

U.S. Coast Guard Base San Juan, Guard House
(Building 121)
La Puntilla Finalle
San Juan
Puerto Rico

HABS No. PR-~~134~~
133-B

HABS
PR
7-SAJU,
63B-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Southeast Region
Department of the Interior
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
U. S. COAST GUARD BASE SAN JUAN, GUARD HOUSE
(BUILDING 121)**

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Location: United States Coast Guard
Base San Juan
La Puntilla Finalle
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Significance: The Guard House (Building 121), constructed in 1942, is a contributing element of the Base San Juan Historic District, which is significant for its role as the commanding base of the Coast Guard's Tenth District in the Caribbean during World War II. Base San Juan, along with the Port of Spain, Trinidad and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, formed the major harbors of the Caribbean area. These major ports, together with smaller ports and harbors, formed a ring of protection about the approaches to the Panama Canal. From Base San Juan, the Coast Guard maintained and added new Aids to Navigation in the Caribbean, conducted beach patrols, and provided convoy escorts to protect merchant ships from German U-Boats. The Guard House was designed during World War II to serve as a controlled access point for all persons and vehicles entering and/or leaving the base, and continues to serve this function.

Description: The Guard House is a small rectangular plan building. All of the exterior walls, floor, and roof are constructed of reinforced concrete. The building is slab on grade construction and covers approximately 325 square feet. The main entrance to the building is on the east side, through a steel framed, steel entry door.

The interior walls of the building are also constructed of reinforced concrete and divide the building into three rooms: an entry hall, a bathroom, and an office. The entry hall is approximately 4' x 9' and provides a storage area and access to the other two rooms. The bathroom contains a shower, sink, and toilet. The bathroom floor and walls are covered in a glazed clay tile. The office measures approximately 10' x 10' and occupies the north half of the building. The office has a dropped acoustical tile ceiling and the walls have been covered with a synthetic wood paneling.

The south side of the building has no fenestration. The east side of the building has an aluminum framed sliding window. The west side of the building has two windows which are both approximately 3' x 3'. The

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northern window is an aluminum framed sliding type; the southern window is comprised of nine, 1'x1' glass blocks. None of the windows

appear to be original to the building. The north side of the building has a wood framed, wood entrance door which leads directly into the office.

A covered open porch is located on the southeast corner of the building. The porch walls are approximately 4' high and are also constructed of reinforced concrete. Fixed and sliding aluminum framed windows have been installed on the north and east sides of the porch to provide protection from the weather. The reinforced concrete roof of the porch extends from a decorative band around the main building and is supported by steel columns.

Historical Context: Between 1899 and 1906 the U.S. Navy Department occupied most of the southern half of La Puntilla, demolishing and constructing buildings as necessary. On the tip of La Puntilla the U.S. Lighthouse Service established a reservation on February 19, 1903. In September of 1940, the Quarantine station established on La Puntilla was formally transferred to the U.S. Treasury Department for use by the Coast Guard, which needed to expand beyond the Lighthouse reservation acquired in July 1939.

In February 1942, President Roosevelt directed that the Secretary of the Navy take all steps necessary to protect water-front facilities against injury from sabotage, subversive acts, accidents or other causes. The Secretary of the Navy entrusted this responsibility to the Commandant of the Coast Guard. To oversee activities in Puerto and the Virgin Islands, Base San Juan became the District Headquarters of the Tenth Coast Guard District.

As with all military installations, activity on Base San Juan increased dramatically during World War II. During this time the Coast Guard conducted its primary missions of aids to navigation and search and rescue as well as providing escort services and conducting beach patrols. Base San Juan was especially effected between 1942 and 1943 during an invasion by German U-boats that preyed on merchant ships transporting products and military supplies. In response to this assault, the Coast Guard provided escort service for convoys and patrolled for submarines. Base San Juan's location was crucial in defending headquarters in an emergency and its ability to disperse special patrols at any time within the district.

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Serving as a military base during World War II, security of the base was of utmost importance. It was during the beginning of the war that the Coast Guard constructed the Guard House to monitor personnel and visitors entering and exiting the base. The significance of port security is seen in the creation of a Volunteer Port Security Force (VPSF) comprised of local civilians to take the place of Coast Guard personnel needed for duty afloat. By 1944, 431 men of the VPSF had taken over about 50% of the Coast Guard duty on all San Juan waterfront posts (USCG, "First Narrative: San Juan Battalion"). VPSF members assisted the Security Officer and manned upwards of 24 standing and 14 roving posts. The VPSF may have served at the Guard House, although no specific mention is documented.

Sources:

Files of the U.S. Coast Guard Base San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Gautier, Jorge. Base Engineer, U.S. Coast Guard, San Juan. Personal interview regarding building history and use, November 10, 1998.

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USCG. Proposed Upgrade of United States Coast Guard Base San Juan, Puerto Rico. July 1998.

USCG. "Final Historic Resources Survey and Determination of Eligibility Report for U.S. Coast Guard Base San Juan." Report prepared by Greenhorne & O'Mara, Inc., August 1995.

USCG. "The San Juan Battalion Volunteer Port Security Force Coast Guard Reserve, First Narrative" Record Group 26. Record of the US Coast Guard. Narrative Histories, WWII, 1941-1945, Box 8 Entry 281, n.d. The National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Project Information: This project is a mitigative recording required by a Programmatic Agreement executed by the U.S. Coast Guard, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Officer regarding implementation of the proposed development and construction of Base San Juan. URS Greiner Woodward Clyde completed mitigation documentation for this project in November 1998. Andrew Bagniet prepared the photographic documentation. Charles Arthur and Susan Salvatore compiled the Architectural Data Form.

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