

Sam Hutto Personal Interview
May 10, 2014

Sam Hutto is a dairy farmer who lives across the site of the Damascus missile silo. Mr. Hutto was watching the missile silo site at the time of the explosion. He was able to describe the explosion and its' effects on the people of the community.

A. There were two leaks before. There was one bad leak about a year and a half, two years before the missile base blew up that really, except for running us off when they evacuated, affected us more than the explosion did and it kind of set the mood for when it, when the explosion happened because we were thinking of the leak again when they evacuated us and nothing happened the first time when it did the second time, so we knew it was serious, but we didn't expect it to blow.

Q. How did you feel about the missile silo before and after the explosion?

A. So, you know, the other thing I told Mr. Schlosser about, that he was asking us about what we felt about the missile base before it blew up and, it had been here so long it was just kind of a landmark. You know, you give people directions, you are going to Reba Joe Parrish's house, where you all just came from, back then that was the first house past the missile base. And, you know, besides the Airmen getting a Coke every now and then at the store or something, it was just there like the Tater Hill over here or the Southside Church or anything else. It was just kind of there. You didn't really think about it. And then after it blew up, when the hundreds of newspaper people were here, they all wanted to know why we weren't leaving. They said are we going to build it back, and my daddy told all of them we were here first, we wasn't going anywhere. My—one of my grandsons, my daughter lives in this house right behind us. He'll be the seventh generation here on this farm. I mean, we've got lots of roots here and as bad as that was, we wasn't leaving just because it blew up. It might do it again.

Q. Were you able to see the explosion?

A. And I was one of the few that was far enough from it, but close enough to it to see it blow up. Sid King and all that bunch were right up there on the highway and they felt it blow up and saw it blow up, but where 124 turns toward Quitman down here, I was right on top of the hill dropping off in there. They had evacuated us, and I was sneaking back in to milk and just as I started to drop off that hill there, there was a spot you could see the missile base from and when I got right there it blew. And I felt it. I mean, it shook the truck, it shook the ground, but as far as seeing the explosion, from there I had a better vantage point than the guys up close because I could see everything around. But it was quite a boom and then what I found out later, it was a warhead that blew out of the hole. It looked like a missile taking off. It was like a cannon going upside down. And the Air Force guys told me later that that was the dynamite charges blowing off the warhead. It was like a hundred dynamite charges on that thing and they have to go off within a billionth of a second to compress the nuclear material and make the atomic explosion, the fusion, I mean, fission explosion and that's what we -- I saw burning. At the time we didn't know what it was. But I made a u-turn in the road to go back, they evacuated us and mama and daddy and Kay and Sancy were down at my brother's house. They lived in Damascus at that time and I just made a u-turn and stopped for a second and got out of the truck and right down at 124 there were two State Troopers that had a road block up and I knew one of them pretty well. He would kind of let

me in to check on the cows and stuff at night. And they came by me doing about 100 miles an hour and they didn't stop to tell me to evacuate or nothing. They just left, literally. And then within two minutes, I drove back to my brother's house and got daddy, told him that -- tell Sancy and Kay and mama to get ready, that they were going to run us off of there. So I took daddy back up to see and there was a solid line of traffic coming south, three cars wide running as hard as they could run, blue lights flashing. And to this day we haven't figured how they got across the bridge down here. There was a road wide enough before you get there and was wide enough past it, there was one row on the center line and two on each shoulder running --and it was solid as far as you could see, but somehow they made it on that road without killing all of them, but that was -- they just run up all the way to Conway. And as soon as we got down there to my sister's house, we took the lady, Sancy home, we come around and daddy and I turn around to come back because we needed to milk the cow, they have to be milked every 12 hours. It had already been over 12 hours since the cows had been milked so we got them all to Skyline Drive in Conway and sat for an hour or two and then they let us come back to Greenbriar and then they run everybody around 25 to Heber, so when they did that, we thought we had it made, because we went to Guy and hit the dirt roads and we was going to sneak right into the barn and had roadblocks set up that caught us. And we sat over there until about 3:00 that afternoon twiddling our thumbs. And then they told us we could go on to Bee Branch if we wanted to. But they kind of -- wait, no stop, so when they did that we come in the back roads and my brother was getting cows up for the milking -- he was in Oklahoma City when it blew up. And they left out there coming this way and he got back before we did from Conway. They didn't have the roadblocks set up over that way. They just drove right in. But -- and we had a milk hand at that time that we found out later that he went ahead and milked that morning, he was around when the missile base blew up, it was just about time to milk when it blew up. And he said when they had evacuated everybody he made his wife leave and he stayed home. He lived over on top of the hill, that's a house we had, a milk hand house. And he said when it blew up he got up and looked around, realized he wasn't already dead and thought he probably wasn't going to be so he came down and milked the cows. Then he left. So we didn't miss milking on that, so. The Health Department made us dump our milk for about a month. The Air Force reimbursed us for it. But I doubt if there was anything in it, but they was just playing it safe. When they had a chemical leak a couple of years before and we had to dump our milk for about two weeks, and there was probably more -- more of a chance of it being contaminated over that, because the explosion, it burnt everything up. The other leak was a big orange cloud. You could see it from here. You could taste it. And I don't know what it was. But they said it was some really bad stuff. It was the jet fuel, but that's kind of an overview of what we seen and what we did. Ya'll can ask some questions and fill in the blanks about what you're wanting to know about.

