

Naval Air Station Dallas,
Commanding Officer's House
(Naval Air Station Dallas,
Building 202 [Quarters A])
Spruance Place
Dallas
Dallas County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3408-M

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Southwest System Support Office
Department of the Interior
Santa Fe, New Mexico

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NAVAL AIR STATION DALLAS,
COMMANDING OFFICER'S HOUSE
(NAVAL AIR STATION DALLAS, BUILDING 202 [QUARTERS A])
HABS No. TX-3408-M

Location: Spruance Place
Dallas
Dallas County
Texas

U.S.G.S. Duncanville Quadrangle (7.5)
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
14.690770.3624655

Present Owner: City of Dallas
Naval Air Station Dallas
Redevelopment Office
8100 West Jefferson Avenue
Building 102
Dallas, Texas 75211

Lessee: United States of America
c/o Commander, Naval Reserve Force
4400 Dauphine Street
New Orleans, Louisiana 70146-5000

Present Occupant: Commanding Officer of NAS Dallas

Present Use: Single Family Residence

Statement The Commanding Officer's House was constructed in 1929 as part of the original development of Hensley Field. It and the Executive Officer's House are the only examples of period revival style, single-family housing at the Naval Air Station (NAS) Dallas and the only remaining buildings associated with Hensley Field. Intended to provide a garden setting for the residences are two lagoons located across Spruance Place. Together, these elements are the only surviving tangible links to the origins of the base and the Army Air Corps' presence in the Dallas-Grand Prairie area. They are representative of the important role Hensley Field played in local history. When constructed, the house served as the residence of one of two senior officer and his family. Currently it is home of the commanding officer and his family. Apparently, built from standardized plans developed by the U.S. Army Quartermaster General, Construction Division, this residence incorporates elements of then popular Spanish

Colonial Revival architectural styling, a distinctive form frequently used by Army designers for residential buildings in the west, southwest, and south during the 1920s and 1930s. It is a distinctive example of military architecture between the world wars and illustrates one type of building the Army specified in this period. Despite alterations to the building, it retains its massing and form, fenestration patterns, and interior spatial arrangements. When viewed within the larger context of the historic landscape, the house and the lagoons reflect the attention paid to planning and quality-of-life issues for senior officer housing by military designers between the wars. These features convey a strong sense of time and place.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: Circa 1929. No original plans were located during research efforts. However, plans drawn in 1932 by the U.S. Army, Quartermaster General, Construction Division, show a building that appears to be the model for the Commanding Officer's House.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: --United States of America, Department of the Army (Army Air Corps).
--United States of America, Department of the Navy.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown
5. Original plans and construction: No original plans were located. However, Joseph Crews cites 1929 as the date of construction for the house in his 1993 report. Drawings prepared in 1932 by the Army Quartermaster General appear to delineate the house. These are standardized plans from the 600 series and include elevations (625-2449), plumbing and electric (625-2454), heating plans (625-2453), floor plans (625-2448), and sections (625-2450 and 625-2452).
6. Alterations and additions: In 1965 window air conditioning units were added, but were removed when central heating and air conditioning was installed at an unknown date. In 1970, the original basement garage was sealed off by a

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concrete, load-bearing wall. The first major alterations to the house appear to have taken place in 1977 when the original windows and the sunroom door were removed and sound suppressant types were installed. Storm doors and windows were added at that time. In 1978, the smooth-textured exterior stucco was sandblasted and the exterior refinished with rough-textured stucco. Deteriorated wood also was repaired at that time. Interior changes include the replacement of original interior doors and various redecorating schemes, and the conversion of the second-floor sleeping porch, located above the sunroom, into a sitting room.

