

Red Cross Complex  
↪ Southwest Corner of Eagle and Borman Drives  
↪ Chanute Air Force Base  
Rantoul vicinity  
Champaign County  
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1161

HABS  
ILL  
10-RAN.V,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
REDUCED COPY OF MEASURE DRAWING

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
National Park Service  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
RED CROSS COMPLEX

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HABS No. IL-1161

Location: Southwest corner of Eagle and Borman Drives  
Chanute Air Force Base  
Rantoul, Champaign County, Illinois

USGS Rantoul Quadrangle, Universal Transverse  
Mercator Coordinates: Zone 16  
Northing 4461220  
Easting 401760

Present Owner: American National Red Cross  
National Headquarters  
17th & D Streets, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20006

Original Use: Red Cross Field Director's Office, Residence,  
and Garage

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Red Cross Complex at Chanute Air Force  
Base physically and symbolically reflects the  
mission of aid to servicemen that stands as a  
distinguishing characteristic of the American  
National Red Cross. Built at the height of  
America's World War II military construction  
activities, the Red Cross Complex provided a  
crucial link between civilians and servicemen  
at Chanute during a time of intense  
interaction between these groups. The  
Administration Building's shape and roof  
color physically reproduced a red cross,  
thereby using form to declare function. The  
resultant complex is architecturally unique  
among other temporary World War II structures  
on the base.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection: 1941
2. Architect: Not Known
3. Original and subsequent owners:  
The American National Red Cross (1941-1993)
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Construction resulted from a contract between the Army Corps of Engineers and E. N. DeAtley of Champaign, Illinois. Mr. Frank Bosley acted as superintendent of construction for the Champaign contractor (Chanute Field Wings 1941c).
5. Original plans and construction: Original plans for the structure could not be located during research investigations.
6. Alterations and additions: The Red Cross Complex buildings were altered through the re-siding of the structures in 1978 and the remodeling of the apartment kitchen and bathroom in 1988. Additions of a handicap ramp and landing were added to the west side of the Administration Building in the early 1980s.

B. Historical Context:

The Red Cross Complex was constructed during 1941 and 1942. Intended to provide a headquarters facility for Red Cross services at Chanute Air Force Base, this complex fulfilled its purpose for over fifty years by housing Camp Service activities designed to meet the social and psychological needs of individuals and groups on the base. The rapid expansion of the Armed Forces in connection with World War II was responsible for both the revitalized development of Chanute Air Force Base and the associated growth of the Red Cross Camp Service. The history of the Red Cross Complex is interwoven with that of the base, as the history of the American Red Cross is linked with that of the Armed Forces.

At its official founding in 1881, the American Red Cross society was chartered to help sick and wounded soldiers in war, to provide disaster relief, and "... to serve as a medium of communication between the people of the United States and their Army and Navy ..." (Dulles 1950, 1). The American Red Cross was granted a charter by the United States Congress in 1900, authorizing them to provide services to members of the Armed

Forces (American Red Cross 1989). This obligation was largely fulfilled by the establishment of base facilities staffed by field directors. The first instance of Red Cross personnel in place on military bases occurred in 1898 during the Spanish-American War when field agents sent to Army camps participated in the distribution of supplementary supplies for Army camps and hospitals (Dulles 1950, 45-46). Over time, Camp Service activities evolved into an organized effort ". . . to help individual soldiers, sailors and marines with personal problems that ranged from assistance in getting furloughs to counseling on marital problems" (Dulles 1950, 397). Field directors and their staff provided consultation and guidance, information referrals, reporting services, assistance with family communications, and health services.

With the United States' entry into World War II, the American Red Cross underwent a period of rapid growth concurrent with military expansion. From July 1941 to June 1942, personnel in Services to the Armed Forces increased 381 percent, from 641 to 3,088 (American Red Cross 1942, 18). "On June 30, 1942 resident field directors were stationed at 260 army posts and naval stations in the United States and at 37 posts overseas. Assistant field directors were being assigned on a basis of one to each five thousand men in the armed forces" (American Red Cross 1942, 22). This expansion necessitated the construction of new facilities. By the end of June, 1942 Red Cross buildings had been completed on 58 bases, with 45 more in the planning stages, and Camp Service covered 600 Army camps and naval stations on a resident basis at the height of its wartime activity (American Red Cross 1942, 23; Dulles 1950, 402).

The United States Armed Forces were also expanding at this time in preparation for the impending war. Until the pre-war mobilization period, all military construction had been under the control of the Office of the Quartermaster General (OQMG), while the Corps of Engineers (COE) had responsibility for civil projects. As war approached and military construction projects burgeoned, the Quartermaster Corps became overburdened while the COE was looking for new assignments. As a result of the ensuing shake-out, Air Corps construction was transferred to the COE in November of 1940 (Fine and Remington 1972, 244, 267). One year later, on 1 December 1941, President Roosevelt signed a bill giving all military construction functions to the COE (Fine and Remington 1972, 473). As circumstances would have it, there was little time for settling into these new roles.

