Photographics, Inc.)



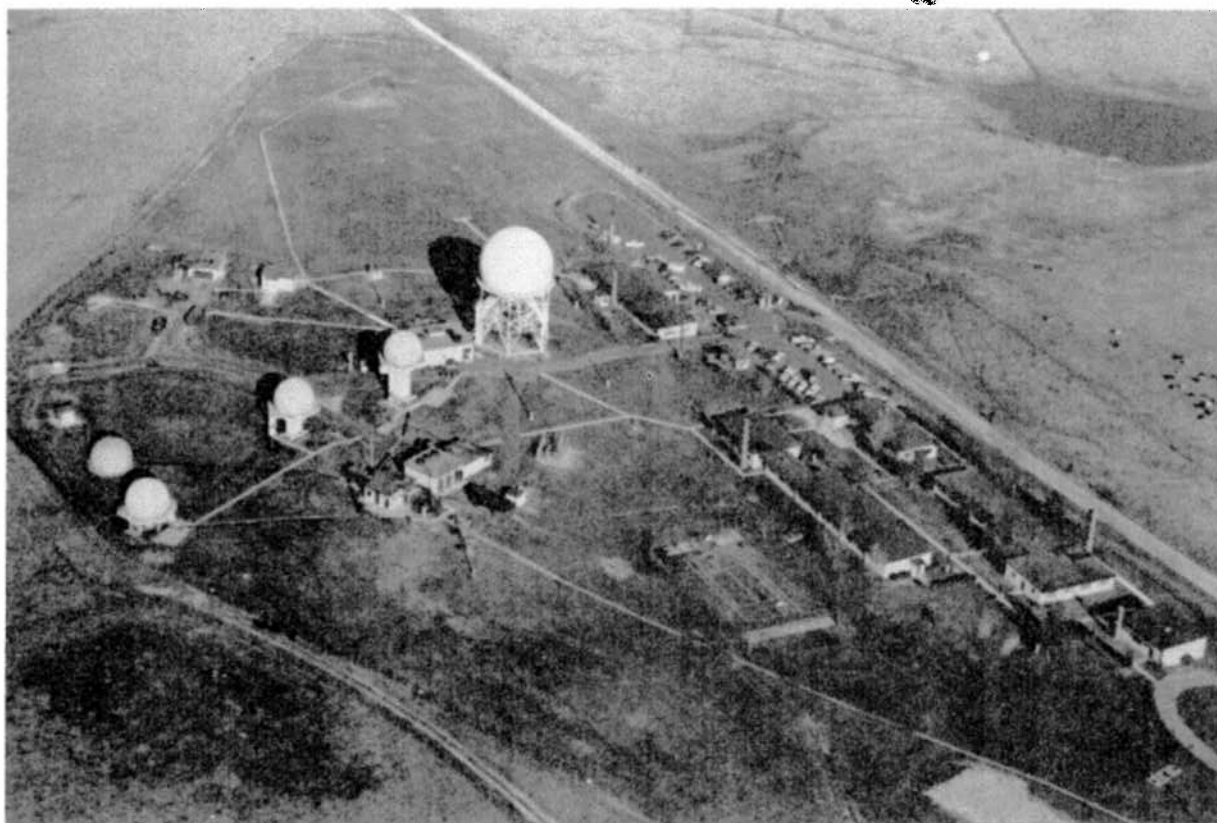
Road

SILVERBROOK ROAD

Road

Road

Prison Buildings



Aerial view of the command and control portion of the Lorton Nike site. Note the multiple radar domes, which were part of the sophisticated Nike guidance system. (Photo: Lorton, Virginia, 1972. Courtesy of Air Defense Artillery Museum, Ft. Bliss, Texas.)

eventually relocated to Chantilly and is now Dulles International Airport.)

THE FIRST BATTERY IN FAIRFAX was built in 1954 near Lorton, in a corn field used by the District of Columbia for a prison farm. The Lorton site was among the first two built in the nation. This early construction, and the battery's proximity to the national capital in Washington, D. C., led to its selection in May 1955 as the showpiece for a full-fledged public announcement of the Nike missile system and plans by the Army to deploy it nationwide. Although the Nike program was not a secret—the Army had issued press releases about it, land had been purchased, and construction contractors were building the emplacements in full public view around the country—the completion of Lorton offered an opportunity to reveal an entire operational battery to the country and the world. Articles about and photographs of Fairfax County's Lorton missile battery soon appeared in all three daily Washington, D. C. newspapers, in *The New York Times*, in magazines like *Life* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, and in other publications around the United States.

But, more was to come. Over the next several

years, Lorton's accessibility to Washington led it to be a showplace for hundreds of senior American military officers, congressional leaders, as well as visiting foreign dignitaries interested in seeing firsthand an example of America's anti-aircraft missile network. But it was not necessary to be an important government official to tour Lorton. The site opened to the public for Armed Forces Day in 1956, and in subsequent years "open houses" were held each Sunday. Civic leaders, students, and curious neighbors all visited. On a typical day in April 1957, 150 cub scouts and an equal number of civil defense volunteers and their families stopped by.