B. Historical Context:

In September, 1928, the Dallas City Commission purchased 319 acres for \$75,000, two miles east of Grand Prairie in the Mountain Creek area for the purpose of leasing the land to the U.S. Army for the development of a military base. Under a 20-year renewable lease with a \$1 annual fee, the Army developed Hensley Field, an air base, which functioned as an Air Corps Reserve Base and Army Air Depot in the 8th Corps Area.¹ Close to both Fort Worth and Dallas, and situated at mid-continent, the field was well placed to provide both pilot training activities and rest and refueling services for cross-country flights. Hensley Field was approved by and named for Major William Hensley, Sr., Commander of the 8th Corps Area and noted plane, balloon, and autogiro flyer during the early years of American aviation. Hensley died in an air crash before the field was completed. Hensley Field began with just three buildings: an officer's club and two senior officers residences. Two lagoons were constructed adjacent to the houses in a park-like setting. Built with funding approved by the Army, this initial construction was manned in part by local men through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA). In 1930, the Dallas Chamber of Commerce provided \$16,000 for the erection of a 20 foot by 110 foot steel-frame hangar. A 40-man barracks was also built that year. Additional work took place in 1931 with the construction of the administration and radio buildings. In 1936, the Bureau of Air Service allocated \$362,852.92 to complete the runways, extend the aprons around the hangars, and construct additional support facilities and barracks.² Throughout the 1930s and during World War II, Hensley Field provided air ferry service for Army Air Corps planes.

In 1941, the Army agreed to allow the Navy to construct a Naval Reserve Air Base (NRAB) on 30.7 acres adjacent to Hensley Field. Built in three major World War II construction phases in 1941, 1942, and 1943, NRAB Dallas was part of congressional efforts to improve and expand military installations throughout

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the United States in order to improve military preparedness.³ From its commissioning in May 1941 until January 1943, the Naval facilities adjacent to Hensley Field provided primary pilot training; ground crew training; aircraft engine repair and overhaul; and depot services through the testing, acceptance, and ferrying of military aircraft built by nearby private industry. In January, 1943, NRAB Dallas was redesignated NAS Dallas, owing to the growth of training and depot activities that were part of the massive training effort to prepare men for D-day and intensified action in the Pacific Theater. In May 1945, NAS Dallas took on the additional task of overhauling R-985 radial engines pulled from flight-weary planes. At the close of the war, NAS Dallas was redesignated an NRAB with a mission of pilot training and Reserve recruiting. In 1949, the Navy assumed all administrative and management functions for the former Army Air Corps operations at adjacent Hensley Field,⁴ which continued to be used by Army and Air Force Reserve groups, the Texas Air National Guard, and the Texas National Guard. Both Hensley Field and the adjacent Naval facilities have been under one administrative command since that time. In 1961, all of the original Hensley Field facilities were demolished, except for the two senior officers residences and the adjacent lagoons.

The Commanding Officer's House (Building 202), one of two senior officers quarters built in 1929, served as the residence of senior Army Air Corps officers at Hensley Field throughout the Army's tenure. When Hensley Field came under Navy jurisdiction in 1949, it is thought that the house became the residence of the commanding officer of the NRAB, a function it still serves. The house spans the entire history of the Hensley Field and NAS Dallas facilities, and is one of only two buildings to do so. Although no original plans were found for the house, plans drawn by the U.S. Army Quartermaster General, Construction Division, in 1932 are identical. Designated "Company Officers Quarters" on those plans,⁵ the house is simple but accomplished, and incorporates Spanish Colonial Revival design elements. Popular throughout the country between 1915 and 1940, this style was selected by Army designers for standardized housing at installations throughout the west, southwest, and south. Located next door to the Executive Officer's House (Building 203) and across the street from the lagoons in their park-like setting, the Commanding Officer's house is significant for its support role as the home of the base's high-level officers and as part of the only remaining tangible features from the Army Air Corps Hensley Field era. The house and the adjacent water and landscaping features reflect the thinking of U.S. Army Quartermaster General architects and planners and provides an understanding of the attention paid to quality-of-life issues in the design of senior officer housing at that time.

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Changes made to the building include the replacement of windows and some exterior doors and the application of rough-textured stucco over the original smooth stucco surface. Interior changes are mostly cosmetic. The house will continue to function as the residence of the commanding officer of NAS Dallas until the closure of the base in 1998⁶ as a result of the recommendations of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission. When the base closes, the house, which the Navy leases from the City of Dallas, will revert to the ownership of the City of Dallas.

