

MOUNTAIN HOME AIR FORCE BASE 1958 SENIOR OFFICERS'
HOUSING, COMMANDER'S RESIDENCE
(Building 4478)
Tuck Street
Mountain Home vicinity
Elmore County
Idaho

HABS ID-118-B-2
ID-118-B-2

HABS
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MOUNTAIN HOME AIR FORCE BASE 1958 SENIOR OFFICERS' HOUSING,
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Location: Building 4478 on Tuck Street (originally Locust Street), Mountain Home Air Force Base, Elmore County, Idaho

USGS Crater Rings Southeast Quadrangle, UTM Coordinates
11.593395.4767368

Present Owner: United States Air Force

Present Occupant: Military Officer

Present Use: Military Family Housing

Significance: The commander's residence is one of three senior officers' houses at Mountain Home Air Force Base (AFB) constructed as part of the 270-unit Armed Services Housing Project, a collaboration between the architectural firms of Richard J. Neutra & Robert E. Alexander of Los Angeles and Hummel, Hummel & Jones of Boise, Idaho. Prominent architect Richard Neutra designed the three officers' housing units in 1958 and construction was completed in 1959. The housing reflects elements of the International Style, of which Neutra is considered a master, and is the only example of his work in Idaho.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Plans for the commander's residence are dated April 14, 1958, and were approved on April 15, 1958. Real Property cards indicate that construction was completed in August 1959. Frank Hummel of Hummel, Hummel & Jones certified the plans as built on April 27, 1960.
2. Architect: Richard J. Neutra & Robert E. Alexander of Los Angeles and Hummel, Hummel & Jones of Boise, Idaho
3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses: The United States Air Force has maintained ownership of the commander's residence since its construction in 1959.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The contractor for the 270-unit Armed Services Housing Project was Sheriden, Inc. of Pasadena, California. The landscape architecture firm was Baldwin, Eriksson & Peters of Los Angeles.
5. Original plans and construction: The original design of the commander's residence was a one-story house with a rectangular floor plan and linear arrangement of rooms, with the façade facing northwest. Plans specify a house comprising four bedrooms, three bathrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen, breakfast nook, and garage. The garage door was clad in wood siding to complement the wood siding on the façade of the house. A walled service yard at the front elevation was part of the original plan, as was an open concrete terrace at the rear elevation.
6. Alterations and additions: Since its completion in 1959, there have been no additions to the house. On the interior, the original plan included an accordion wall between the living room and fourth bedroom. The accordion door has been removed and replaced with a permanent wall. Cabinets in the kitchen and bathrooms have been replaced, and the original kitchen cabinets were reinstalled in the garage. Original oil furnaces were replaced in 1987 with gas furnaces, and in 1990, original evaporation coolers were replaced with air conditioning units.

B. Historic Context:

Mountain Home AFB was originally established during World War II as Mountain Home Army Air Field under the Army Air Forces. The airfield opened on August 7, 1943, and was used throughout the war for heavy bombardment combat training (Weitze et al. 2006:14). Following the end of World War II and throughout the mid-1940s, use of Mountain Home Army Air Field was sporadic. The establishment of the independent United States Air Force in 1947 brought more regular use to the base, which reopened in December 1948 as Mountain Home Air Force Base (Air Force History Overview 2007).

Strategic Air Command (SAC) served as the first host command for the base, beginning in 1948. During that time, the base was used for geodetic and reconnaissance photography training (Weitze et al. 2006). The base closed in April 1950 and remained inactive until January 1951, a few months after the Korean War began. In January 1951, Mountain Home AFB reopened and was home to the 580th, 581st, and 582nd Air Resupply and Communications (ARC) Wings. Throughout the Korean War, the resupply units, airborne materiel assembly squadrons, and a balloon-launching squadron assigned to the base flew C-119, B-29, and SA-16 aircraft and "trained to support what we know today as covert and special operations" run by the Central Intelligence Agency (MHAFB History 2007). Following the end of the Korean War in 1953, Mountain Home AFB remained open and SAC returned as the host command where it continued bombardment and special weapons training. SAC remained the host command until 1966, and Mountain Home AFB experienced substantial growth under its command from 1953 to 1966, largely due to the construction of three Titan missile sites in southern Idaho and the resultant assignment of additional personnel to prepare for this new missile capability. After the closure of the

