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SUBJECT Location of Nuclear Weapons

HUGH DOWNS: Well, earlier in the broadcast we saw in Sylvia's report how overclassification seems to be hindering the effort to keep real secrets secret. Now we're going to raise another issue, and it too is the talk of Washington today. How much of the classified information spies are scurrying around for is readily available in an open, free society?

Well, a book published just today lists for the first time the specific locations of America's stockpile of nuclear weapons. And in doing so, it seems to make a mockery of government policy against such disclosures. It also raises the question: Do the Russians already know what we should know?

Here's Tom Jarriel's report.

TOM JARRIEL: Keep Out. That's what signs like these, guards like these, and fences like these are all about, protecting our nuclear arsenal. It's been like that for years.

When it comes to nuclear weapons, official U.S. policy says we will neither confirm nor deny the presence of such weapons. But the nuclear secrets they're guarding are not really such secrets to the people we fear most, according to defense analyst Daniel Ford.

DANIEL FORD: The Russians know where our nuclear bases are. We know where the Russian nuclear bases are.

JARRIEL: Both sides, the U.S. and the Soviets, have expensive, elaborate networks of secret agents and spy satellites working around the clock to learn more about the other's nuclear capabilities. But in an open society, our democracy, there's

plenty of sensitive information readily available if you know where to look for it. Remarkably enough, it's data the Kremlin already knows. But because of our government policy of keeping quiet, U.S. citizens often are unaware of it.

Twenty-nine-year-old William Arkin, a former Army intelligence officer, spent ten years researching nuclear weapons and storing data in his computer. Now he's written a book, out today, Nuclear Battlefields, about what he's found.

WILLIAM ARKIN: And now we've identified some 2000 facilities, and they are in 48 states, everywhere. And there are nuclear weapons deployed all over the United States.

JARRIEL: And they are everywhere, perhaps near where you live or vacation, as you'll see. They're stored in major metropolitan centers, near the Statue of Liberty and the Golden Gate Bridge, from Portsmouth, New Hampshire to San Diego Harbor.

Our government will not discuss these locations. When we asked the Pentagon for an unclassified list of nuclear bases to compare it with one Arkin compiled, they said one doesn't exist.

The little-known Defense Nuclear Agency, in this building without a name, keeps track of all 26,000 nuclear weapons in our arsenal. Dr. Walter Atkins is Deputy Director.

DR. WALTER ATKINS: I believe that the public fully understands that for their own protection it's necessary to keep a lot of information classified. They don't want to know information that should be protected.

JARRIEL: The public doesn't want to know if they have X number of nuclear weapons at a naval base a few miles from their home?

DR. ATKINS: I don't believe they do.

ARKIN: We may be putting together information which the Pentagon would prefer not getting to the public's hands. But the information is already out there for everyone to see.

JARRIEL: Before we tour the closed world of William Arkin's America, we should tell you how he says he's learned these sensitive details and why he thinks these secrets are not such secrets after all.

ARKIN: Our book was based upon Freedom-of-Information-Act requests, congressional hearings and reports, a lot of military manuals, and leaks.

JARRIEL: Some of this material, he admits, may be considered classified. But he says it was obtained legally, mostly by just writing letters and asking for it.

Arkin's coauthor explains:

MAN: Well, Tom, we got literally files full of information, like a file detailing Puerto Rico's nuclear contingency plans. We got brochures describing where missiles are tested. We got various things like telephone books that tell where the nuclear weapons officers are and what their duties are. We got maps of bases, like Adak, Alaska, where the nuclear weapons are stored there. And we got a huge inventory of all military property. And this lists all the missile silos, all the launch control centers, the whole thing.

JARRIEL: Using that type of data, the two authors have compiled a book which uniquely reveals the vastness of the U.S. nuclear arsenal for public scrutiny, debate, and potential political fallout for years to come.

Let's look at what they found. First, some surprises about where the warheads are.

[Clip of "The Day After."]

JARRIEL: If you watched "The Day After" dramatization, you'd think they're all in the missile fields of the Midwest, which certainly must be high on the Kremlin's list of potential targets.

These Minutemen ICBMs have been here so long, people have grown to accept them.

MAN: We've learned to farm around them, the guide wires and what have you.

MAN: They certainly haven't disrupted the productivity of the soil one bit.

WOMAN: And you grow accustomed to it. You really do. And you don't give it too much thought.

JARRIEL: Nuclear-armed B-52s fly regularly from bases nearby. Between the missiles and the bombers, Arkin estimates, there are 1510 nuclear warheads in North Dakota. The big surprise, though, there are more elsewhere.

The state with the most firepower speaks with a Southern accent, South Carolina. Arkin ranks it number one in warheads.

ARKIN: Charleston is the largest nuclear depot in this

country, and probably in the world. At any one time, there are three to five nuclear-missile submarines at the Charleston Naval Weapons Station. And there, you have a concentration of some 1900 or so nuclear warheads all together.

JARRIEL: Next door, Georgians may be surprised to learn that all of the estimated 406 nuclear warheads in their state are at Kings Bay, a new nuclear submarine base.

Further south, Jacksonville, Florida, a modern city with a proud military heritage. As the skyscrapers have grown, so has the sophistication of weapons used in the Navy's air and sea force based here. Today there are 230 nuclear warheads stored in the Jacksonville-Mayport area.

DAVID MCCLINTOCK: Folks really don't have an idea of the quantity, the number, or the quality in terms of size of explosion of the weapons that are being stored in their backyards.