Notes

1. Rappetto, Francis P. "Hensley Field," June 1963, p. 5. Typescript on file at NAS Dallas Public Affairs Office.
2. Vail, Martin. "History of Grand Prairie," p. 43-44. Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1954.
3. Emme, Eugene M., Lt. (jg.), USNR, "A History of Naval Air Station Dallas, Texas," 15 October 1944, p. 3. Typescript on file at the Dallas Public Library.
4. Agreement NOy (R)-44882, 1 May 1949. NAS Dallas Public Works Department. Dallas, Texas. Naval Air Station Dallas Public Works Department. Deeds, Agreements, and Leases, 20 November 1940—12 August 1983.
5. U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps, Construction Division. Plans and drawings, Company Officers Quarters, 1932.
6. Department of the Navy. "Draft Environmental Impact Statement: Disposal and Reuse of Naval Air Station Dallas, Texas." April 1995.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Commanding Officer's residence is architecturally meritorious for its Spanish Colonial Revival styling, which is most notably expressed in its symmetrical massing, unadorned stucco walls, red tile roof, and simple projecting entry portico. Such elements, often chosen for officer housing on military bases in the west, south, and southwest portions of the United States,

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referenced both the comparatively mild climate and the history of the region. It is a stylistic "companion" to the Executive Officer's House (Building 203).

2. Condition of fabric: This building is in excellent condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The house is a two-story, three-bay dwelling that faces northeast. A two-story, one-bay, side-gabled sunroom wing is located on the southeast side. The house measures 37 feet wide, 32 feet deep, and 35 feet high. It encompasses 2,918 square feet.

2. Foundation: The building has a poured-concrete basement, and the first floor has been shored with steel bracing.

3. Walls: The building has masonry walls with a rough-stucco finish, which was applied in 1978.

4. Structural system, framing: The house utilizes a combination of concrete, hollow terra-cotta tile, stone, and wood framing.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: The house has a projecting one-story, one-bay, round-arch entry-porch located in the center of the front facade. The porch facade is slightly different than that shown on the original plans. It is not known whether this modification is original to the house or an alteration. Sheltered by a front-gabled roof, the porch has a concrete-slab floor and steps and retains its original cast-iron handrail with a newel post. An iron lamp is located in the center of the porch ceiling. A secondary entrance on the southeast elevation leads to the sunroom. It has a concrete floor and steps and a metal awning with decorative iron supports and a wrought-iron balustrade. A brass lamp is located above the doors. In the rear center bay of the house is a small back porch. It has concrete steps and stoop, a metal awning, a brass lamp, and a wrought-iron balustrade

6. Chimneys: An interior stucco chimney with a stone cap is located at the southeast gable of the main block.

7. Openings:

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a. Doorways and doors: The front entry door is a six-panel wood type, which appears to be original. Two of the wood panels have been replaced with fixed-pane glazing. The door is covered with an aluminum-and-glass storm door. The first-floor entry to the sunroom has replacement twin glass doors with faux muntins. The back door is an original wood-panel door with six lights covered with an aluminum-and-glass storm door. At the rear of the house is a cellar door with a concrete frame, wood base, metal cover, and metal doors.

b. Windows and shutters: The house has 6/6 double-hung wood-sash windows with stone sills and aluminum-frame storm windows. The sunroom has paired, 6/6, double-hung wood-sash windows on northeast side and a horizontal bank of four, vertical, double-hung wood-sash windows on the second story of southeast side. The basement has aluminum-frame hopper windows. Sound-suppressant windows were installed in the original openings in 1977. Building plans from 1932 show horizontal-slat wood shutters flanking each window on the exterior. It is not known whether these shutters were ever present on the house. No shutters are currently present.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The roof is side gabled with a terra-cotta tile covering. The mission tiles are laid in straight courses. Horizontal-slat wood attic vents are located in the side gables. A small satellite dish is located on the roof of the house.

b. Cornice, eaves: The building has shallow wood eaves with decoratively cut rafter ends. The roof has metal gutters and downspouts with a cast-iron collector.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: The house has a full, finished basement. It consists of a center hall, laundry room, family den, and what was originally a garage, located on the northwest side. The underground garage was enclosed by a concrete load-bearing wall in 1970.

b. First floor: The house has a modified central hall plan on the first and second floors with rooms on both sides. Upon entering the house, the living room is on the left side of the hall and the dining room is on the right. Behind the dining room is the kitchen. Behind the living room are a study and bathroom, which are accessed by the rear hall. The sunroom on the first floor has been converted into a family den. The original floor plan remains intact.

c. Second floor: On the second floor, two bedrooms are located on the right side of the hall. On the left side of the hall are the master bedroom, dressing area, and master bath. A bathroom is located between the front bedroom and the master bedroom. The second floor of the sleeping porch has been converted to a sitting room. The original floor plan remains intact.

