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AMERICA'S RESORT

Activities

THE BUNKER

Facts

Official Name: The Cold War Bunker

Construction: 1958 - 1961

Square-Footage: 112,544

Location: 720 feet into the hillside of the West Virginia Wing of The Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va.

Verbiage

The Bunker at The Greenbrier is unlike any other in the United States. This former U.S. Government Relocation Facility was a top-secret project of the Cold War designed to accommodate both the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives in the event of a national emergency or nuclear war. This 112,000-square-foot, two-story bunker is buried 720 feet into the hillside under the West Virginia Wing of The Greenbrier. Construction was "hidden in plain sight," began in 1958 and was completed in 1961. The secret of this bunker's exact location was paramount and was maintained until 1992 when The Washington Post published a story effectively exposing it. After the exposure, CSX IP, a secure data storage company, signed a long-term lease for the entire bunker space. Today, group and private tours of The Bunker are available to members of the public and operate within CSX IP guidelines. The Bunker remains one of the most visited attractions at The Greenbrier.



Frequently Asked Questions

HOW MANY YEARS WAS THE BUNKER AN ACTIVE FACILITY?

The Bunker was kept as an active facility for 30 years. Communications and other equipment were updated, keeping it at full-operation status.

WHEN WAS THE BUNKER BUILT?

Construction began in December of 1958, and by the middle of 1961 the structure itself was nearly complete. Installation of equipment, however, continued well into 1962. To disguise The Bunker, the West Virginia wing of The Greenbrier was added directly above the bunker. The entire project, the underground bunker and the above-ground West Virginia Wing, was completed in April 1962.

HOW BIG IS THE BUNKER?

The facility at The Greenbrier measures 112,544 square feet and was prepared to meet the needs of 1,100 people. It would have been populated by 535 members of Congress - 100 Senators and 435 Representatives - supplemented by a similar number of staff people. There were 153 rooms in the facility.

HOW WAS THE BUNKER KEPT A SECRET?

The entire Continuity of Government program was a classified operation from its very inception. The number of people briefed on the project was strictly limited; only those with a “need to know” were informed. The construction of The Bunker was hidden within the addition of the West Virginia Wing to the hotel, that is, an overt building and the covert facility were built simultaneously. Once The Bunker was operational, only personnel with the highest level of security clearance were allowed inside. All of those individuals signed non-disclosure agreements which were backed by heavy fines and lengthy jail terms.

WHY WAS THE BUNKER BUILT?

The Bunker at The Greenbrier was part of a larger project called the “Continuity of Government” program. Created in the 1950s during the depths of the Cold War, the Continuity program was driven by the fear that if the Cold War ever led to a major military confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, Washington, D.C. would be targeted and eliminated. This would leave the nation with no leadership at the federal level. The Continuity program involved planning whereby the various segments of the government would be moved to “emergency relocation centers” in case of an attack on the nation’s capital. The Bunker at The Greenbrier was designed to be the relocation center for the United States Congress.

WOULD THE PRESIDENT HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO THE GREENBRIER?

No, there was another facility for the President and members of the Executive Branch.

HOW WAS THE BUNKER MAINTAINED?

A key component of the emergency plan was maintaining The Bunker at a constant state of operational readiness. In fact, one of the main reasons the facility was built at a resort was that maintenance of the bunker might be disguised within the ongoing maintenance of the larger physical plant. Up to one hundred Greenbrier employees, primarily within the resort’s Engineering department, were cleared on the project and would regularly inspect and upgrade all of the equipment.

HOW DID THE EXISTENCE OF THE BUNKER BECOME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE?

An article in the May 31, 1992 Washington Post Magazine exposed the project. The newspaper learned of the facility’s existence through government sources and, once they ascertained that exposure would cause no threat to national security, they published the story. This prompted a phasing out procedure that was finalized in July 1995 when the legal contract between the government and The Greenbrier was terminated.

CAN VISITORS SEE THE BUNKER TODAY?

Yes! The Greenbrier offers Bunker Tours on most days, all of which are open to the public and are available to guests ten years of age or older. Advanced reservations are suggested and can be made by simply dialing 1-844-223-3173.

Quotes

DR. ROBERT CONTE, THE GREENBRIER HISTORIAN

“The Bunker is most assuredly part of the history of The Greenbrier. It is a fascinating look into an era of legitimate nuclear threat during the Cold War. It is a must-do tour at The Greenbrier.”