

DISMANTLING NUCLEAR MISSILES – VERY CAREFULLY!

A single W56 nuclear warhead with a yield of 1.2 megatons detonates dead-center in the old town square of Covington, Georgia. The historic southern municipality and its inhabitants vanish from the face of the earth. The old mill town of Porterdale disappears. Within the broad blast radius, homes and buildings crack and crumble in Social Circle and Conyers. The townships of Jersey and Oxford are gone. Severe to moderate damage befalls Mansfield, Monticello, Lithonia, Madison, and Monroe. Environs of Jackson Lake are uninhabitable; the lake is dead, never to be fished again.



This is the war the world must prevent, this is the reason North Korea must be denuclearized, and this is the logic behind whatever must be done to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of religious fanatics in Iran. Yet, if politics fail and the nukes fly, if indeed insanity has won in the end of times, then a unique breed of military personnel must do the unimaginable.

Travis Bryan was trained by the Air Force to retaliate for America if the unthinkable regrettably happens. Albeit, due to SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty) between the United States and the old Soviet Union, Bryan helped dismantle Minuteman II nuclear missiles in an endeavor to hopefully save lives instead of participating in the extermination of the human race. These unique men and women who babysit our nation's massive retaliatory capability are called Missileers. And this is one of their stories.



Born in 1967 while his Marine father was in Vietnam, Bryan said, "With Dad being a Marine we moved around a lot, 3 different high schools in my case, but only one college, the University of Georgia. Actually, UGA is the 'only' college in my opinion." Bryan augmented college expenses working as a UGA police officer. He graduated in 1990, the same year he married his sweetheart, Julie.

With a military career foremost in his mind, Bryan signed up for Officer Candidate School with the Air Force.

And he waited; and waited. "My second chosen career was police work," he recalled. "I was hired by the Hall County Sheriff's Department and almost forgot about the military, but lo and behold, the Air Force finally called me in 1991."

After attending OCS at the Medina annex at Lackland AFB, Texas, Bryan was sent to Whiteman AFB at Knob Noster, Missouri for his first duty assignment. He said, "It was an ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) base. I was there for two months." When asked his duties, Bryan replied with a wide grin, "Painting the squad room and anything else nailed down."

The Security Police was Bryan's first career choice on the Air Force's 'dream sheet' with 'needs of the Air Force' the fourth 'choice' for every young officer. Bryan was chosen as a Missileer. When asked why he had been chosen to work with nuclear missiles, he replied, "I have no earthly idea." Missile Combat Crew training took place at Vandenberg AFB near

San Francisco.

Bryan recalled, “We had four thick T.O.s (Technical Orders) the size of dictionaries, two classified, two non-classified. We had to learn them from front to back, from hundreds of acronyms to launching a nuclear missile.”

In case of a nuclear launch, the Missileers NEVER know their target. Bryan surmised, “I guess that way we don’t think too much about what we’re hitting. But pushing the button is only part of the story. A Missileer has to know what to do if the missile acts up in the silo, if you lose air, if there’s a fire, a security breach, and hundreds of other scenarios.”

The inevitable question: “*Could you push that button?*”



“Yes,” Bryan replied. “But if you have second thoughts during your career, you’re allowed to remove yourself. You have to have confidence in authority, the people above you who issue the order. The decision to launch would be a last resort. It would mean someone had launched at us first. In the nuclear missile game, America will not be the aggressor.”

Ironically, Bryan wouldn't have to launch. Sent back to Whiteman AFB, he was chosen to dismantle obsolete Minuteman II Missiles. Asked how a person dismantles a nuclear missile, he replied, "Very, very carefully."

The silos are in outlying areas, unmanned, and monitored by Missileers in an Air Force ‘house’, usually miles away. One ‘house’ can monitor five flights, and each flight has ten missiles. Launch sequence is classified, as is the unbelievable security available if an electrified and sensor sensitive fence surrounding a missile silo is disturbed.

Bryan said, “The American people need to understand that even if a ‘house’ is taken out or goes down for whatever reason, and airborne launch control center can override our system and launch from the wild blue yonder.”

After a missile is dismantled and removed, the silo is blown up. "I suppose people could spot a silo from the road," Bryan said. "But you'd have to know what you're looking for."

Asked if a security breach ever occurred while he was on duty, Bryan replied, "Absolutely. We had fence security violations several times, invariably a bunch of curious or hungry rabbits. But let me say this, nobody, and I mean nobody, needs to think about sneaking up on one of our missile silos. Nuff' said."