2. Stairways: A wood staircase with carpeted treads is located in the central hallway. It has a painted wood handrail and newel post cap with painted balusters and newel post. Wood stairs with a steel-pole handrail lead down to the basement.

3. Flooring: The first floor has wall-to-wall carpeting, except for the hallways, which are linoleum. A wood-parquet floor is located at the front entry. Hardwood floors with a light stain are found in the master bedroom. Bathrooms have black-and-white hexagonal tile floors. The basement has a concrete-slab floor, except in the den, where there is a linoleum floor.

4. Walls and ceiling finishes: Walls and ceilings on the first floor are finished with nonoriginal textured plaster. Second-floor finishes are of smooth plaster. First-floor rooms and hallways have wood baseboards. Bedroom walls have picture moldings at the top of the wall and wood baseboards. Bathroom walls have tile wainscoting. The study has wood panel walls and a dropped particle-board ceiling. Basement perimeter foundation walls are concrete. The former garage door has been sealed with concrete and concrete block. The interior walls of the former garage are hollow clay tile. The basement hallway and den have lowered ceilings.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Most doorways have original, wood-panel doors with the "cross-and-bible" pattern. On the second floor, the hall-closet

door and bathroom-closet door have narrow, three-panel wood doors. Some doors have been removed, such as between the kitchen and dining room on the first floor. A wood-panel, two-way swinging door with a brass kickplate and push plate and porthole light is located between the kitchen and dining room. The basement den has hollow wood doors.

b. Windows and shutters: Window surrounds are wood. The study has decorative folding, louvered shutters.

6. Decorative features and trim: Flat-board molding surrounds are found on the door and windows in the sunroom. The dressing room has built-in closets with double wood doors and metal latches. The first-floor hallway has a built-in wood telephone niche with a drawer for telephone directories. The dining room has a built-in wood china cabinet with glazed double doors. Below the cabinet is a sheet-metal screen pierced with small, cut-out quatrefoils.

7. Hardware: Most doors have had the original brass doorknobs and keyholes replaced. The pantry door still has its original brass door knob and keyhole. Several of the doors have doorstops at the center with cracked rubber cushions that have been painted. These appear to be original.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: There is a fireplace in the living room on the southeast wall with a wood mantle. It has a brick front with a flat-arch framed by wood pilasters. The floor of the fireplace is terra-cotta tile. The fireplace opening is covered with a metal mesh screen. A faux-log gas heater is in the fireplace. The house has central heating and air conditioning; a heat pump is located behind the house.

b. Lighting: Sconces, shades, and chandeliers for room lighting are not original. Nonoriginal security lighting is located on the outside of the building.

c. Plumbing: Although the washstands and medicine cabinets have been replaced, the bathrooms have many older features. The upstairs bathrooms have niches located in the ceramic tile walls for soap and toilet paper. There are also ceramic toothbrush holders and towel rod holders. The old ceramic bathtubs have metal faucets with handles labeled "H" and "C" for

water. The downstairs bathroom is the only one in the house with original tub faucets with "H" and "C" knobs.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Commanding Officer's House is sited on a knoll and faces northeast in the area that was originally part of Hensley Field. The immediate setting of the house is residential in character. However, to the rear of the house are hangars and maintenance areas for the Texas Air National Guard. In front of the house is a semicircular concrete driveway and a flagpole. The large yard is planted with boxwood shrubs, flowering shrubs, crape myrtles, and trees. Trees planted on the northwest side of the house provide shade from the afternoon sun. A brick wall with a wooden gate encloses the rear of the property. Ten-foot-tall shrubs separate the Commanding Officer's House and the Executive Officer's House. The south side of the house has a concrete patio enclosed by a decorative concrete block wall. A portion of the patio is sheltered with a metal awning. A chainlink fence and a gate enclose the yard near the back door. Next to the storm cellar door is an iron grate and drain. Across the street from the house are two lagoons, which are thought to date from the original construction of Hensley Field and create a garden like setting for the residences. The lagoons are surrounded by lawn and trees, and a street that leads to the original Hensley Field gate, now used by the Texas Air National Guard, bisects these water features. On the north side of the lagoons is a major four-lane highway with commercial and industrial development. On the other side of the highway are railroad tracks. There is an abundance of noise from automobiles, trucks, trains, and military jets operating in the immediate vicinity.

