

## How Kimball learned to stop worrying . . .

By Mary Louise Knapp

**W**elcome to Kimball, Nebraska — Missile Center, U.S.A.," proclaims a billboard at the entrance to this Panhandle city — where nuclear weapons are a way of life.

Kimball is in the center of one of the largest Minuteman III missile installations in the United States. About 200 Minuteman III missile silos are in the immediate area, which includes parts of Wyoming and Colorado.

The area now is being considered as a possible site for deployment of the MX missile, a weapon that can carry up to 10 nuclear warheads.

The Francis E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyo., controls the missiles in the Kimball area.

First Lieutenant David Lamp, public affairs chief of the base, said the Air Force base is a contender to receive the new missiles until the Defense Department decides how to deploy the missiles permanently. But no decision on where the missiles will be placed is likely for some time, he said.

Most townspeople favor bringing the MX to Kimball, for both patriotic and economic reasons, but many area farmers — especially those who own the land where the silos are based — oppose the idea.

Kimball Mayor Wayne Robbins said if the federal government thinks the MX should be based in Kimball for security reasons, he would support the government.

"Whether the MX is based here or not, we are still a high-risk area," he said.

Robbins, who also manages a Kimball Construction Company, criticized farmers who oppose the MX. Farmers should be willing to sacrifice some of their land for the missile silos if it is necessary for the country's defense, he said.

"A missile or two is not too high a price for freedom," he said. "I would donate enough land to stay free."

Robbins said since the Air Force paid farmers for placing the missiles on their land farmers should be willing to work with the government if MX missiles are based on their land.

**O**ne plan for basing the MX is to expand and harden Minuteman silos — which may require taking two to three more acres of land, Robbins said.

Both Robbins and Dan Jenson, director of civil defense in Kimball, said they believed the MX missiles would not need more land.

"I don't feel it would take a lot of acreage," Jenson said. "They'll make it as easy as they can on the American people . . . damage the least land they can. The government knows we need farmland to feed people."

In January briefings of area residents, however, Air Force personnel told townspeople they could not promise they would never need more acres if the MX missiles are based around Kimball.

Bob Arraj, city administrator for Kimball, said he found the townspeople's attitudes toward the MX "surprising."

"I haven't heard a word from the public lately," he said.

"Several years ago, when the MX concept was first born, there was quite a reaction in the farming community. At that time, they were considering the shell game system, and I can well appreciate their concern."

In its original form, the MX system would have required using hundreds of acres of missile silos with many fewer missiles than silos.

The missiles would be moved from silo to silo at periodic intervals, theoretically preventing enemies from guessing their location.

This system, commonly called the "shell game" has not been ruled out yet, according to the latest Defense Department reports.

Delynn Peterson, a Kimball area farmer who owns land with a Minuteman silo on it, opposes a possible MX installation on his land.

"They (the Air Force officers) should let well enough alone," he said. "We have enough missiles here already. I don't think they should take any more private property in the area."

Although Peterson is a firm supporter of President Reagan, he said he has little reason to think kindly of the military.

## . . . and love the bomb

Two years ago, while Peterson was drilling an irrigation test well in his fields about half a mile from the missile silo, two armed Air Force security guards approached him and told him to leave the pickup he was driving.

"They told me to get out and put my hands on the pickup," he said. "The Air Force guy said that if I tried to go over the (silo) fence, he would shoot."

Peterson said he was not on government property at the time of the incident, but had used an approach road leading to the missile site to get to the test well.

"We stayed away from the fence and did not disturb them," he said.

**T**he Air Force security guards continued to point guns at him as he left the area, Peterson said.

Glenn Barrett, another Kimball farmer, said the Minuteman silo and control center on his land have posed no major problems for him.

"The Minuteman is no problem, but it might be better if they put the MX somewhere else," Barrett said. "We've made some sacrifices for security, but I don't think we owe the whole nation security."

Fifteen years ago, the Air Force purchased 4.5 acres of land for the installation of Minuteman silos. It paid \$100 an acre.

The control center on his land was the site of a historic simulated nuclear attack in the 1940s.

Five-foot walls 60 feet underground were cracked during the test.

The Minuteman missiles have been a boon to the city's economy, and many townspeople feel Kimball would experience an economic upswing if the MX is installed there.

Steve Kuhlman, manager of a Kimball clothing store, said Kimball — population about 4,000 — is too small a town to rely on industry for its livelihood and it needs the kind of economic stimulus the MX would provide.

The MX installation would bring an influx of Air Force personnel and their families, as the Minuteman installation did in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he said.

"It is a good idea to update the missiles," Kuhlman said. "I did not agree with the first MX plan, but the new plan would be fine."

Kuhlman said people in the Kimball area have come to accept the dangers of living in a defense center, and generally do not worry much about it.

The subject of nuclear war is not discussed at length in the area, he said.

Arraj said he doesn't believe the fear of nuclear war is any more intense in Kimball than anywhere else.

"If the fear was greater, you'd see more bomb shelters being built and more concern about civil defense plans," he said. "I haven't heard word one as to concern on that subject."

**O**pposition to the MX generally is lacking in Kimball, but Sidney — a nearby town of about 6,000 — has a strong and vocal group that formed to protest the missile.

The organization, called Nebraskans Opposed to MX, includes members of five farm organizations and townspeople, Marian Lenzen, a Sidney member of the group, said.

The group is worried that the new MX plan, originally expected to take only a few acres of farmland per missile silo, is the government's way of "getting their foot in the door" to take more and more land, Lenzen said.

"The MX is not another Minuteman, although the Air Force wants to give us that impression," she said.

Lenzen said no technology has been developed yet for hardening and expanding Minuteman silos to fit the MX. Since the technology is not developed, the Air Force would very likely return to the original "shell game" plan after they decided where to base the MX, she said.

"It's being slipped in on us," she said.

In the past few months NOMX has led several rallies against the missile, Lenzen said.

Those rallies in the Sidney area have been well attended and the group has a great deal of local support, she said.

Continued on Page 7