missile sites had begun in 1964-1965, SAC's mission at Mountain Home came to an end. In January 1966, Tactical Air Command (TAC) assumed control, focusing on a variety of reconnaissance missions using first RF-4C aircraft and then F-4D Phantoms. Upon its return from Vietnam, the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing became host command in 1972 (MHAFB History 2007; Weitze et al. 2006). Now known as the 366th Fighter Wing, the group remains as the base command at Mountain Home AFB (MHAFB History 2007).

In continuous use since the early 1950s, the base experienced an important period of growth in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly with the construction of several hundred units of on-base housing under the Wherry and Capehart housing initiatives. At the outset of the Cold War, the United States military was faced with a tremendous lack of on-base housing for its personnel. The Wherry (1949) and Capehart (1955) programs were introduced to create a more efficient system by which military housing was constructed and managed. The Wherry housing program ran from 1949 to 1955 (Weitze et al. 2006). Introduced by Senator Kenneth Wherry of Nebraska, the bill provided for collaboration between the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), the military, and private developers (United States Army Environmental Center [USAEC] n.d.:31)

By August 1955, consternation over the shortcomings of the Wherry initiative prompted Senator Homer Capehart of Indiana to introduce new legislation that sought to correct some of the problems that arose under the Wherry program, namely, the use of poor quality building materials and lack of maintenance upkeep by developers. Under the Capehart legislation, once construction was complete, the military would own and maintain each housing project. Per-unit costs were also raised under the Capehart program, which enabled better quality housing to be built (USAEC n.d.:57-59). The Capehart program also included funds for the acquisition and renovation of housing built under the Wherry Act. Both Wherry and Capehart housing projects were implemented at Mountain Home AFB.

In September 1953, Mountain Home AFB formalized its housing needs, and in December of that year, the Wherry housing design contract was awarded jointly to the firms of Neutra & Alexander and Hummel, Hummel & Jones. The contract called for 500 family housing units to be constructed on the base (Weitze et al. 2006:24). The Mountain Home AFB Wherry housing project was the first collaboration between Neutra & Alexander and Hummel, Hummel & Jones. Hummel, Hummel & Jones, based in Boise, Idaho, achieved renown in the early twentieth century for its designs for the Idaho State Capitol, St. John's Cathedral in Boise, and the administration buildings at the University of Idaho and Idaho State University. The firm's location in Boise and prominence in the state of Idaho contributed to its selection for projects at Mountain Home AFB.

Neutra & Alexander and Hummel, Hummel & Jones collaborated again in 1958 on the design of 270 units of Capehart housing for Mountain Home AFB. This commission consisted of 108 officers' quarters and 162 enlisted men's duplex apartments (*Mountain Home News* 1958). The three units of senior officers' housing documented for this project were built during this phase.

Born in Vienna in 1892, Richard Neutra received much of his architectural training in Austria, studying at the Technische Hochschule in Vienna with Adolf Loos, and after graduation, working with Erich Mendelsohn in Berlin. Neutra immigrated to the United States in 1923, briefly living in New York and then settling in Chicago. He worked as a draftsman for Holabird & Roche while in Chicago, in the intervals between his work for Wright at Taliesin, Wright's self-designed home and studio in Wisconsin (Allaback 2000; Roth 2001:394). Neutra moved from Chicago to Southern California in 1925, where he established himself as one of the most highly regarded architects in a new school of modern, experimental design (Allaback 2000). Among his most well-known designs is the Dr. Phillip Lovell house in the Hollywood Hills of Los Angeles. In the Lovell house, Neutra implemented many elements of design that would come to define his brand of "California Modern" architecture, specifically, repetitive bands of windows, cantilevered projections, flat roof surfaces, and the marriage of man-made form with the natural landscape.