Visits to Lorton were written up in local newspapers. A *Washington Star* columnist recounted his visit, hosted by Second Lieutenant Robert M. Hardy. The guests were ushered onto a steel, 30-by-15 foot, platform at ground level, which lowered them into a large underground area. There they were shown eight "of the long white Nikes, beautiful in design, defensive in purpose." The lieutenant noted to the columnist, "This seems to awe them. When we tell them the Nikes have live warheads, some of the women utter faint screams and the noise of the elevator starts the babies crying. It's quite dramatic."

South of Pope's Head Road between state Route 123 and Clifton Road was Fairfax County's second Nike site; it was probably constructed by late 1955 or early 1956. Because of the topography of the area, more than thirty separate property easements had to be obtained for the radar sweeps, for utility lines, road access, or safety zones. Land acquisition included the condemnation of five acres of a 100-acre orchard that physician Moir F. Bowman and his wife had purchased in 1950 upon moving to Fairfax County. "We moved to the country so we would have land and trees and a place to raise our four children," Dr. Bowman explained to the *Washington Star* at the time of the condemnation, "[t]hen they hemmed us in with this Nike project. Now they tell us they have to take our trees."

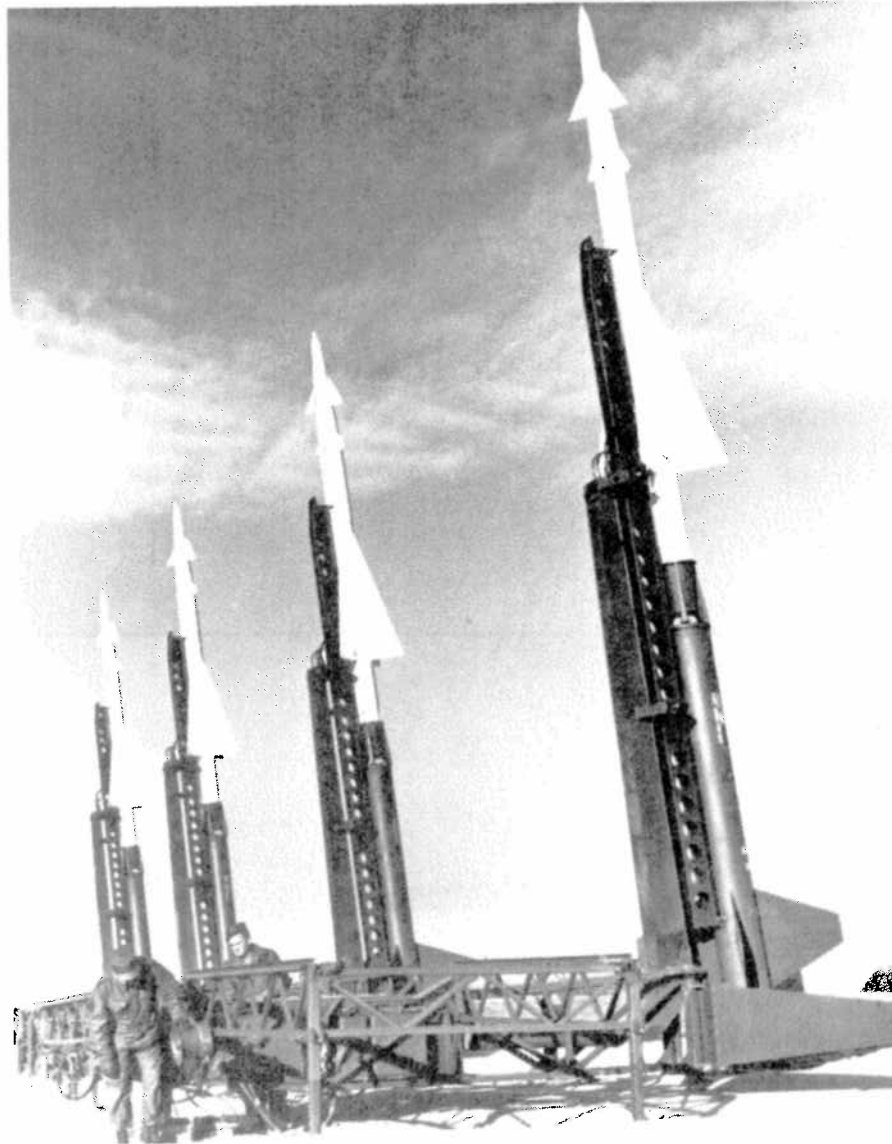
The Army was aware of its public relations responsibility to local citizens, and by January 1958, the *Fairfax Herald* reported that the Fairfax battery's commanding officer had "entertained Mr. Olson, Mrs. Randall and Mrs. Ingram, of the local chapter of the American Red Cross at lunch," and provided "an informal guided tour." The commanding officer also spoke to thirty-five members of the Fairfax Junior Chamber of Commerce gathered for their monthly meeting.