The impact on the Corps of Engineers produced by the Pearl Harbor attack was felt immediately, as the period from 1 December 1941 to 1 September 1942 saw the most intense World War II military building activity (Fine and Remington 1972, 564). During 1942, the Corps of Engineers and local contractors completed 2,091 jobs

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including 482 Air Force facilities, 389 Ground Force facilities, 164 storage and shipping facilities, and 149 industrial facilities (Fine and Remington 1972, 521). This enormous building drive impacted nearly the entire country, including Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, Illinois.

Begun in 1917 as a training field for aviators, and named for Octave Chanute who pre-dated the Wright brothers as an aviation pioneer, Chanute Field has always been primarily a technical training center (King and Peyton 1991, 11-12). After training 18 squadrons for World War I, the Armistice signaled the beginning of a period of decline for the base, as it was downgraded to a storage depot and remained that way until 1921 when the Army Enlisted Mechanics School was assigned to Chanute (King and Peyton 1991, 15-16). By 1926, the base hosted the Air Corps Technical School with courses in mechanics, photography, and communication (King and Peyton 1991, 16).

The next major building phase at Chanute occurred from 1938-1941 in preparation for the coming war. The need for aviators increased and the training facilities at Chanute were expanded to accommodate the influx. This period became known as the "Great Renaissance" due to the large amount of construction and revitalization which occurred at the base. Structures including barracks, a hospital, a headquarters building, warehouses, hangars, theaters, family housing, and a fire station were constructed (Bush and Cardinal 1990, 16). Chanute's present built environment is largely a reflection of this period of expansion as many of these buildings are still present.

The numbers of servicemen at Chanute expanded even more rapidly than the built environment. In June 1939, there were 2,000 personnel at the base. By May 1941, this number had grown to 21,000. The increase in population produced an increase in the need for Red Cross services. The Red Cross announced in August 1941 that they would build a facility at Chanute. Later that autumn construction began on a new Red Cross complex to house the field director, his family, staff offices, and multi-purpose rooms (U.S. Air Force 1987, 25-26).

The Administration Building, dedicated in March 1942, followed one of the four basic headquarters building plans used by the Red Cross during this time (Roland Born, telephone interview, 28 September 1992). Being cross-shaped with a red-shingled roof, the building's form created a "red cross" easily distinguishable from the air, providing protection in case of enemy air attack. Unique among Chanute buildings for this functional declaration, the Administration Building is also "... the only wooden structure on the base that reflects classical architectural style and detail" (Bush and Cardinal 1990, Appendix B).

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When construction of the complex began, the Chanute Field Red Cross office had a staff of five handling an average of 500 cases a month, most of which involved requests for emergency furloughs or dependency discharges (Chanute Field Wings 1941a). This represented a nine-fold increase over the monthly caseload of the previous year (Chanute Field Wings 1942a). Mr. Robert A. Clough, the field director at the time, ascribed the increase to elevated financial burdens on soldiers' families resulting from the war (Chanute Field Wings, 1942a). As the caseload increased, so did the Red Cross staff. Three new assistant field directors arrived the first week of March (Chanute Field Wings 1942c). By July, Chanute Field had been designated as a training post for future Red Cross field directors, with six new assistant field directors arriving to begin their training (Chanute Field Wings 1942e).

After the war, stateside bases saw increased activity as soldiers were processed through separation centers for demobilization. The Red Cross field directors were personally involved in helping discharges file disability claims and receive information about the G.I. Bill of Rights. By 1946-47, this task was completed and Red Cross Camp Service had been reduced from 3,693 to 639 (Dulles 1950, 512-513). Only the larger installations retained field directors, but the services they had offered in the past remained in place, including counseling and emergency financial aid (American Red Cross 1951, 50-51).

At Chanute AFB, the Red Cross Complex continued through the years to shelter the same activities that the service had always offered. The classroom was used for instruction in first aid, CPR, social welfare and other courses (U.S. Air Force 1967, 27). A succession of field directors and their families inhabited the Administration Building, and the offices were continuously utilized by staff. Although the Red Cross services remained constant, other aspects of Chanute AFB did not. Runways were closed to military air traffic in June 1971, and the base is scheduled for closure by September 1993 (King and Peyton 1991, 26). As a result of the dwindling numbers stationed at Chanute, the Red Cross field director's office was closed in August 1992. After providing continuous service and retaining its original function for fifty years, the Red Cross Complex now stands vacant.

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Date: October 1992

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: This is an intact Red Cross military installation facility that was occupied from 1942 to 1992 at Chanute Air Force Base, Rantoul, Illinois. The complex includes an original Administration Building with a tall central mass and two projecting wings, and a three-bay garage. (See photographic documentation HABS no. IL-1161-1 through IL-1161-6, and HABS drawings IL-1161, Sheets 1 and 2).
2. Condition of the Fabric: General condition of the exterior envelopes are good, due partly to the fact that the buildings underwent exterior renovations in August 1978. The improvements involved the removal of the original 1"x8" shiplap siding and decorative moldings, and replacement with 1"x12" hard board siding. Weathering has occurred at the window frames, with flaking and peeling paint and some sills beginning to rot. All the corner flashings show some minor bending and denting. The roofing material is in generally good condition, but some leaking of water to the interior was apparent in the class room, general office, and office hallway of the Administration Building. The interiors are in good shape having had only minor remodeling since construction.