During the next three decades, Neutra continued to build his reputation as an innovative and modern designer with commissions ranging from single-family housing to apartment and office buildings. By the late 1940s, already established as an icon of modern architecture, Neutra was looking for a partner with whom to expand the scope of his work to include more planning and public architecture commissions (Allaback 2000; Hines 1982:223). Robert Alexander had significant experience with urban planning, having designed several residential communities as a partner in the firm of Wilson, Merrill and Alexander. Neutra and Alexander became acquainted in the 1940s, and their partnership was formed in 1949 when Alexander invited Neutra to work on a Public Housing Authority project in Los Angeles known as Elysian Park Heights (Hines 1982:224).

The firm of Neutra & Alexander won a number of large-scale commissions throughout the 1950s. Among the largest government commissions awarded to the firm were the Wherry and Capehart housing projects at Mountain Home AFB (Hines 1982:243). The houses employ Neutra's trademark flat planes, rectilinear volumes, cantilevered projections, and walls of windows that create a relationship between interior and exterior spaces. All of these elements had become hallmarks of Neutra's designs and the International Style. The housing at Mountain Home AFB incorporated these aspects in modest and practical applications, paring down even further Neutra's already simple and unornamented aesthetic. The commission for the Mountain Home AFB Capehart housing project came near the end of the partnership between Neutra and Alexander. In 1958, the partnership officially dissolved, but their final joint commissions were not completed until 1960. Both Neutra and Alexander continued working independently after 1960 (Hines 1982:249).

Many of the Wherry and Capehart units designed by Neutra & Alexander and Hummel, Hummel & Jones at Mountain Home AFB were in continuous use through 2007, demonstrating the success of the designs themselves as well as the housing initiatives under which they were constructed.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The commander's residence (Building 4478) at Mountain Home AFB is a one-story house with a rectangular footprint. Designed by architect Richard J. Neutra, the house exemplifies the California interpretation of International Style architecture with its rectangular plan, limited ornamentation, raised ribbon windows, and cantilevered projections. The house features four bedrooms, three bathrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen, and breakfast nook arranged within a rectangular plan. The exterior is a mix of vertical wood siding and brick block with the relationship between the building materials, rather than traditional applied ornamentation, providing visual interest.
2. Condition of fabric: Structurally, the commander's residence is in good condition. The floor plan has not been altered since construction. A living room wall has been inserted and appliances, flooring, cabinetry, exterior doors, and garage doors have been replaced

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building is one story, with all rooms encompassed in a rectangular plan. As-built architectural drawings list a net area of 1,798 square feet, with a gross area of 2,587 square feet. The garage and storage area make up 616 square feet of the gross area. The house is 97 feet in length, 26 feet 9 inches in width at the northeast end of the building, and 29 feet in width at the southwest, or garage, end of the building. The living room area in the central section of the house has a raised ceiling that is reflected on the exterior. A concrete terrace measuring 34 feet by approximately 20 feet is located at the rear elevation (originally 34 feet by 9 feet), and a walled service yard, 35 feet by 22 feet 8 inches, is located at the front elevation.
2. Foundations: The house has a concrete foundation, which sits above 4 inches of gravel fill. Plans specify a 2-inch increase in the foundation wall thickness in the terrace area at the rear of the house.
3. Walls: Exterior walls are constructed of a combination of brick block, vertical wood siding on sheathing, and plastic-coated plywood,. The ends of the house are constructed of brick block. Panels of plastic-coated plywood are located above the doors on the front elevation; the rest of the exterior walls are constructed of wood siding. On the rear elevation, walls are vertical wood siding with plastic-coated plywood inserts above window openings.
4. Structural System, framing: The structural system is a combination of wood frame and masonry block construction. The two end walls are constructed of brick block; the remainder of the house is wood frame. On the plans for the commander's house, Neutra specified the use of 4-by-8-foot wood beams over all window openings unless otherwise noted; 2-by-10-foot rafters support the flat

