

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
MEDICAL DETACHMENT BARRACKS

HABS No. TX-3339-P

(Building Number 7159)

Pipes Drive

El Paso

El Paso County

Texas

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Southwest System Support Office
National Park Service
P.O. Box 728
Santa Fe, NM 87504

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

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Location: Pipes Drive, Fort Bliss, William Beaumont Army Medical Center, El Paso, El Paso County, Texas. The property is bounded by Fred Wilson Road to the north, Dyer Street to the east, Hayes Avenue to the south, and Alabama Street to the west.

Present Owner: United States Army

Original Use: Medical Detachment Barracks

Present Use: Barracks

Significance: This building is deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under Criterion A and C as a contributing element to the proposed William Beaumont General Hospital Historic District (WBGHHD). This district encompasses the permanent and semi-permanent buildings constructed in the WBGH area at Fort Bliss between 1921 and 1945. These buildings contribute to the understanding of the hospital's role of providing medical service to thousands of American soldiers and their dependents during periods of both war and peace. The original wards no longer exist; however, the remaining buildings in the proposed WBGHHD depict the administrative, social and recreational environment of the hospital during the period of significance. Even though the period of construction of the buildings within the proposed WBGHHD spans over twenty years, they form a cohesive environment based on architectural styles, construction materials, and geographic proximity. Furthermore, this building meets NRHP criteria in that it possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

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PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. Original Construction Date: 1921
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: United States Army
4. Builders, Contractors and Suppliers: Unknown
5. Original Plans and Construction: The building essentially retains its original exterior appearance and building footprint. Unlike other barracks structures, this particular barracks has retained its open porch on the northeast facade. Other barracks structures have been enclosed.
6. Alterations and Additions: The interior of the building has undergone major alterations. Gypsum board partitions were constructed in the 1980s to create individual sleeping rooms. The main circulation is now through a central double loaded corridor. A ramp system that connected two of the barracks has been removed. A small gabled "vestibule" was added to the building's northeast corner and encloses the basement steps.

B. Historical Context:

William Beaumont General Hospital was one of the U.S. Army's five original general hospitals. It opened at Fort Bliss on July 1, 1921 although the facility was not fully completed until the following year. The hospital originally consisted of forty-eight tile and stucco buildings with a bed capacity of approximately 414. The staff consisted of six officers, two nurses, and thirty enlisted men. William Beaumont General Hospital's original mission was to provide general medical care to border patrol troops stationed at Fort Bliss. By the 1930s, however, the hospital was serving the entire western portion of the Army's Eighth Corps area, providing health care to soldiers stationed at posts in Arizona, New Mexico, and western Texas.

When Congress authorized a limited peacetime mobilization just prior to the nation's entry into World War II, the Army initiated a major expansion program at William Beaumont General Hospital to increase its ability to handle the medical needs of the greatly expanding Army. During the World War II era, the hospital received new wards, instructional buildings, quarters, storehouses, repair shops, and recreational facilities. This new construction pushed the total number of buildings at the hospital to 174 and the

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number of available beds to nearly 6000. During the war, the William Beaumont General Hospital trained approximately 16,000 medical technicians, including over a thousand WAC recruits. The hospital also became a specialty center for plastic surgery, ophthalmic surgery, neuropsychiatry, and deep radiation therapy. In the last year of the war alone, some 26,358 patients received medical treatment at the hospital.

William Beaumont General Hospital was one of only ten, of the Army's sixty-three, general hospitals retained after World War II. Besides providing medical care to returning wounded soldiers during the conflicts in both Korea and Viet Nam, the hospital also provided general medicine and surgical services to veterans and personnel at Fort Bliss and other regional military installations. By the mid-1960s, the needs of the Army began to surpass the capabilities of the hospital. Consequently, the Army constructed a new, modern, twelve story facility to the west of the hospital. The new facility, known as the William Beaumont Army Medical Center, opened in 1972 and became the Southwest's major regional Army medical center.

Building 7159 is one of the original buildings constructed at the William Beaumont General Hospital. Built in 1921, this hollow tile stuccoed building originally served as Medical Detachment barracks. It was converted to a ward building in 1941. The original cost for construction was \$28,887.55.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The barracks is an utilitarian building containing a combination of Spanish Colonial and American Bungalow elements in a simplified version of either style. The Spanish Colonial style is evident in the roof forms and full open porches with Greek Revival influenced wooden columns. The American bungalow style is evident in the eave overhangs, exposed rafter ends, building materials (clapboard and stucco), and the full porches with wooden columns.
2. Condition of Fabric: The exterior of the building is in good condition. Although the interior has been substantially altered from the original wide open space, it has been well maintained and is still occupied.