B. Site:

1. General Setting: The Red Cross Complex is located in Chanute Air Force Base, Rantoul, Illinois. The Red Cross Administration Building faces east with its long axis parallel to Eagle Drive. The Garage is oriented the same way, and is located approximately forty feet to the west and slightly south of the Administration Building. An asphalt driveway enters south of the Administration Building on Eagle Drive and ends in a small parking lot immediately east of the Garage. The site is predominantly flat.
2. Buildings: The complex includes an Administration Building with a tall central mass and two projecting wings, HABS No. IL-1161-A, and a three-bay Garage, HABS No. IL-1161-B.
3. Landscaping, Enclosures: The buildings are located on an expanse of turf (primarily fescue) which covers most of the site. All four perimeters, however, have been planted with trees. Adjacent to Eagle and Borman Drives are single rows combining Green Ash, Sycamore, and a Black Willow. The western perimeter is planted with White Spruce, and the southern edge contains a mixture of Austrian Pine, Eastern

White Pine, Northern White Cedar, Scotch Pine and Norway Maple. In addition, a large Norway Maple is located in the southwest quadrant of the site. There are four rose bushes north of the Administration Building, and a combination of Japanese Barberry, Common Juniper, and Privet shrubs are located adjacent to the east elevation of the same building. A privacy screen to the south of the Administration Building is a recent addition.

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Date: August 1990, October 1992

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural Drawings: Existing Drawing, "Chanute Field Illinois, Red Cross Building, Elevations," by N.B. Popov for U.S. Engineer Office, Chicago District Air Corps, Construction, Feb. 12, 1943.

Measured Drawings produced for documentation are located at the Tri-Services Cultural Resources Research Center, U.S. Army Construction Engineering Research Laboratories, Champaign, Illinois.

- B. Historic views: (2) Photographs - Corps of Engineers, Louisville District, PhotoFile:

(1) File #7719 - Caption: "Chanute Field, Rantoul, Illinois. Red Cross Building. Looking North over Foundation Forms. Construction by Red Cross on contract. (S.I. & L. only by U.S. Engineer Dept.)", 4 December 1941.

(2) File #7796 - Caption: "Chanute Field, Rantoul, Illinois Red Cross Building complete except for Interior Trim. Constructed by Red Cross on contract. (S.I. & L. only by U.S. Engineer Dept.)", 21 January 1942.

- C. Interviews:

Mr. Roland Born, Red Cross Field Director, Telephone, Goodfellow AFB, Texas, 28 September 1992.

- D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: None

2. Secondary and published sources:

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\_\_\_\_\_. 1942a. "Red Cross Cases Jump Nine-Fold." Chanute Field, 30 January, p. 6.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1942b. "Red Cross Occupies New Building Here." Chanute Field, 27 February, p. 1.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1942c. "Three Red Cross Leaders Arrive." Chanute Field, 6 March, p. 2.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1942d. "Red Cross Center to be Dedicated." Chanute Field, 13 March, p. 1.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1942e. "Field is Red Cross Training Center." Chanute Field, 10 July, p. 2.

Dulles, Foster Rhea. 1950. The American Red Cross: A History. New York: Harper & Brothers.

Fine, Lenore and Jesse Remington. 1972. The Corps of Engineers: Construction in the United States. United States Army in World War Two, The Technical Services. Washington, D.C.: Office, Chief of Military History, United States Army.

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Measured Drawing. 1943. "Chanute Field Illinois, Red Cross Building, Elevations." by N. B. Popov for U. S. Engineer Office, Chicago District Air Corps, Construction.

U.S. Air Force. 1967. "Central Illinois Congratulates Chanute Technical Training Center on its 50th Anniversary 1917 - 1967." Rantoul, IL: Crown Publications.

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E. Likely sources not yet investigated: None

F. Supplemental material: None

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Federal Agency: Tri-Services Cultural Resources Research Center (TSCRRC)  
U.S. Army Construction Engineering Research Laboratories

Project Name: Manual for Documenting Historic Military Structures

Records Preparation Dates: 1990-1992

Prepared by: Historic Context researched and written by Susan Enscoe (TSCRRC);  
Architectural Statement researched by Robb McKay (TSCRRC) and written by Robb McKay and Mira Metzinger (TSCRRC);  
Measured Drawings produced by Richard Hayes (TSCRRC), Jim Bowman (TSCRRC), and Ring-Ru Lin (TSCRRC);  
Archival photography produced by Martin Stupich.

Date: 27 October 1992