

GORGAS HOSPITAL, SECTIONS A AND B
(Gorgas Hospital, Buildings 255 and 253)
Culebra Road
Balboa Heights Vicinity
Former Panama Canal Zone
Republic of Panama

HABS No. CZ-11-E

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
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For information about other structures at Gorgas Hospital, see:

HABS No. CZ-11	GORGAS HOSPITAL
HABS No. CZ-11-A	ADMINISTRATION AND CLINICS (Building 237)
HABS No. CZ-11-B	KITCHEN AND MESS (Building 238)
HABS No. CZ-11-C	SHOPS AND BOILER HOUSE (Buildings 240 and 240A)
HABS No. CZ-11-D	ISOLATION WARD (Building 242)
HABS No. CZ-11-F	MORTUARY AND CHAPEL (Building 257)
HABS No. CZ-11-G	SECTION O (Obstetrical Building, Building 261)
HABS No. CZ-11-H	MAIN STAIRS AND PASSAGEWAYS

Location: Culebra Road, Balboa Heights, Former Panama Canal Zone, Republic of Panama

Present Owner: United States Department of Defense

Original Use: Hospital wards

Present Use: Section A is a Hospital Clinic-Building and Section B is designated a Hospital Building, USA MEDDAC-Panama

Significance: Sections A and B, identical buildings constructed to house the main hospital wards in 1916, are significant for their architecture, their setting, and their role within American healthcare in the former Panama Canal Zone. Sections A and B were designed in concert with the Administrations and Clinics Building and are uniquely sited on a spur on the northeast slope of Ancon Hill.

A. General Statement:

1. History:

Sections A and B were the first wards constructed within the permanent hospital complex built between 1915 and 1919 on the northeast slope of Ancon Hill by the United States government. Construction began in 1915 on Section A (Building 255) under the direction of the Building Division of The Panama Canal. It was occupied in June of 1916. Section B (Building 253) was constructed in 1917 and occupied in April of that year. The original architectural drawings or as-builts date to 1915 for Section A and 1916 for Section B and the statement of responsibility shows that Samuel M. Hitt, the Panama Canal Building Division architect, was responsible for their design while H. Rowe, resident engineer, was credited with the engineering components of the design. T. C. Morris, the Building Division's assistant engineer in charge of foundation work, reinforced concrete, and analyses for size and dimensions of beams, columns and floors, reviewed the plans. Hitt's imposing design which drew from the style and scale of the permanent architecture constructed in the adjacent canal community of Balboa, created functional and attractive buildings to house the first hospital wards. In addition, both were functionally linked to the other hospital buildings by walkways and covered passageways, permitting the easy transfer of patients, supplies, and meals.

Each section incorporates three buildings (two rectangular wings and a service building) in a pavilion arrangement. Original plans refer to Sections A and B as Ward Groups No. 4 for Section A (Building 255) and Ward Group No.5 for Section B (Building 253). The original plans show the three buildings within each section separately, referring to each wing as Buildings "A" and "B" while the central service building is referred to as "C." Four large open wards, each accommodating 29 beds, and surrounded by porches, were located on each floor in Subsections "A" and "B" for Building Section A. The service building that bridged the two wings was outfitted with a main stairway, rest rooms, dining room, nurses' and orderlies' rooms.

As built plans for Building Section B (Building 253) show that it housed the maternity department, children's wards, wards and private rooms for American and foreign men and women within 37 private rooms, 7 small wards, and 2 cells. Subsection "A" had private rooms, and wards for children, Spanish patients, and American patients on its first floor and obstetrics and nursery on the second floor. Subsection "B" contained private rooms and surgical wards for Americans. Subsection "C", like its counterpart in Section A, contained the main stairway, rest rooms, dining

room, nurses' room and a "special" room on its first floor and private rooms and service rooms on the second floor . The *Annual Report of the Governor of the Panama Canal for 1917* noted that Section B building was appointed with white enamel furniture, electric sterilizers, ranges, elevators and a call system. Only the construction cost for Section A was reported at \$129,182.50 in the *Annual Report of the Governor of the Panama Canal for 1916*.