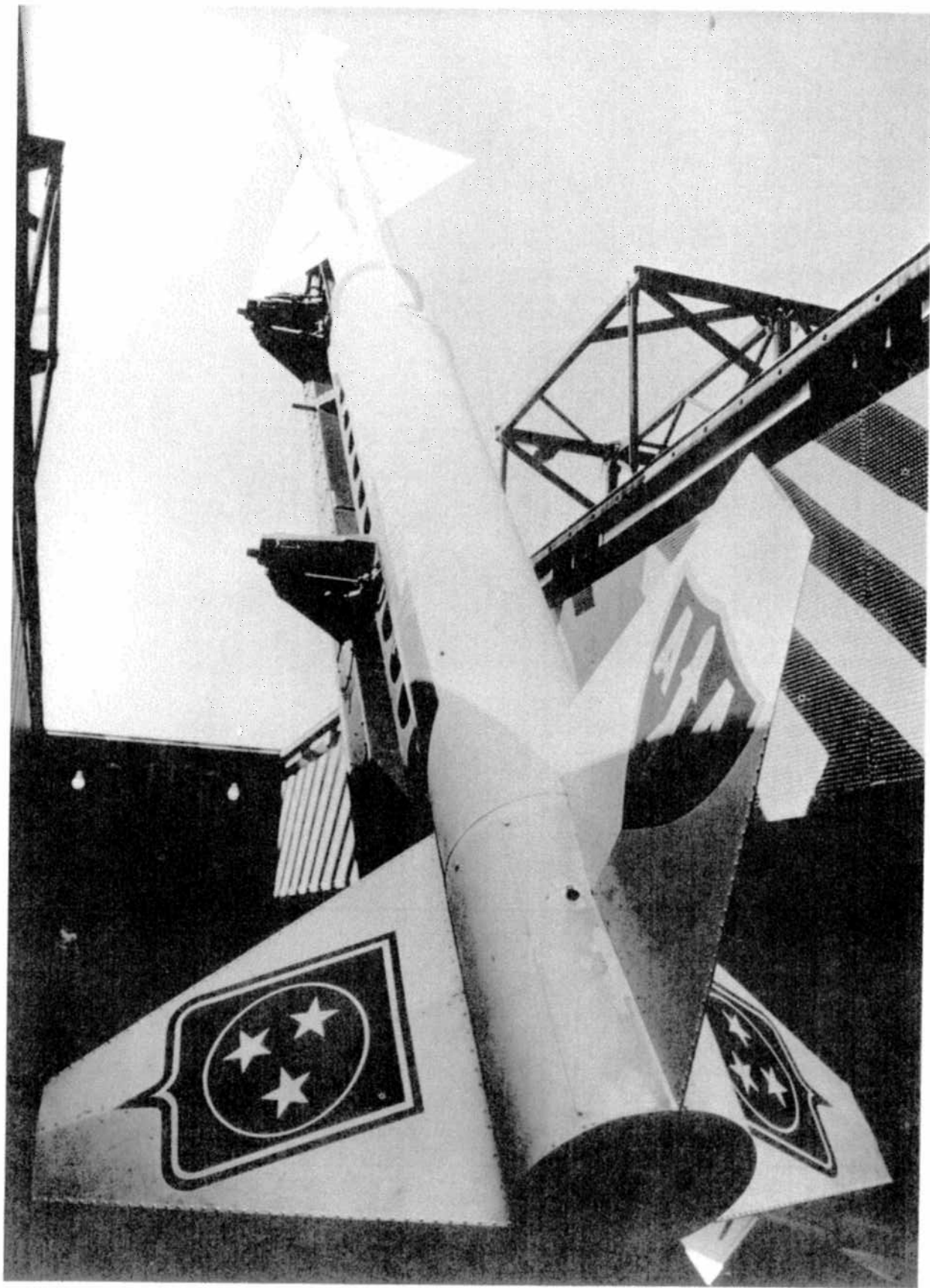
THE LOCAL JAYCEES also heard "Capt. Van Santen describe the multi-million dollar Nike site on Pope's Head Road as unusual business in the community." The explanation of the purpose and use of the various radars and missiles was interesting to the assembled businessmen. Capt. Van Santen extended a "cordial invitation to all members of the Jaycees as well as residents of the community to visit the Nike site in

order to determine for themselves how their tax money for defense was being employed."

Fairfax County's third Nike battery occupied two tracts of land condemned by the Army from Mark Turner and Miss Ida Money between Georgetown Pike and Route 7 in the northern part of Fairfax County. Condemnation was a last resort in land acquisition, but was allowed when purchase negotiations were stalled and there was a critical need for the property. Mr. Turner ran a successful and well-known 180-acre dairy farm and was a former member of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. He was also a Master of the Virginia State Grange, and past Chairman of the State Milk

Nike missiles, at Lorton, ready on their launchers in case of Soviet attack were inspected frequently by the U. S. Army launch team at each site. (Photo: Lorton, Virginia, 1956. Copyright, Washington Post; reprinted courtesy of D. C. Public Library.)





A Nike anti-aircraft missile, on its launcher, being raised from the underground storage area to the surface for potential launch, at the Lorton emplacement in Fairfax County. Insignia of three stars inside a circle was distinctive to Nike sites in the Washington-Baltimore area. (Photo: Lorton, Virginia, 1955. Copyright, Washington Post; reprinted courtesy of D. C. Public Library.)

Commission. His subsequent dairy production figures, especially the prodigious milk output of his heifer "Ramey," indicate that the condemnation did not appear to hinder Turner's successful farming operations.

