

Sunrise Ridge

Vashon has a long history of military presence on the Island that began with World War II and did not end until 1984 when the final parts of what would become known as the “Nike Base” became Paradise Ridge Park.

With the beginning of World War II in December 1941, army units were quickly assigned to Vashon in early 1942 as part of the Puget Sound defense system. The army units had headquarters at the Center School, which was empty because of the consolidation of the Center and Burton school districts.

In 1942 two air observation posts were established, air raid drills were held, and a volunteer Aircraft Observation Corps was established. An observation tower was constructed at Cove and an observation shack at Pembroke on Maury Island. The volunteers staffed these posts 24 hours per day. In 1943, the volunteer posts were closed and the Army Fighter Command took charge.

With the end of World War II and the emergence of the Cold War and the perceived vulnerability of Seattle to atomic attack by air, a Ground Observers Post was established in 1952 which trained 70 air defense volunteers to staff the Post. The next year Air Defense Anti-Aircraft Battery C “Charlie Battery” of the 513th Air Defense Battalion was stationed on Vashon, where the Eagles Aerie is located, with anti-aircraft guns to ward off potential air raids.

With the introduction of anti-aircraft missiles, in 1956 the Sunrise Ridge administrative site, Oakwood Terrace, a 16 unit housing complex for personnel just north of the Sunrise Ridge site along Vashon Highway, and Paradise Ridge missile launch site were purchased by the government to become one of a ring of twelve Nike missile sites surrounding the Seattle area known as the Metropolitan Defense Ring. The Sunrise Ridge site was originally a strawberry farm run by the Harmeling family, and then owned and farmed in the 1930s by the Matsumoto family.

By the time the government condemned and purchased the land through eminent domain in 1956, the land had been subdivided and was owned by seven families. The Oakwood Terrace military housing site and the Paradise Ridge missile launch site were purchased at the same time using the same principle of eminent domain. These three sites together became collectively known as the “Nike Site.”

Battery A of the 433rd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Missile Battalion was stationed on Vashon and operated the base until it closed in 1974. The increased technology, and logistic demands of the Nike Missile led to the construction of a series of major buildings at Sunrise Ridge for the administration of the base. A missile launching facility with underground launch silos, magazines for storing warheads, and fueling facilities was constructed at Paradise Ridge. And, in 1957, Oakwood Terrace, was constructed. That same year Battery A, and the batteries at

Renton, Federal Way and Midway were declared “best in the nation” after launch trial tests.

The Nike Base was closed in 1974, and on September 22, 1976 the U. S. Government (through the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare) Quit Claimed the Sunrise Ridge property for a period of 30 years plus one year to The Vashon-Maury Health Services Center, Inc. which is a board of nine Vashon residents. On September 22, 2007 the land was officially deeded to the VMHSC Board. At the time the property was Quit Claimed to VMHSC there were proposals to turn the site into a community center, a youth hostel, and other uses, none of which developed much beyond the talking stage. Vashon Health Clinic was established at the site, as was Granny’s Attic to raise funds to support the Health Clinic.

The Paradise Ridge site was deeded to King County, but in 1983 the County proposed returning the site to the Federal Government. This mobilized a number of Vashon Islanders to propose the creation of a Park and Recreation District. This proposal came before the voters in 1984 and was approved. In 1985 the newly created Vashon Park District acquired the Paradise Ridge land from King County and two years later voters passed an operating levy that allowed the site to be developed.

The Oakwood Terrance site, and the 18 acres of the Sunrise Ridge site not Quit Claimed to VMHSC was sold to private individuals who then subdivided and sold the properties.



The first photo is of the Nike Base at Sunrise Ridge in the mid 1950s with the Air Force personnel mustered for review. The administration building in the background is now the Vashon Health Clinic. The parking lot where the airmen are mustered was flat and open.



The current photograph, taken in 2008, shows the same building as it is today. The entrance has been modified by closing in the insert break in the original building and constructing a new entrance which extends beyond the lines of the original building. The area has been re-landscaped, the windows covered or modified, yet the outlines of the original building are still recognizable.

Today Sunrise Ridge is the home of the Vashon Health Center, Granny's Attic, Vashon Food bank, Voice of Vashon Radio, and two sports fields. A legacy of The Cold War, Sunrise Ridge continues to serve the public of Vashon-Maury Island.

Original Photo Courtesy of Vashon-Maury Island Heritage Association

Current Photo – Terry Donnelly

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