2. Historic landscape design: The house is one of two officer's residences that overlook the old entrance to what was Hensley Field. Much of the residential character of the area is probably a continuation of the historic landscape design, as are the lagoons. Combined, the lagoons, their immediate landscaping, and the park-like treatment of yards associated with the residences form a garden setting for the houses that stands out in the highly utilitarian hardscape environment of the remainder of the base. An original concrete sidewalk is located adjacent to the eastern most lagoon and a four-drain concrete culvert connects the two bodies of water. Although the side of the culvert that faces northwest appears to be original, the side that faces southeast was replaced in the 1960s. The gently rolling landform that surrounds the lagoons appears to be unmodified, and the simple landscaping has been changed only by the addition of picnic tables and a gazebo adjacent to the eastern most lagoon.

3. Outbuildings: A covered carport with a brick wall and a wood frame utility building with wood siding are located behind the house.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original architectural drawings: No original drawings for the house were located. However, drawings made in 1932 by the U.S. Army Quartermaster General, Construction Division, appear to delineate the plans for the house. These plans are available at the Public Works Department, NAS Dallas. No decision has been made as to where the drawings will be moved when the base closes.

B. Early views: No early views of the house were located, although aerial photographs from 1932 show a portion of the eastern most lagoon, and aerial photographs from 1944 show both the lagoons and the houses.

C. Interviews: No interviews were undertaken to complete this form.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Dallas, Texas. Naval Air Station Dallas Public Works Department. Deeds, Agreements, and Leases, 20 November 1940—12 August 1983.

U.S. Army Quartermaster General, Construction Division. Plans and drawings, Company Officers Quarters, 1932.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Crews, Joseph M., *A Historical and Architectural Assessment of the Dallas Naval Air Station, Dallas, Texas*, 2 vols. Prepared for the Fort Worth District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Fort Worth, Texas, 1 June 1994, vol. 2.

Emme, Eugene M., Lt. (jg.), USNR, "A History of Naval Air Station Dallas, Texas," 15 October 1944, p. 7. Typescript on file at the Dallas Public Library.

Department of the Navy. "Draft Environmental Impact Statement: Disposal and Reuse of Naval Air Station Dallas, Texas." April 1995.

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Rappetto, Francis P. "Hensley Field," June 1963. Typescript on file at NAS Dallas Public Affairs Office.

Vail, Martin. "History of Grand Prairie." Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1954.

E. Likely sources not yet investigated: Information on NAS Dallas may be held in the National Archives, Washington, D.C., or in the architectural collections of the archives in Suitland, Maryland. These repositories will not be investigated for the purposes of this project.

F. Supplemental Materials: N/A

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The decision by the Defense BRAC Commission to close NAS Dallas and relocate needed activities to NAS Fort Worth (the former Carswell Air Force Base) triggered an assessment of the property's potential eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), as required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended. The Texas Historical Commission determined 12 buildings and structures in a portion of the base built for and associated with World War II Navy activities and two single-family officer's houses and two adjacent lagoons built for and associated with Army Air Corps activities in the late 1920s and the 1930s to be eligible for NRHP listing. The Texas State Historic Preservation Officer, the Department of the Navy, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation are in the process of signing a Memorandum of Agreement requiring Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) Level I documentation of the 14 buildings and structures and two lagoon areas. Through its Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Southern Division, with offices in North Charleston, South Carolina, the Department of the Navy contracted with Turner Collie & Braden, Inc., of Houston, Texas, to oversee the preparation of the HABS recordation. Under contract with Turner Collie & Braden, Hardy•Heck•Moore & Associates, Inc. of Austin, Texas, gathered historical and architectural information and, prepared a historic context and the HABS forms. Diane Elizabeth Williams served as principal investigator and project architectural historian. David Moore served as historian, Sara Kirtland was associate historian, and Elliott K. Wright gathered information for the architectural descriptions. Craig Melde, of ArchiTexas, Dallas, Texas, supervised the preparation of the measured drawings, Craig King served as project coordinator, and Stan Solamillo was the field coordinator. Measured drawings were drafted by members of the ArchiTexas staff. Tom Eisenhour recorded the historic resources with large-format black-and-white photographs.

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