LESS IS KNOWN about the Herndon site than the Lorton two in Fairfax County, although presumably events proceeded there as elsewhere. On a day-to-day basis, troops at each battery ran various diagnostic checks on the missiles and equipment. And, with one hundred men per site, there was also considerable routine administrative work. Batteries also had alert drills. Although no Nikes were obviously ever launched from Fairfax County, local Army units did travel to New Mexico for practice firings. On one occasion, in August 1957, Fairfax County Executive, Carlton C. Massey, schools Superintendent, W. T. Woodson, and the President of the County Chamber of Commerce were flown to New Mexico to observe the training in an effort to promote awareness of Nike operations. Similarly, soldiers assigned to Nike batteries were encouraged to volunteer with civic or youth groups to become assimilated into the local community.

By 1959, the need for thousands of troops to man the sites nationwide was burdening the Army. Consequently, it was decided that the National Guard would assume control over many batteries. That year, the Fairfax (Pope's Head) site was among the first in the nation to be transferred by the Army to the National Guard. The part-time citizen-soldiers of the guard were fully trained, although each man was at the battery only a limited time each month, and shared his duties with others in the community, who were also in the guard.

In 1958, a larger, more powerful version of the Nike, equipped with a nuclear warhead, was developed. Since a single missile with such a warhead could destroy several approaching attackers, fewer missiles and launch areas were needed. The Lorton battery was equipped with the new nuclear Nike. Elsewhere, the obsolescence of the older missile and the staffing demands led to the closure of Herndon site in 1962 and Fairfax site in 1963. Additionally, by then, security considerations associated with the nuclear weapons at Lorton brought guard dog patrols at that site, and the



Historical roadside marker, prepared by the Heritage Resources Branch, approved and funded by the Fairfax County History Commission, and erected by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, alongside the Fairfax County Parkway, to mark the Fairfax (Pope's Head) Nike anti-aircraft missile emplacement. (Photo: Donald Sveig)

cessation of open houses and tours.

As a result of military budget cutbacks, and a general belief that any threat from the Soviet Union on the United States was posed by the newer inter-continental missiles, not bombers, Lorton, along with all other Nike batteries in the United States, was closed in 1974. The District of Columbia Department of Corrections at Lorton re-assumed control over the property. The Fairfax County school system and the Fairfax County Park Authority also obtained ownership of the other parcels at Pope's Head and Herndon.

Along with the Civil War forts of the 1860s, the Nike missile sites of the 1950s and 60s are now part of the history of Fairfax County and the United States. Once powerful symbols of American military might, the locations today only vaguely hint at their previous purpose. A roadside historical marker has been erected along the Fairfax County Parkway to mark the Fairfax (Pope's Head) site. Others are planned for the Georgetown Pike near the Herndon battery, and for Lorton. Although the Nike missile emplacements in Fairfax County are gone, it is appropriate and important to remember their former presence in this community. ♦



In the 1920's, local citizens or tourists could take an airplane sightseeing trip, usually to Rockville or Gaithersburg, from the Beacon Hill airport for \$2.50. (Copy photo by Donald Sweig from: Snake Hill to Spring Bank, Vol. II.)

GHOST AIRPORTS OF FAIRFAX COUNTY

by Paige Watson

(The author was a volunteer intern with the Heritage Resources Branch.)

RESIDENTS NEAR ROUTE 1 in Fairfax County during the 1920s surely saw and may have become accustomed to seeing a small aircraft with large wings, a propeller, and an extremely loud engine overhead. On the tail of the aircraft was painted "FLY 250".

At the time, sightseeing rides were offered to local citizens and tourists for \$2.50 a trip. They were operated by a flying service that flew out of one of the four general aviation airports in Fairfax County. The role of these smaller airports differed from our modern commercial airports, such as Dulles International and Washington National. Rather than shuttle people to points far away from the area, these local airports accommodated local citizens and their privately owned aircraft. While the sites were not used as depots for commuters, they did host flying circuses, flying lessons, and acrobatic flying. All of these local Fairfax County airports have now disappeared. Some were converted to shopping centers and parking lots. Many Fairfax County

residents do not realize that the airports ever existed.

Hybla Valley Airport

HYBLA VALLEY AIRPORT, located nine miles south of Washington, D.C. on Route 1, where the Hybla Valley shopping center now stands, was opened in 1924 as a small training field and landing strip for privately owned planes. The airport's owner and operator, Elvin N. Robertson, established the Mt. Vernon School of Aeronautics to provide classroom and in-the-air instruction after he incorporated the airport into the Mt. Vernon Airways Corporation in 1928.