JARRIEL: David McClintock was trained to fly nuclear-armed jets from Cecil Field in Jacksonville.

MCCLINTOCK: You could carry two on this particular aircraft.

The weapons themselves are generally not stored on board the bases.

JARRIEL: With fighter jets buzzing overhead like mosquitoes, just about everyone around Cecil Field suspects it has nuclear-armed planes.

But that's not the case at this no-place base directly across the highway. It's Florida's major nuclear weapons depot, called Yellow Water. The driver of this food concession truck told us he goes in every week, but didn't know what was kept there.

How did Arkin discover Yellow Water? Simply by reading the readily obtainable official Marine Corps magazine Leatherneck. It has photographs of the Marine guards, who have orders to shoot to kill; details of their daily training; photos of their armored cars; and times of their shift changes. It's information you'd think enemy spies would pay a lot of money for. But Leatherneck sells for a buck a copy.

ARKIN: I mean this is available to anybody who wants to go to a library.

JARRIEL: Getting on to the tightly guarded Yellow Water

base may be almost as easy as finding out what they're doing there. Local hunters say they crawl through holes in the fences, or enter as members of the base hunting club.

Clarence Allen's experience illustrates a problem with routine access. Last December his father didn't return from an authorized hunting trip. He had suffered a fatal heart attack. His worried son wanted to search for him, but the Marine guards didn't even know Clarence's father was still on the base because of confusion over the three passes they had issues.

So using these handmade, hand-scribbled crude passes and documents, you were able to pass through the gate.

CLARENCE ALLEN: right.

JARRIEL: And go right into the nuclear facility.

ALLEN: Right.

JARRIEL: Now, how close could you get to where the nuclear weapons are stored?

ALLEN: Well, you can get to the main fence there all the way around, because they have a road that goes all the way around, and just within inches.

JARRIEL: There was a classified investigation of this possible breach of security. Government regulations at nuclear weapons storage facilities call for elaborate security precautions, with double-fencing and well-trained guards. And even if they won't confirm or deny what's stockpiled there, the government claims it's secure.

But you can fly over them, as we did over New Jersey's Earle Naval Weapons Station just 30 miles from Manhattan. We saw what the Soviet spy satellites have already seen: weapons bunkers, called igloos, which are easily analyzed by arms experts.

ARKIN: We estimate that there are about a hundred nuclear warheads stored at Earle and that it is the main trans-shipment point for nuclear weapons in the Northeast part of the Atlantic.

JARRIEL: Across the river, another eye-opener out of Arkin's research bank. New York State ranks second in total warheads, with most stored upstate at the Seneca Army Depot.

ARKIN: There are about 1300 nuclear warheads stored in Seneca. It's a huge sprawling base of igloo after igloo after igloo of nuclear storage. Seneca is where all the neutron bombs

which the Reagan Administration has produced since August '81 are being stored.

JARRIEL: California is not far behind, estimated fourth in warheads, but first overall in nuclear facilities with 79.

Look at all the bases in the Bay Area. The largest concentration is at the Concord Weapons Station, 40 miles from San Francisco. It has an estimated 350 nuclear weapons.

When Public Television spotlighted this base, there was concern from some local officials, who called on the Navy to consider moving the depot.

After California on Arkin's list of the top ten nuclear states, Washington, Michigan, Texas, Virginia, Louisiana, Arkansas.

Despite all these weapons, the government contends there's nothing to fear.

DR. ATKINS: The public knows that it's officials have maintained the nuclear arsenal so well that -- without any risk to the public, any injury to the public at all.

JARRIEL: For some of the public, nuclear weapons are perceived as a danger, especially for those who live along the routes where they're shipped by rail on a heavily guarded white train, and on the highways in conspicuous white trucks. The government has acknowledged concern over potential sabotage or acts of terrorism.

Nuclear war planners are even more concerned about another element of the nuclear infrastructure, the vulnerability of command-and-control centers tucked away in places like Colorado's Cheyenne Mountain. They're designing a backup nuclear survivable communications system called GWEN which places conspicuous antennas in small communities, such as Canton, Oklahoma and here, Manhattan, Kansas, antennas which could make them a target.

MAN: These antennas, of course, are all subject to direct attack.

JARRIEL: In Amherst, Massachusetts, citizens protested plans to put GWEN towers there, fearing it would make their college community a prime nuclear war target.

Incidentally, if you want to get away from it all, only West Virginia and Delaware have no nuclear weapons-related facilities.

Doomsday weapons virtually in our backyard are a reality of the nuclear age which won't go away. Nor will the conflict between the public's right to know about nuclear weapons and the government's concern over secrecy for national security.

The final irony in this week of sensational revelations about Soviet spies: Some of the most sensitive information considered valuable to our adversaries can be obtained free with a simple public library card.

BARBARA WALTERS: Amazing.

Tom, since the book came out today, do you know what the reaction in Washington has been?

JARRIEL: Certainly. There's already been a storm of controversy kicked off at the Pentagon, where the official spokesman today, first of all, said they believe some of Arkin's information was from closed sources -- in other words, classified sources. They also are challenging the numbers that he's using. But they will not either confirm or deny that there are missiles, so they can't really challenge them too thoroughly.

WALTERS: But the basic premise remains. That is, that there are these bases all over the country that Americans don't know about, but Soviets do.

JARRIEL: They may quibble over a missile here, a warhead there, but the basic thrust of the piece, that these are over a broad geographic region of the United States, will not be challenged.

WALTERS: And all you need is a library card.

JARRIEL: Right.