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Second Section

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Rockcastle's Rocket turns the Big 40!

By David W. Owens

For forty years now as faculty, students, and visitors drive onto the Rockcastle County High School campus they are greeted by the large Rocket which guards the school's entrance. To say the least, it is an imposing sight. It reflects the pride the community takes in its educational system. Some say it is the best physical manifestation of any school mascot in the state of Kentucky.

I guess some would be

surprised to discover that it is not a rocket at all. It is a MGR-1 Honest John Missile. A rocket is a means of propulsion defined by having an entirely self-contained propellant used for various purposes, space craft, fireworks, etc. A missile is a specifically designed military weapon.

The Honest John (known in military terms as a HoJo) was the U.S. Army's first artillery, nuclear surface to surface missile. It was in service

from 1953 to 1973. The HoJo measured 27 feet 3 inches and weighed 5,820 pounds. It was powered by a Hercules X-202 rocket engine and mounted on a truck in order to be self-propelled.

The HoJo was designed to carry either a nuclear or high explosive (1,500 pound payload) warhead during a tactical ground attack. The HoJo has been deployed in combat but never engaged. It's primary intent was to destroy an armored tank fleet at a 15 mile range.

The HoJo, with large fin stabilizers, was an artillery weapon. Once on the battle field, it was aimed much in the same way as a cannon. It's launch was similar to throwing a dart. The system was replaced with the MGM-52 Lance missile in 1973.

But how did it come to be here? The school system received the MGR-1 missile as a gift from the Richmond Bluegrass Army Depot. The missile was transported on a 5 ton U.S. Army flatbed truck driven by Depot employee and local native George Adams from the Army Depot to the Vocational School (now the Rockcastle Learning Acad-

emy) for temporary storage. John Eaton's Central Body Service then transported the missile to the Clow Corporation, operated by Bill Cass, located on Dugg Hill road near Brodhead. There the missile was sand-blasted to remove the original paint and rust. From there the missile was transported to Eaton's garage where it was painted.

With the new paint dried the missile was transported back to the High School campus. It was mounted on supports built by the Clow Corporation on the front lawn of the high school. Now the present site of the Middle School. When the high school moved to the new campus in 1994, the Rocket moved with it. The detail letter painting was done by Depot employee and local native Bill Hale.

But where did the idea come from to get the missile in the first place? It began in the mind of Rockcastle County sports fan Clyde Owens. Owens said he got the idea while watching the Basketball Queen Coronation ceremony during the first Rockcastle County Thanks-

giving Invitational Tournament. As the queen candidates stood between two paper mache rockets made of chicken wire and Kleenex tissue, he got the idea to petition the ordinance depot for two small rockets. Owens approached then superintendent Charlie B. Parsons who encouraged Owens to pursue the idea.

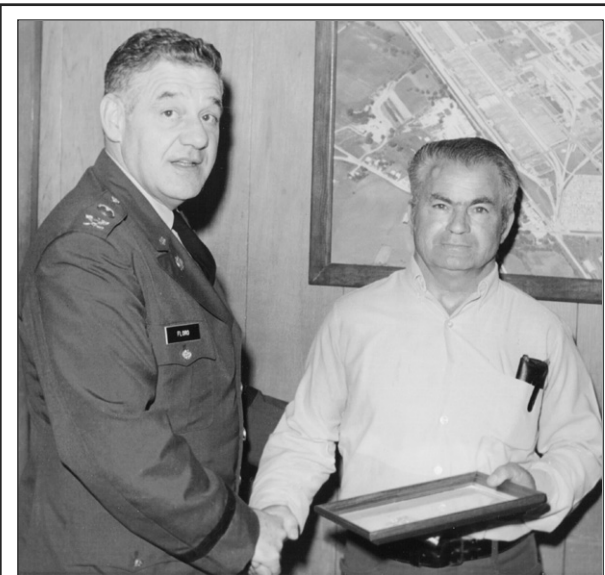
Owens, an employee of the Bluegrass Army Depot then took his idea to Colonel Robert Floro, commander of the depot. Colonel Floro stated that it was against Army policy to donate any active military weapon for public use but that the MGR-1 missile had just been decommissioned. As luck would have it there was a MGR-1 missile mounted in front of the Depot Headquarters and was scheduled to be disassembled for scrap. Colonel Floro stated the school could have it if the school submitted a Department of Defense request form.

