

Air Defence Shelter: 1976 Guardian Article On Nixon's Shelter Visit

Unknown 'Nixon Privy to Peking's underworld' *The Guardian*, 26 February 1976.

'A clerk at the Chien Men clothing store flicked a switch: a section of the tile floor opened, and a former President of the United States walked down a flight of steps into a tunnel complex built to provide protection - against a possible Russian nuclear attack against China.

The Chien Men air raid shelter visited today by Mr Nixon is one of many in this city of seven million people. They all link up and tie in with Peking's subway system.

After touring the shelter, Mr Nixon told Chinese civil defence officials who guided him through the maze of tunnels: "having a shelter makes it less likely you will have to use it." The tunnels are under a busy shopping district just off Peking's Tien An Men Square, containing the Great Hall of the People.

The shelter can accommodate about 10,000 people. Chinese officials told Mr Nixon that practice air raid drills had shown that all 10,000 people could be inside the tunnel within five minutes.

Like the others throughout the city, the Chien Men air raid shelter was begun six years ago shortly after a border battle between Chinese and Russian troops on China's north-eastern border with the Soviet Union. After that incident, [...] Chairman Mao Tse-tung issued orders for people throughout the country to make tunnels for protection in the event of a Soviet nuclear attack.

In response, the 1,800 sales clerks and other workers in Chien Men district of Peking began digging the tunnels. About three-quarters of the people who worked on the complex were women, Mr Nixon was told.

Chinese officials said the underground shelters served three purposes: to provide shelter for people in case of an attack; to enable women and children to move to suburban areas if the attack were prolonged; to be used to fight "tunnel warfare" if the city was invaded.

Enough grain was stored to feed the able-bodied men who would remain behind if the city were invaded for several months. The shelter also had its own generator for electricity, telephones, large speaker systems, water wells, toilets, storage rooms, and a place for people to sleep if necessary.

"Do you have shelters like this in other cities, smaller cities, throughout China?" Nixon asked. He was told they did.'

TITLE

Nixon Privy to Peking's underworld

DATE

1976-02-26

CREATOR

Unknown

PUBLISHER

The Guardian

RIGHTS

Courtesy of Guardian News & Media Ltd under the Open Licence

DESCRIPTION

This article describes Nixon's visit to an air defence shelter complex near Qianmen (前门), not far from the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square.