Later, shortly before the outbreak of World War II, Americans courted German cooperation in a joint aviation venture. In late 1930, speculation arose regarding a German presence at the Hybla Valley airport. In January 1931, *The Fairfax County Independent* reported that the Fairfax County and Alexandria County Chambers of Commerce were



The Falls Church Airport was located along Route 50, west of Seven Corners, in the area that is now the Loehmann's Plaza Shopping Center. It operated for about ten years from 1946 until the mid-1950's. (Photo: Courtesy Mary Riley Styles Public Library, Falls Church, Va.)

working together to establish a terminal for the proposed trans-Atlantic line of the International Zeppelin Transport Corporation on 1,300 acres at Hybla Valley. In order to establish a proposed air route between the United States and Europe, a dirigible landing site was needed in the United States. Favorable data collected throughout 1931 on such factors as wind velocity and direction seemed to indicate that Hybla Valley would be chosen over the other prospective sites in Richmond, Baltimore, and Morristown, New Jersey. Plans for the terminal called for new offices, waiting rooms, concession stands, a restaurant, a swimming pool, two new hangars, and four one-mile runways. As late as July 1935, backers of the plan still held out hope that Hybla Valley would be the American terminus, with the Zeppelin Company's President, Dr. Hugo Eckner, expressing support for the location. A newspaper at the time noted that "the continuation of the property as an airport gives the best possible chance to benefit from such [an] airline terminal in the event that the plans of the German air experts are consummated." The frequency in dirigible accidents, however, caused public excitement over this unique mode of flight to diminish, and a terminal was never constructed at Hybla Valley.



Aircraft parked in the snow at the Falls Church Airport, in the winter of 1947. (Photo: Courtesy Mary Riley Styles Public Library, Falls Church, Va.)

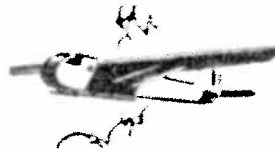
Air Circus



FALLS CHURCH AIRPARK

SUN., JULY 10 - 2 P. M. *

Sponsored by
Vienna Volunteer Fire Department
of Vienna, Va.



...Acrobatic Flying
...Spot Landings
...Parachute Jump

...Demonstration by
U. S. Navy Flyers
& Other Contests

Come And Bring The Whole Family

Refreshments & Restaurant At The Airpark

Admission: Adults, 60¢; Children, 30¢ (tax included)

* In Event of Rain Postponed to July 17

In July 1949, an Air Circus was held at the Falls Church Airpark. It was only one of numerous community events held there. For example, in July 1950, the Second Annual Eastern States Model Airplane Meet, hosted by the Falls Church Balsa Beetles model airplane club, was held at the airpark. Over 200 boys, under age 21, competed in the meet, and several thousand spectators attended. (Copy photo by Donald Sweig, from original newspaper in Mary Riley Styles Public Library, Falls Church, Va.)



Apartments in background of these planes parked at the Falls Church Airpark, were an example of the suburbanization beginning to surround the airfield that finally led to its closing. (Photo: Courtesy Mary Riley Styles Public Library, Falls Church, Va.)

WHILE THE PLANS for the Zeppelin terminal never came to fruition, there was an even grander scheme that involved the airport shortly after it opened. An entrepreneur named Henry Woodhouse, who purported to be the successor to the esteemed Admiral Robert Peary as president of an organization called the Aviation League of America, unveiled plans to open an airport at Hybla Valley in 1929. His airport, however, would have surpassed any existing airport in terms of size and function. Woodhouse claimed he would build the "world's greatest air, scientific and historic center" on 2,000 acres off of U.S. Route 1 at Hybla Valley. Woodhouse boasted that its facilities, including runways of 7,500 and 4,500 feet, would comprise an area larger than the combined airports of New York, Chicago, Paris, London, Berlin, and Rome.

Woodhouse emphasized the history of the site in promoting his plans. The name of the proposed airport, the George Washington Air Junction, was fitting, because Woodhouse claimed the site was situated on the "ancestral homelands of two of the nations' greatest patriots," referring to George Washington and George Mason. In 1793, our first President witnessed the first balloon ascension in the

Western hemisphere, made by Francois Blanchard in Philadelphia, which Woodhouse felt was proof that George Washington supported aeronautics. Woodhouse promised to recreate this "birth of air navigation on the Western hemisphere" every Saturday afternoon at 3 o'clock at the airport.

HENRY WOODHOUSE ALSO PUBLICIZED the use of balloons in another regular weekend event, the Air Fox Chases. He announced that each Saturday, balloons were to take to the air to reproduce the fox chases acted out on the ground by Washington and Mason and their contemporaries. For those wanting to keep their eyes at ground level, Woodhouse advertised an exhibit of rare historic memorabilia he had supposedly managed to procure, including papers of the Washington family.

His grandiose ideas, even after finding an audience in the House of Representatives thanks to Representative Woodruff of Michigan in 1928, quite literally could not get off the ground. He had offered the use of the air junction to the federal government and the District of Columbia free of charge, and would sell the land at its purchase price, not for profit, if the government wished to acquire its own

airport. Perhaps the economic conditions brought on by the Great Depression precluded such a sale, but there was never an airport to sell, aside from Robertson's Hybla Valley Airport. Whatever his motives, Woodhouse did utter one truth when he mentioned the tremendous economic potential assigned to the growing industry of flight in his invitation to the air junction's 1929 grand opening: "It is believed that this great twentieth-century institution, set on a charming eighteenth-century background, and the inspiring ideals and examples of George Washington, will aid many in finding stepping stones and opportunities in the new billion-dollar aeronautic industry." In 1939, Mr. Robertson sold his Hybla Valley airport with its two intersecting runways of 2,500 and 3,000 feet to the United States Navy, which used the site to train

pilots for World War II. At the close of World War II, the government established an office at the airport to sell surplus airplanes.