Owens then appeared at the next scheduled school board meeting with the request form in hand and the board voted to accept his

proposal. Owens then returned the form to Colonel Floro and the rest is history.

The Rocket was officially dedicated at a ceremony held Friday, May 18, 1973. The principal speaker for the occasion was Major Barry Daniels, public affairs officer for the Richmond Army Depot. Superintendent Parsons served as master of ceremonies. Mr. Parsons recognized several people who contributed time and labor toward the project. Some of the people recognized were Owens, who Parsons termed as, "doing the leg work", George Adams, Bill Cass of the Clow Corporation, John Eaton of Central Body Service and commercial artist Bill Hale.

According to U.S. Army records there is only one other MGR-1 Honest John missile on public display. Neenah High School, also known as the Rockets, in Neenah, Wisconsin has a MGR-1 Honest John missile on their school campus. With proper maintenance and a little tender loving care Rockcastle's Rocket should last at least another forty years.



Colonel Robert Floro presents Clyde Owens with a certificate of Dedication and Department of Defense Release form for the MGR-1 Missile to become the property of Rockcastle County Schools.



The Clow Corporation of Brodhead donated their time and equipment to unload the rocket at RCHS from the Blue Grass Army Depot. Pictured are Bill Cass and Hershell Woods on the rocket and Charles Lawrence on the forklift.



Rockcastle County Superintendent Charles B. Parsons requested the Blue Grass Army Depot to furnish RCHS with a rocket to install on its front lawn to serve as a symbol of the Rockets' name. The rocket was moved inside and painted red, white, and blue before being permanently installed outside. Pictured are: George Adams, Supervisor Blue Grass Army Depot; Superintendent Parsons; and Cleston Saylor, principal at Rockcastle County High School.



The MGR-1 Honest John Missile on Neenah High School Campus.



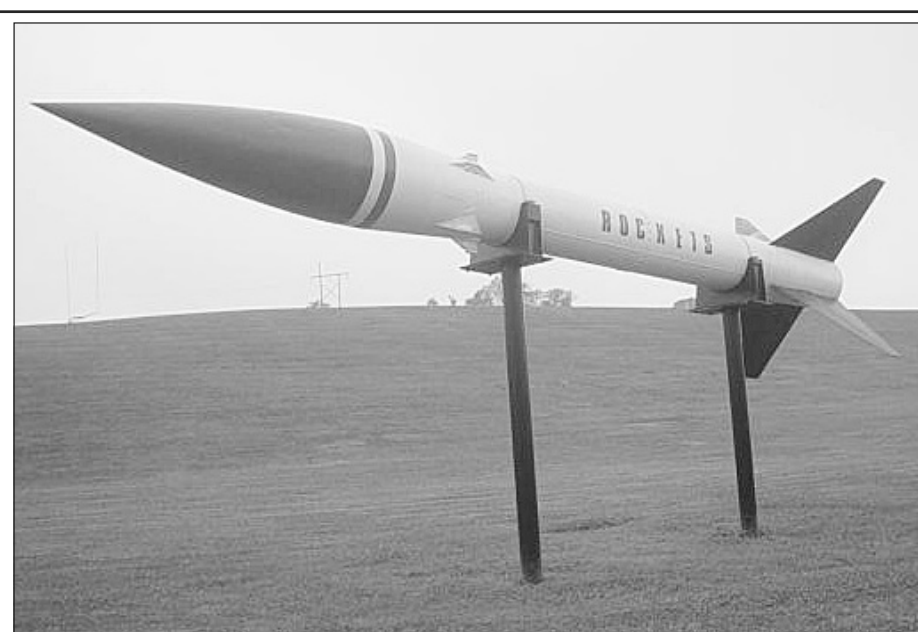
Rockcastle's Rocket as it appeared in 1973.



The MGR-1 Honest John Missile.



Test Firing the MGR-1 Honest John Missile.



Rockcastle's Rocket as it appears today.