A circa 1920 view of the ward reserved for Spanish patients shows an open room to the ceiling with exposed concrete beams. Structural columns with curtain walls formed the perimeter of the room; the ward walls did not reach the ceiling to allow maximum ventilation from the open porch/corridors. The inner walls were amply ventilated by paired casement windows. Floors were finished with red ceramic tile and electric lights were positioned on each interior column. The ward was simply furnished with white enamel beds and tray tables. A view of a private room indicates that each room had a inner corridor glass and frame double door with a hopper opening transom and an outer door leading to the porch/corridor. A series of clerestory windows was positioned over the outer door and windows. The floor in the private room were finished with red ceramic tiles and the ceiling was open to the beams.

2. Architectural Character:

In plan, Sections A and B, which are long, rectangular, reinforced concrete buildings, are angled to accommodate their site. They are joined with the Administration and Clinics Building by passageways at their western elevations and the stately Main Stair and passageway on their eastern elevations. The three buildings and passageways form a distinctive and harmonious unit within the complex. Designed as pavilions, each tripartite building section is monumental in size with main entry porte cocheres supported by paired columns and accented with parapeted balconies, and exterior walls featuring dripstone courses, inset panels, rusticated quoins and window openings flanked with columns. End elevations were supported by sets of paired columns. These architectural elements are found in the other buildings within the hospital complex as well as the hipped roof finished with red Spanish tile.

These buildings have been in continuous use since their construction and their preservation is good. Modifications to the historic fabric of the building are confined to the closure of both sections' original four sided open porches to accommodate climate control. These modifications have seriously compromised the openness that once defined these pavilion style buildings, changing their character. Interior changes have also occurred due to changes in use and to climate control and the original floor plans are no longer intact.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions:

In plan, Sections A and B are composed of two rectangular buildings joined at an angle to a T-shape building. Each wing building is 138' by 40' while the T-shaped service building is 92' by 32'. The service building portion has nine bays while each ward wing has nine 16' bays. The building has three stories. The basement floor is 12'6" in height, the first story is 14'6", the second story is 11'8".

2. Foundations:

Foundations are constructed of poured-in place reinforced concrete.

3. Walls:

Load bearing walls and structural columns were constructed of reinforced concrete; partition walls of concrete block. Annual Reports of the Governor of the Panama Canal prepared by the Resident Engineer for 1916, 1917, and 1918 state that walls less than 6 inches thick were laid in hollow cement block, plastered with two coats of cement and sand stucco and troweled "to a dead finish." Concrete walls were rubbed and filled to match this finish. Exterior walls are detailed with rusticated quoins, rectangular inset panels on the second floor curtain walls between columns, and dripstone courses. Interior walls were treated with two coats of a wash of sulfate of zinc, two coats of flat-finish oil-base paint then a third coat of enamel washable paint.

New walls have been created by the infilling of former openings along each wing's four elevations with concrete or with windows and concrete. Each first story column is 12' 3" in height and 1'6" across. Columns on the upper story are 7'5" high and alternate in width between 1'6" and 1'. A 2'10" high concrete parapet originally ran between the columns when the porches were open. The upper story parapet features inset squares and rectangles. These parapets now form the base of a window opening or an infill area.

4. Structural System:

The structural system is reinforced concrete with concrete block partition walls. The roof is a wood truss and the floors are reinforced concrete slabs.

5. Porches, Exterior stairs:

The original porches which extended around all elevations of the wing buildings and were recessed under the main roof and supported by columns have been infilled with windows or other materials to accommodate climate control. The porte cochere is square, projecting 11' from the entry and measuring 10'6" across. It is connected to the slightly projecting main entry bay in the central or service portion of each building. Constructed of reinforced concrete, it extends over Culebra Road and is supported by paired columns. It supports a small balcony with a parapet detailed with recessed panels.

6. Chimneys:

None.

7. Openings:

a. Doors:

The main doors are contained within the hipped roof, entry area that projects 7'10" from the service area and incorporates the porte cochere. The door trim is simple and the double doors with panic bars and door closers are modern glass replacements. The original doors were wood paneled. Secondary doors occur on each end elevation connecting these buildings to the complex passageways or main entry staircase and these are modern.

b. Windows:

Windows are all modern replacements typically with four light fixed type windows that fill in the once open porch areas that lined three sides of each of the wing buildings. First story windows are tinted and have security grills. Some replacement windows are smaller and are surrounded by concrete in the once open porch bays. Fixed glass block windows have replaced original casement

windows on the second story porch area over both porte cocheres on each building. Many service section front elevation windows have been filled in with concrete, end elevation bays have been similarly infilled.

