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Top ICBM Test Failures Forced Full Overhaul

Repairs have had to be made to all of the most modern U.S. intercontinental ballistic missiles because of the failure of missiles to fire in three tests last October, according to testimony before a congressional committee made public today.

Dr. John F. Foster Jr., director of defense research and engineering, told a House Appropriations subcommittee that the first failure occurred on Oct. 8, 1966, in a test of an operational Minuteman II missile near Grand Forks, N.D.

"On Oct. 19, 1966, a launch was attempted, but the missile failed to enable," he said.

Censors Delete Answer

"This was traced to a substandard resistor which has been corrected. The third scheduled try, actually the second launch attempt, aborted in the terminal countdown due to an indicated guidance failure. The problem was traced to a capacitor failure. An engineering change proposal has been issued to eliminate this problem."

"Immediately," he added, "a retrofit program was started for all of the Minuteman II missiles."

The Minuteman is a solid-fuel missile, based in an underground silo and theoretically capable of being launched within minutes of an order to respond to an enemy attack.

Defense Department censors deleted Foster's answer to a question as to how many of the missiles had to have parts replaced.

At the time of his testimony, on March 20, all of the missiles were operational, he said, and he described the over-all readiness of the Minuteman and submarine-based Polaris missiles forces as "excellent."

Deterrent Force Planned

The Defense Department has a continuing program, he told the committee, of actually firing operational missiles on a test basis to make sure they would be able to operate in case of a war.

In reply to a question, a department spokesman said no

further information on the missile failure was immediately available.

In other subcommittee testimony released yesterday, Foster said the United States has planned a deterrent missile force which would overwhelm the Soviet antimissile defense system.

To assure the destruction of the Soviet system, Foster said, the strategy would be "sheer exhaustion of the enemy ballistic missile defense and then having enough re-entry vehicles left over to cause assured destruction."

Another witness, Lt. Gen. Austin W. Betts, chief of research and development for the Army, said Russia leads the United States in the development of germ and chemical warfare weapons.

Betts said the United States should pursue development of such weapons.

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