

Editorial Page

Air Bases Vulnerable

Whether or not our air bases would be knocked out in a surprise Russian rocket offensive is a matter which has been discussed at great length by men who are charged with the planning, and many others. We sometimes wonder, especially after some recent discussion.

Our three Strategic Air Command bases in Michigan we know about, and assume this could happen anywhere. We think it could happen also at Omaha, where we've seen the headquarters which are underground but the runway on the surface.

It has been suggested that all these bases for our intercontinental bombers could be knocked out in minutes by a handful of men at each and easily-purchased equipment. All you'd need would be money and a few dozen trained fanatics willing to lose their lives.

The money would buy mortars and ammunition, not too difficult to come by from international gun smugglers—as witness Castro and Cuba. A good mortar will accurately throw a 7-pound shell a couple of miles. The mortar and 50 shells could be carried in a station wagon, and could be shouldered by one man in several trips.

At many air bases, especially in Michigan, it's easy to get within two miles of the runways. In some cases it's even possible to rent homes within that distance. You wouldn't need to hit the planes—the runways would be sufficient.

You can aim and fire 50 mortar shells in five minutes if you're trained, and you'd have at least that much time before you were found—probably more. Mortar shells don't pack a lot of destruction, but fueled-up bombers do. Fragments from phosphorus shells can explode the planes. Once one goes, the others are gone. The attacks could be coordinated, so all bases were hit at the same time. You wouldn't get the planes in the air, of course, or even all of those on the ground. But your handful of men with these small, old-fashioned weapons could cause as much destruction as an all-out attack by a great air force.

From the history of surprise attacks in the past, it would foul up military communications and you might get enough chaos to trick the country into believing we were under missile attack or invasion.

We have another vulnerability, according to another man. He claims that over 95 per cent of all the spark plugs manufactured in the United States are made in three factories; all are under one roof and within 1,000 yards of private homes, buildings or brush fields where more mortars could easily be concealed. Spark plugs are a vital component of our transportation and military system, and even a serious slow-up in products of a few months would hurt.

We have our Nike bases, and hear other defense plans for our area. But we wonder sometimes just how far this defense planning has gone, and just how much protection we'd get in this area if an atomic war were started.

Move Faster, Mole!

Contractor for the new interceptor sewer, The Mole Co., is working north on Middlebelt, is still half a mile or more from the Middlebelt school. If that work isn't done before school starts in September, it will really be a mess for pupils and buses.

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