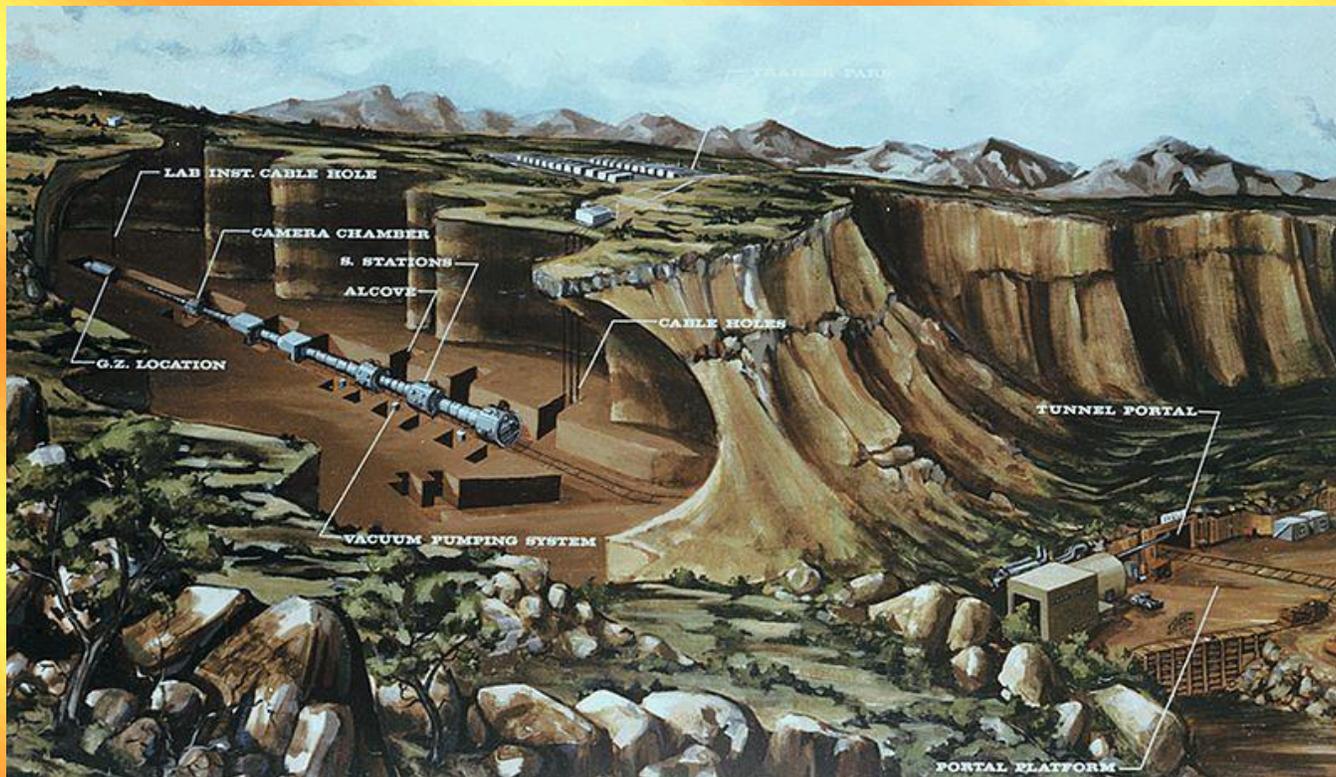


As the Minuteman II Missile program faded out, Bryan merged with the Space Command. "Well, that was certainly different," he said. "Instead of launching missiles, we looked for incoming missiles, which included tracking space junk." Asked to clarify 'junk', Bryan replied, "You wouldn't believe all the stuff floating around our planet, including an astronaut glove. If it's bigger than a coin, we track it. Junk could bring down a space station or destroy a missile launch. In fact, junk did hit the space shuttles on re-entry, taking chips out of the windshield and nose."

Now a Captain, Bryan's job at Space Command was terminated. After five years in the Air Force, he finally had a job around airplanes. Assigned to a KC-135 refueling wing, Bryan was all smiles. "I finally got aboard an Air Force plane. I worked at the Command Post. We controlled everything on the ground, the planes and crew rest, on-ground fueling...shoot, I really liked that job."

Albeit, his new job was short-lived. Within months the officers were removed from Command Post and replaced by sergeants. Bryan joked, "I told my wife it was time to get out before I shut down the entire Air Force." On a more serious comment, he said, "We decided to let God lead the way, let Him take us to our next port-of-call."

Once out of the military, Bryan returned to police work at two universities before taking an IT (information technology) position at Snapping Shoals EMC in Newton County. Since then, he's moved on with wife and daughter to new adventures with God leading the way.



Asked his final thoughts, Bryan said, "I want people to know that the Missileers are dedicated men and women. We don't joke or make fun of our job. We understand the seriousness of what we do. That said and done, I did see a Domino's Pizza sign on one of the blast doors. Of course it read, *'If not delivered in 30 minutes, your next one is free.'*"

As of this writing in 2018, the United States is rumored to maintain about 7,400 nuclear warheads/bombs. Approximately 2,120 are said to be actively deployed, another 2,530 are claimed to be in reserve. I never have been much of a mathematician, but simple math indicates a gap of 2,750 nuclear devices. Don't fret by thinking were missing nuclear weapons. Secrecy, even if not supported in certain political camps, is necessary for national security and survival. Whether it be a Missileer, an Ohio-class submarine, or one of many airplanes capable of delivering our nuclear arsenal, we have the power to negotiate from strength, not weakness. We don't need to bully; but we should require respect.