Q. Actually, I think part of the reason that they did that was because some of the gas had stayed at the site of the missile because Jeff Kennedy got blown away from the site, but David Livingstone had stayed there and both ended up suffering from injuries related to the toxic fumes.

A. They were -- one of the guys on CNN and every news company there was set up satellite. Back then when they set up a satellite it wasn't a little one, it was a satellite 40 foot across that they set up to have a live feed. They stayed here for a month, which was a lot of fun at first but then it got really, really, old really, really quick because if you didn't lay down and throw a kicking and screaming fit they didn't really want to talk to you. If you were just kind of normal people, they wanted reactions and they couldn't figure out how come we took it so calm. We joke and cut up about everything around here. We'd be out at the coffee shop and talk about it and

they would come in there and one of them said something one day about how could we joke about it or something like that and Buck Miller, an old dairy farmer from out in Martindale was sitting there and he said, well, I am getting old or whatever and I got that darn think out of a hole anyway. It was a hard enough explosion that it cracked the blocks I in our old bard there and I got some cracks in the wall in the carport here. This house was three years old when that happened. And it shifted it enough that it cracked the blocks down in the concrete. It was a pretty good boom. I know we got over there to look, there were -- the reason they built the missile base where they built it, it sits in solid blue granite, they cored it out, and they cored the walls but it was protected because everywhere they put it it was solid blue granite, it was solid rock six inches deep down. It doesn't make good farm ground, but it makes a good missile base, which you can see from those pictures that's on the website that it shoved the wall straight out in that solid blue granite, it there was cracks in the corners, and squirted hunks of rock up as big as this house that was sitting around the holes, it squirted. It just squirted those huge blocks out, blue granite lay around there. There was one hunk of steel I remember, it was as big as the downstairs part of this house, five-eighths steel, honeycomb squares about that big, and they told me later it was solid concrete, the concrete was all blown off almost a hundred buried about half in the dirt about a mile away due west of us. That was the biggest miracle of the thing. There was probably 200 people at the site when it blew up, but except for the one that was killed and the other one that was blew out, they were all sitting on 165 or between 165 and the missile base. It blew everything west. West of it there wasn't a square yard that didn't have a hunk of concrete as big as a basketball up to as big as this house. Started at the missile base quarter mile wide, half a mile deep, but if it had blew east that way it would have killed everybody. It blew the blast doors, about 750 tons or whatever they was, cleared some huge oak trees in the northwest and landed out there in the woods out there behind that. If they had of went the other way -- they went far enough it was in the highway. That was -- that was one of the biggest miracles of the whole thing to me was that it blew everything that direction, it spared a lot of people. Most of the people I talked to about it say that when they clicked their exhaust fan on to try to vent the gas-that's what triggered the explosion, electric motor arced somewhere, there was a spark or something, there was a spark off of that. It was close to the same time and that's the last thing they remember they were going to go in there and do. And but it was about the biggest thing that ever happened around here. I went to Colorado a couple of years after that hunting and they would ask where are you from, Damascus, and you would get a funny look when you would say that. After that for a few years people knew where Damascus was.