8. Roof:

a. Shape and Materials:

The primary and secondary roofs for each building subsection are hipped and finished with red Spanish tile.

b. Skylights, Vents

Copper louvered semicircular ventilators were originally placed on the primary roofs for each building. Steel replacements that mimic the original vents have been installed. Each building's service subsection rear elevation roof has an added utility tower with a Spanish tile pyramidal roof.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

Both buildings have been extensively updated and remodeled to house different clinics and medical offices. The original floor plans of the wings are no longer intact. The infilling of the wing porches with either concrete or windows has changed the basic floor plan and new partition walls have been added to the wing floors. The original plan in each of the wing buildings featured large central rooms that communicated with a porch on both sides or clusters of small private rooms that had an interior corridor in addition to the open porches. Building 255 currently has stair halls in its end elevations and a stair hall in the central entry. The building's clinics are accessed by the northern porch which is now a glassed in corridor that runs the length of the building and accesses all the clinics which occupy the space once devoted to the wards and the opposite open porch/corridor. Rooms associated with separate clinics such as the dental clinic occupy a floor of a wing. The basement floors are fairly open with space devoted to storage and laundry facilities. In contrast, the service portion of the building's original plan remains fairly intact, including stairwells, rest room facilities, etc. Rooms once used for nurses' rooms or dining rooms have been converted for office or clinic use. This reuse pattern was noted for both buildings which were extensively remodeled in 1967, 1974, and 1987. Section A (Building 255) was connected to

Building 264, Gorgas Army Hospital's Main Building in the 1960s via an underground tunnel which connects all the primary hospital buildings.

2. Stairways:

The stairways are concrete with thick, wood balusters and a curved wooden handrail. Stairways occur in the main entry and end elevations. Original drawings show the end elevation stairs were originally housed in the open porches located on the end elevation of each floor. The balusters, balustrade, and handrails constitute both buildings' best preserved original features.

3. Flooring:

The corridors, stairwells, and main entry floored with vinyl tile. Clinic areas are carpeted.

4. Walls and Ceiling Finishes:

Original walls are painted concrete appearing in the main entry and stairwell. Infilled walls are also painted concrete. Interior partition walls that once defined ward areas are no longer intact. Modern partition walls exist in each clinic area; waiting rooms have an open plan. Ceilings are dropped with acoustical tile used in remodeled areas.

5. Openings:

Doors:

Interior doors are modern and appear to date to the 1987 remodeling.

Windows:

No distinctive interior windows noted.

6. Decorative Features and Trim:

None noted.

7. Hardware:

None noted.

8. Mechanical Equipment:

a. Heating and Air Conditioning:

Both buildings have central air conditioning as well as window units.

b. Lighting:

All lighting is modern fluorescent lighting.

c. Plumbing Fixtures:

All plumbing fixtures have been updated. No original fixtures were identified.

d. Conveyance System:

An elevator is located in the main entry area of service subsection that accesses all three floors.

9. Original Furnishings:

None noted.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation:

Section A (Building 255) faces north while Section B (Building 253) faces south. The buildings are angled and uniquely sited joining the central Administration and Clinics Building in a triangular formation. Both front elevations face Culebra Road. Diagonal parking is allowed by the main entries and curbside parking is afforded along both sides of Culebra Road which winds through the courtyard created by Sections A and B and the Administration and Clinics Building. Section A's rear elevation is skirted by a parking lot and the covered tunnel that connects Section A to