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B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: The barracks is 109'-2" in length and 25'-2" in width, with an additional 10'-0" width with the porch. It has a first floor height of 11'-9" finished floor to ceiling, and a second floor height of 11'-6" finished floor to ceiling. The floor area is approximately 6,586 square feet, not including the porches.
2. Foundations: The foundation is a concrete pier and beam with footings.
3. Walls: Exterior walls are 10" stuccoed hollow clay tile.
4. Structural System: The structure is a 10" load bearing hollow clay tile wall system on concrete foundation. The second floor and roof structure are wood construction of beams with joists carried on saddle-type joist hangers.
5. Porches, Exterior Stairs: A two story full-width porch with full-height square paneled columns extends the entire length of the building's northeast (main) facade. Concrete steps leading to the first floor level are at both the northeast and southeast corners of the porch. Access to the second floor is possible via two wood-frame U-shaped stairs, one on each end. The first floor has a concrete floor with steel pipe rails, while the second floor is sheathed with tongue-and-groove wood flooring, and has a 34" high wood balustrade.
6. Chimneys: None
7. Openings:
 - a. Doors: Two single metal doors with one-light and a three-light transom are on the main (northeast side) on both floors. A wide five-panel wooden door provides access into the basement "vestibule."
 - b. Windows: Typically nine-over-nine-light double hung wood windows with cast stone sills are used throughout the entire building.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, Materials: The building includes a hip roof with exposed rafters. It is constructed of wood 2x, 1" sheathing, and finished with composition shingles.
 - b. Dormers, Vents: Two large metal vent stacks project above the hipped roof.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor Plans: The barracks is rectangular in plan with the main entrance on the southeast facade. It is a two-story building with a partially exposed basement. It includes an addition on the northeast side of the main building.
2. Stairways: Same as exterior.
3. Flooring: The floor throughout most of the barracks is carpeted. The bathrooms are finished with linoleum.
4. Wall Finishes: The exterior wall finish is painted stucco, with a full length painted wood porch. The wall finish on the interior is painted gypsum wallboard.
5. Ceiling Finishes: A 2' x 4' panel acoustical tile drop ceiling has been added throughout the corridors and bathrooms of the barracks as its finish. The plaster finish has been left exposed, within each of the private rooms.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doors: The interior door leading in to each of the private rooms is a single hollow core wood door. The bathroom doors have self closing hardware and kick plates.
 - b. Windows: The windows are painted.
7. Decorative Features and Trim: A wooden shelf is located above the row of bathroom sinks. No other decorative features or trim are visible.
8. Hardware: The doors throughout the barracks have been replaced through the years, leaving little or no original hardware.
9. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning: The heating, ventilating, and air conditioning duct work is positioned above the drop ceiling, running along the corridor with vents leading into each of the private rooms. Swamp coolers are on the backside of the building, on the southwest facade.
 - b. Lighting: Fluorescent lighting within the drop ceiling runs down each corridor, and attached fluorescent fixtures are within each of the private rooms.

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- c. Plumbing Fixtures: The plumbing facilities include toilets, showers, sinks, and stalls. Each bathroom contains exposed piping. Washer and dryer hookups are just outside of the women's bathroom.
10. Original Furnishings: None
- D. Site:
1. General Setting and Orientation: The barracks has been incorporated into the site of the William Beaumont Army Medical Center in El Paso, Texas (Figure 1). The front of the building faces northwest towards Lazear Street, and the main entrance from the vestibule on the northwest side faces Pipes Drive.
2. Historic Landscape Design: The historic landscape of William Beaumont General Hospital was renowned for its beautiful array of shade trees, shrubs, lush lawns and flower gardens. Between the grounds inception in 1920-1921 and the gradual reduction of maintained acreage in the 1950s, the landscape was referred to as the "paradise in the desert." Gardner William Reeves was most likely in charge of any planting plan or landscape design that may have governed the layout of the grounds. Today, only scattered residual vegetation and landscape features remain, and most of these have been installed since the period of significance. Building 7159 is located in the original 1920s construction area, where the landscaping of the hospital grounds was most extensive. Other than two trees along the southeast corner and a solitary shrub to the rear, the remaining landscape is now composed of open paved surfaces, sporadic lawn, and a chain link fence along the street edge.
3. Outbuildings: None

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- A. Architectural Drawings: The large format archival architectural drawings were found on file at the Offices of the Directorate of Public Works and Logistics and the Directorate of Environment, Historic Preservation Team, Fort Bliss, Texas. Drawings include those pertaining to the conversion to individual barracks facilities and alterations with drawing numbers of WB-576 (2, 5, and 6, of 11) dated April 1980. These included plans, details, and room finish and door schedules. Maintenance and repair drawings dated August 1966 with drawing numbers WB-452 (4 and 5 of 5), include floor plans. A small scale record of a floor plan and section were also found, dated May 3, 1940.