roof. Load-bearing walls are located in the interior between the kitchen and living room, along the north side of the hallway leading to the master suite, and between the master bedroom and master bathroom.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, porticoes, bulkheads: A 4-inch-thick concrete terrace approximately 34 feet by 20 feet is located on the rear elevation. A metal awning covers the original section of the terrace, and a newer metal awning has been added onto the original awning. The original terrace projected approximately 9 feet from the rear wall of the house; a large, crescent-shaped concrete addition was poured at the same level as the original terrace and extends approximately 11 feet beyond the original terrace. The walled service yard at the front elevation provides an additional exterior space that is connected to the house itself.
6. Chimneys: A chimney located northeast of the entry doors on the front elevation provides ventilation for the service room containing the heater and water heater. There are no fireplaces in the house.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Three doors provide entry to the commander's residence from the exterior of the house. Two are located on the front elevation, and one is located on the back elevation. One interior door links the house to the garage. On the front elevation, the entry features a replacement door and a sidelight. The other door on this elevation leads from the service yard into the breakfast area and is only partially visible; the brick block wall surrounding the service yard obscures all but the top portion of the door from sight. The back door is centered on the southeast (rear) elevation. Each exterior doorway features a metal storm door with two stacked panes and a solid wood door.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The windows of the commander's residence are a mixture of fixed and sliding windows, all flush with the exterior walls. Windows grouped in sets all feature a single flat wood sill. Wood inserts above the windows have been painted the same color as the wood siding and are no longer distinguishable as lintels. On the façade, there are four sets of windows, two on the northeast side and two centered on the elevation. Both sets of windows are banked (panes side by side). The set located in the bedrooms at the northeast end of the elevation comprises one narrow pair and one wide triplet. The set centered on the elevation (located at the kitchen and service yard) comprises one wide pair and one triplet with a wide central pane and two flanking panes. There are two sets of windows on the garage, one paired, banked slider on the southwest elevation and a matching set on the rear (southeast) elevation. On the southeast elevation, fenestration is varied. In the central section below the metal awning is a ribbon window comprising (from south to east) one fixed pane, a banked sliding pair, one fixed pane, and then another fixed sliding pair. The bedroom windows on the rear elevation also form a ribbon window, alternating three times between a banked sliding pair and a single wide fixed pane.

8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The roof of the commander's residence is a flat, gravel roof. Plywood sheathing beneath the gravel and metal gravel stops along the roofline.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Eaves of the commander's residence are formed by a deep metal overhang extending from the roof on the front and rear elevations. These cantilevered projections are characteristic of the California Modern interpretation of the International Style and serve to shade the windows directly underneath. Awnings are not present on the portions of the house constructed of brick block.
 - c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: There are no dormers, cupolas, or towers on the structure.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The commander's residence is a one-story house with a rectangular footprint. The façade of the house faces northwest. The interior floor plan features a linear arrangement of rooms. There are four bedrooms, three bathrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen, and breakfast nook in the house. The master suite spans the entire width of the northeastern end of the house and features a bedroom, bathroom, and dressing area. The other three bedrooms and one of the baths are arranged on either side of the central hall that leads from the master suite to the foyer. The kitchen, breakfast nook, living room, dining room, third bath, and garage are located in the southwestern half of the house. The breakfast nook and kitchen are located on the west side of the house, and the living room and dining room are arranged on the east side. The third bathroom is located between the kitchen and the door to the garage.
2. Stairways: There are no stairways in the house.
3. Flooring: Carpet covers the hall, bedrooms, living room, and dining room floors of the commander's residence. Vinyl tile covers the kitchen, breakfast nook, and bathroom floors.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are insulated gypsum board. Ceilings are also gypsum board. All interior wall and ceiling surfaces are painted white. Stained wood base moulding is installed throughout the house.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: All doors, including closet doors, are flush wood. The wood of the doors matches the wood of the original kitchen cabinets now installed in the garage. Doors between the bedrooms and the hallway feature decorative stepped trim. There is also stepped trim in the

doorway between the hall and second bath and in the doorway between the master bedroom and dressing area. Other doors have no trim.