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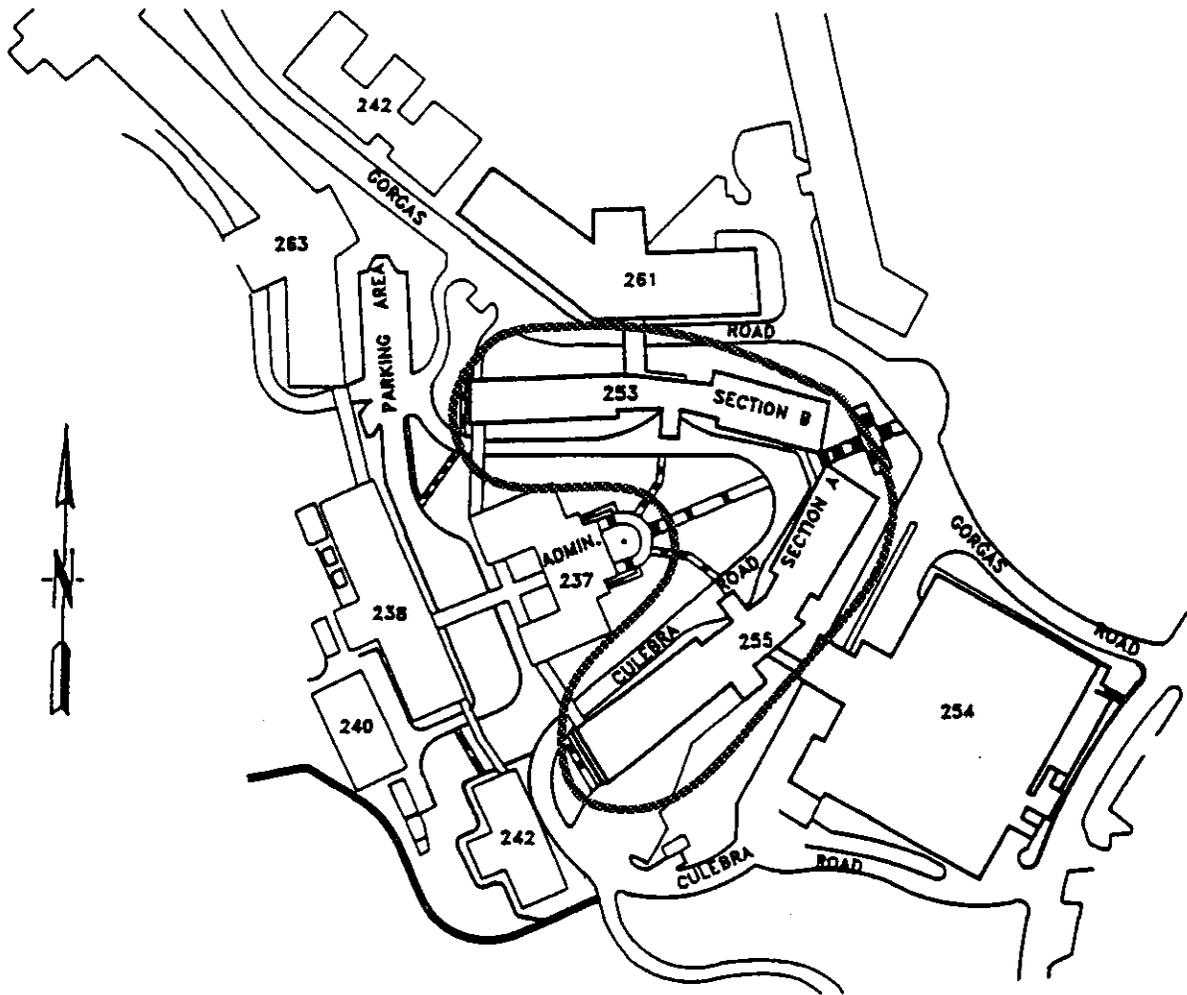


Figure 1 Map, 1996 (original located at Real Property Office, Corozal).
Mapmaker unknown.
GORGAS ARMY HOSPITAL COMPLEX

Building 264 the Gorgas Army Hospital extends over a large grassy bank and the service road leading from Gorgas Road into the complex. Parking is limited in the interior courtyard; some cars are parked on the grass banks that flank these buildings and Building 237.

Sections A and B are joined by a passageway which also leads to the Main Stairs. The latter connect the lower Gorgas Road elevation with the terrace on which these buildings are located. The end elevation on the west side of both buildings is connected to the Administration and Clinics Building by an elevated covered passageway that arches over Culebra Road and acts as the formal entry to the interior courtyard created by this group of buildings.

2. Historic Landscape Design:

No historic landscape design was identified

3. Outbuildings:

None.