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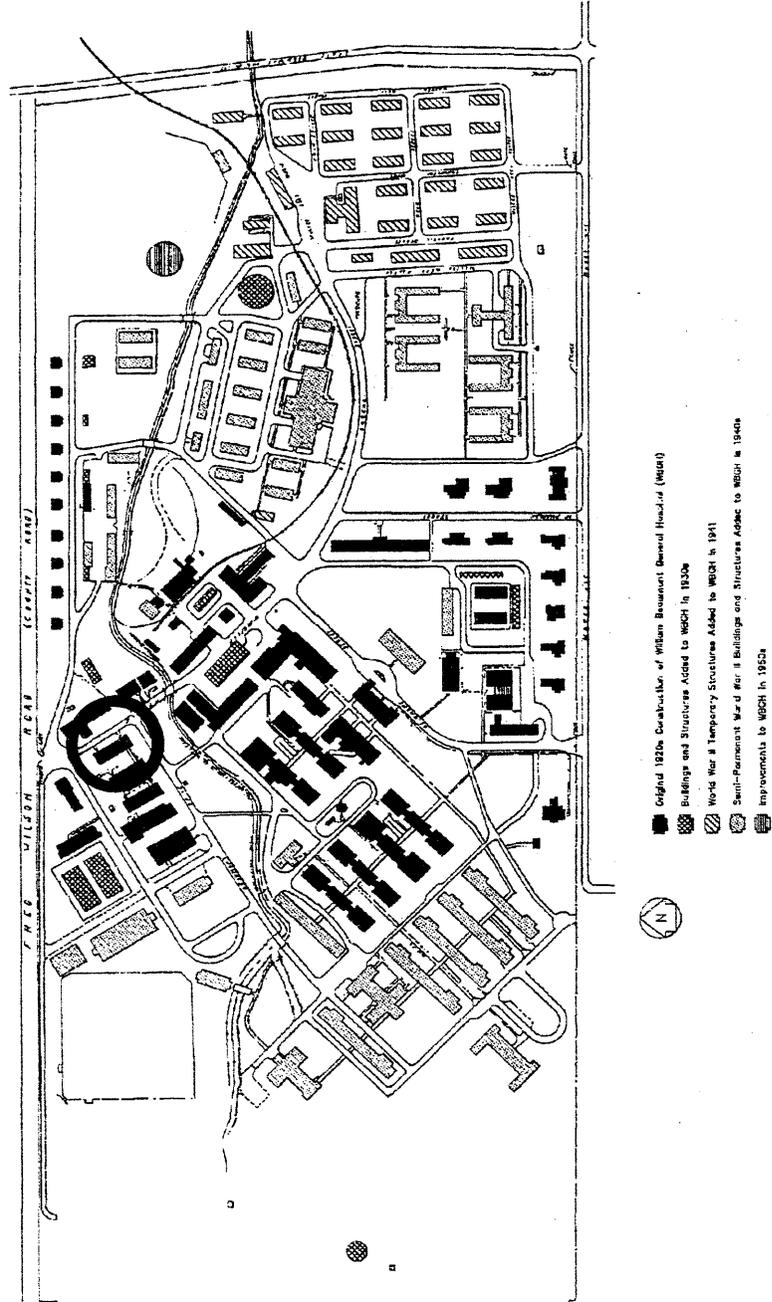


Figure 1: Building Location Map

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- B. Early Views: A collection of historic photographs is housed in the Office of the Directorate of Environment, Historic Preservation Team, Fort Bliss, Texas.
- C. Interviews: None
- D. Bibliography:
- Fort Bliss Real Property Management Office - Office of the Quartermaster General Records
- Fort Bliss IFSM Data August 1994
- Fort Bliss Facility List
- Map of Post Area - William Beaumont General Hospital, July 1945
- Texas Historic Sites Inventory Form - Texas Historic Commission, July 7, 1989
- E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: None
- F. Supplemental Material: None

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

The project was sponsored by the Office of the Directorate of Public Works and Logistics, Fort Bliss, Texas. Documentation was coordinated through Ms. Vicki Hamilton, Architect, Office of the Directorate of Environment, Historic Preservation Team, Fort Bliss, Texas. The project was completed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers Construction Engineering Research Laboratories (USACERL). The project was completed at the USACERL Cultural Resources Research Center. Ms. Sheila Ellsworth served as project architect. The project researchers were Mr. Patrick Nowlan, Dr. Susan Ensore, and Ms. Amy Lamb. Mr. Martin Stupich produced the large format photographs included in the report.