Beacon Hill Airport

JUST NORTH OF THE HYBLA VALLEY AIRPORT, in the area surrounding the intersection of Route 1 and Beacon Hill Road, was the site of Beacon Hill Airport. In 1925, this land was open pasture owned by Franklin Pierce Reid. Soon after, in 1925, it was converted to an airfield, when Aubrey Burdette rented the land and opened the Burdette Flying Service. The airfield was called Beacon Hill because of a revolving light that was erected to direct planes at night, both in the immediate vicinity and the larger area around Washington.

*This 1946 aerial view (below) of part of the runway at the Falls Church Airpark looking east, with a small section of Route 50 in upper left, contrasts with (opposite) a 1977 photo of the Loehmann's Plaza Shopping Center, looking west.
(Photo: Courtesy Mary Riley Styles Public Library, Falls Church, Va.)*



With Mrs. Burdette in charge of ground control, Mr. Burdette took to the sky with his flying students. Lessons were fifteen-dollars an hour; a cheaper way to spend a Saturday afternoon in the air was to embark on a short plane ride offered by the Burdettes as part of their flying service. For \$2.50, local citizens could fly beyond Virginia's borders and into Maryland, usually to Rockville or Gaithersburg. Lucky individuals might also have spotted a famous American radio personality of the time, Arthur Godfrey, taking off from Beacon Hill in his plane.

Flying lessons and sightseeing rides continued even after Burdette turned control of the airfield to Bob Ashburn, who had helped manage the Burdette Flying Service. Mrs. Burdette stayed on at the airfield but her name did not, because the Burdette Flying Service became the Ashburn Flying School. Ashburn's operation offered a greater variety of planes for use, as well as a new hangar to house private planes.

Later, during World War II, civilian activities moved to another location further from the coast allowing Navy pilots to train at the site. With the war's conclusion, the airfield resumed civilian operations.

A FAMILY NAMED REID operated the airport for some time. In 1950, a local citizen's association lobbied the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors for the closing of the airport due to a rash of accidents that literally hit a little too close to home. One accident resulted in a plane crashing into a house near the runway and another landed in a person's backyard, just short of the house. This opposition from area residents resulted in the airport closing in 1952. Many years later, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors named a small service road running between Route 1 and the Beacon Hill shopping center for Winton "Chappy" Cole, who had crashed and died shortly after his high school



graduation in 1934.

The beacon, for which the field had been named, was removed in 1959. It was the last remnant of the old airport.

Falls Church Airpark

THE FALLS CHURCH AIRPARK was located on Route 50, two miles west of Seven Corners, on the present-day site of the Loehmann's Plaza shopping center. Chartered in 1945, the Falls Church Airpark provided the City of Falls Church with the distinction of being one of the first communities in America to have a "playground" type of airport. The function of the airpark was to accommodate sportsman pilots, who disrupted the air traffic at municipal airports where commercial flights took priority.

The expansion of the small Falls Church airport into a thriving airpark was heralded in *The Falls Church Echo* in 1946. The newspaper noted that when completed, "[the airpark] will compare very favorably in beauty, pleasure, and aeronautical features with the Eldon, Missouri airpark." The Missouri facility, hailed as a "model airpark" at the time, had opened two weeks earlier in June of 1946 to national media attention and much fanfare, and was already being called "internationally famous". In order to put Falls Church on the map (both figuratively and literally as it would appear on the nation's air maps because of its inclusion in the official government airport listings), the installation of tennis courts, a snack bar, a picnic table, shuffle board, and tourist cabins was promised. Sightseeing rides, flying lessons, and aircraft rentals were also advertised to attract business. In 1947, the airpark received a contract from the Veteran's Administration to offer flight instruction under the G.I. Bill, and to train returning military veterans to be private pilots. Two years later, an air circus was held at the airpark, featuring acrobatic flying, spot landings, parachute jumps, and demonstrations by the U.S. Navy flyers, all for the admission price of sixty cents for adults and thirty cents for children (tax included).

WITH SUCH AMENITIES, aviation experts predicted "aerial tourists" would flock to Falls Church from all over the country. The *Echo* confidently remarked in 1946: "The idea is spreading rapidly and before long the U.S. will be dotted with these friendly havens." Just ten years later, however, the airpark was sold to developers. Pilots considered the runway hazardous because they had to negotiate trees at one end of the runway and stop in a minimum distance due to the short runway—it was never

extended to 3,000 feet as advertised. Numerous airplane accidents were reported in the local *Echo*, but surprisingly there were not any fatalities among the flying acrobats and recreational pilots that frequented the Falls Church Airpark.

Washington and Virginia Airport

The Washington and Virginia Airport, incorporated in 1947, was often referred to as the "Crossroads airport" due to its proximity to Bailey's Crossroads in Falls Church. The airport was opened to "maintain and operate a public airport; to deal generally in airplanes, flying machines, and dirigible balloons of any and all types." While it is doubtful many dirigibles used the field, it was definitely frequented by smaller planes such as Cubs, Cessnas, and PT-19s.