- b. Windows: The windows in the commander's residence are untrimmed.
6. Decorative features and trim: In keeping with the International Style, the commander's residence incorporates virtually no architectural ornamentation. Applied ornamentation is limited to the stepped molding in the doorways along the hall.
 7. Hardware: The round, polished bronze doorknobs found on each of the bedroom doors as well as the doors leading to the garage and exterior may be original.
 8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The house is air-conditioned and is heated by a gas furnace.
 - b. Lighting: The most noticeable and unique lighting in the house is a light trough that runs the length of the living and dining rooms. The light trough is an important part of the architectural design of the house. The length of the trough reinforces the horizontality integrated throughout the house, including the partial partition walls, the galley-type kitchen, the bedrooms' ribbon windows, the overall plan of the house, and its low, flat-roofed profile. Four recessed lights run along the center of the hall, and the brushed metal of those fixtures complements the hardware on the hallway doors.
 - c. Plumbing: The commander's residence has three bathrooms. Each bathroom has a sink and toilet; the master bathroom has a large shower, and the second bathroom located off the hallway has a standard bathtub. The kitchen has two sinks, one of which is located in the passage to the dining room, an area that may have functioned at one time as a wet bar.
 9. Original furnishings: There are no original furnishings in the commander's residence. The only original furnishings designed for the house were built-in desks in two of the nonmaster bedrooms. Neither of the desks is extant.
- D. Site:
1. Historic landscape design: The commander's residence is located on a central block of what was historically known as Capehart Area II. Landscape plans for the Capehart buildings were developed by Baldwin, Eriksson & Peters of Los Angeles and were completed and approved concurrently with the plans for the houses. The landscape plan specified placement of trees and shrubbery on the block as well as fences between the residences. The placement of trees and shrubbery served to provide additional privacy between the homes as well as shade in the backyard and service yard areas. Though portions of the fences have been removed, much of the historic landscaping is still intact.

2. Outbuildings: There are no outbuildings associated with the commander's residence.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: Hummel Architects PLLC in Boise, Idaho, provided certified as-built architectural drawings for the commander's house. Additional copies of drawings were procured from the drawings vault at Mountain Home AFB.
- B. Early views: Early views of the 1958 Capehart housing project, including photos of construction, were provided by Mountain Home AFB.
- C. Interviews: During the course of research, interviews took place with Yancy Mailes, Historian, Mountain Home AFB; Sheri Mattoon-Bowden, Cultural Resources Manager, Mountain Home AFB; and Kimberly Gilbertson, Marketing Coordinator for Hummel Architects PLLC. Each of these individuals contributed essential materials and information used in the preparation of this HABS documentation.

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) Level III documentation, including large format photographs, of the Mountain Home AFB 1958 senior officers' housing was accomplished from August 2007 to October 2008. Mikel Travisano and Michelle Wurtz visited Mountain Home AFB in August 2007 and completed site visits and photographic documentation of the three senior officers' housing units. At that time, Mr. Travisano and Ms. Wurtz also conducted research at Hummel Architects PLLC and the Idaho State Historical Society in Boise and met with Sheri Mattoon-Bowden, the Cultural Resources Manager at Mountain Home AFB. Jessica Forbes prepared architectural descriptions of the buildings and wrote the historical and descriptive data. Ann M. Keen performed additional research and incorporated comments and revisions for inclusion in the final report. Marsha Prior, Ph.D., supervised project development.

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