Its two gravelled runways of 2,150 and 2,300 feet accommodated about one-hundred flying students shortly after its opening. Like the Falls Church Airpark, it was eligible to train pilots under the G.I. Bill. In addition to up to twenty planes housed in the field's hangar, as many as forty to fifty other planes were reported as being stored at the airport in early 1948. At the height of the field's operations, 135 planes were kept there. Its services included private and commercial instruction, night flying facilities, aerial surveys, aircraft charters, aircraft rentals, and sales.

The Washington and Virginia Airport was the last of the local area airports to remain open, but, with changing times, in 1969 and 1970 the land was sold for development. The Skyline Mall and apartments were erected in its stead.

BY THE LATTER TWENTIETH CENTURY, Fairfax County's growing population encroached upon the large, open spaces of the local airports, and led to their conversion from homes for airplanes to those for human dwellers.

Even with the trend in airport closings to accommodate development, the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce in 1959 urged the County Board of Supervisors to appoint a committee to determine if the construction of another general aviation airport was needed. The committee concluded four years later that "an airpark is a necessary public utility that can repay the county investment, attract new industries, and be a major asset to the taxpayers." In addition to serving private pilots, the airports would also provide facilities for company-owned planes. Therefore, the idea was to add another site in the midst of development in

order to provide for new development.

IN 1965, A 434-ACRE TRACT OF LAND off of Pope's Head Road, three miles southwest of Fairfax City, was selected by the Board as the proposed site. It was located between Pope's Head Road on the north, and Fairfax Station Road on the south, and was to have a runway 100 feet wide and 4,000 feet long. Part of the airport would have encompassed the area where a former Nike anti-aircraft missile site was located. The underground area that once stored the missiles would have been used to store fuel, and the surrounding buildings were to either be renovated or razed.

The Board faced stiff opposition from local residents who feared the construction would threaten the character of the area. They also argued that the site would be unable to accommodate subsequent commercial and industrial development. Although the Board gave final approval to the plan in 1969, an airport was never built on the Pope's Head site.

In the early 1970s, a site just north of the Prince

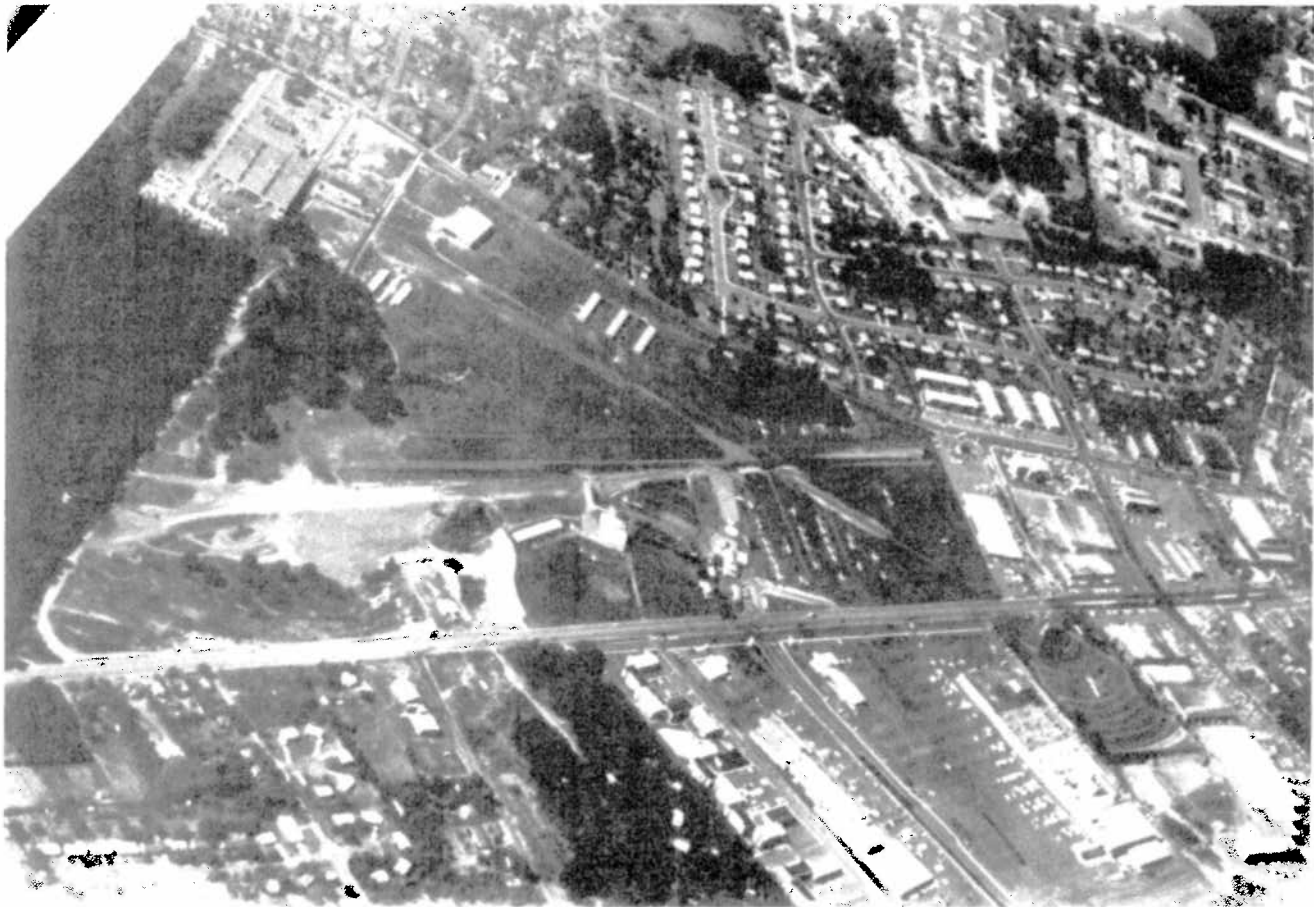
William County border at Ft. Belvoir was considered for a county municipal airport. However, conservationists quickly pointed out the flaw with the site in question: it was adjacent to Mason Neck, which was home to the endangered bald eagle.

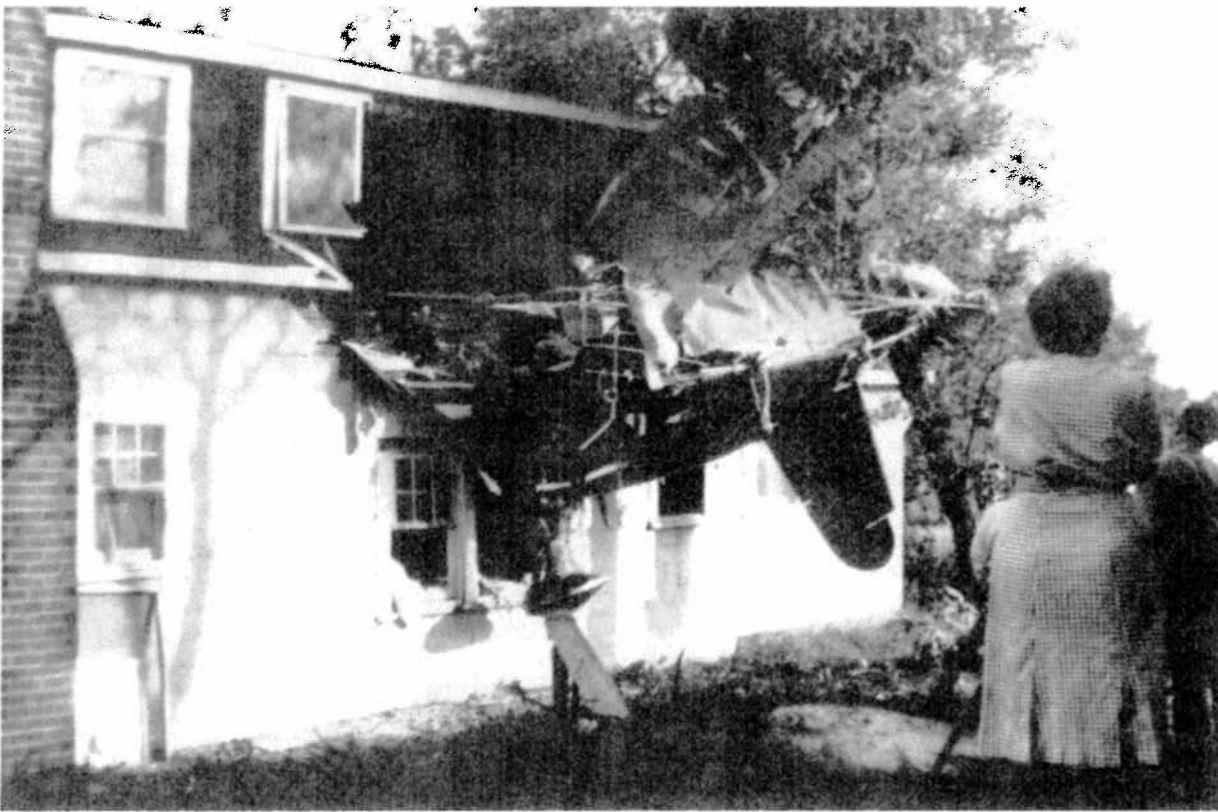
When this proposal failed, the county was left without the promise of a small municipal airport. Fairfax continued to develop, leaving fewer options for private pilots. Today, the majority of county residents would agree that Dulles and National Airports adequately serve their aviation needs, but many of the office buildings, stores, and homes, where they live, work, and shop, were built on land that not so long ago were local airfields. Only their photos remain today. ♦

Correction


The front page photograph on the last *Fairfax Chronicles* was incorrectly captioned as Hollin Hills in the 1950s. It is actually a photo of Holmes Run Acres around the same time.

This 1970 aerial of the Bailey's Crossroads area (crossroads is at lower right) shows the runways, buildings, and parked airplanes at the Washington and Virginia Airport. Leesburg Pike (Route 7) is just below airport in photo, with west to the right.
(Copy photo by Donald Sueig, from original in Virginia Room, Fairfax County Public Library)





An airplane trying to land at Beacon Field crashed into this house in 1949. This was among accidents that led to the closing of the airport in 1952. See "Ghost Airports of Fairfax County," beginning on page 12. (Photo: Fairfax County Public Library Photographic Archives.)

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