

Naval Air Station Dallas,  
Underground Ammunition Bunker  
(Naval Air Station Dallas,  
Building 22)  
Essex Drive  
Dallas  
Dallas County  
Texas

HABS No. TX-3408-G

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,  
UNDERGROUND AMMUNITION BUNKER  
(NAVAL AIR STATION DALLAS, BUILDING 22)

HABS No. TX-3408-G

Location: Essex Drive  
Dallas  
Dallas County  
Texas

U.S.G.S. Duncanville Quadrangle (7.5)  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
14.69140.3623.710

Present Owner: United States of America  
c/o Commander, Naval Reserve Force  
4400 Dauphine Street  
New Orleans, Louisiana 70146-5000  
Upon closure of the base, this building, which is owned by the Navy but is on land leased from the City of Dallas, will revert to the ownership of the City of Dallas

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: None

Statement of Significance: The Underground Ammunition Bunker is a small utilitarian building that served the mission of the Naval Air Station (NAS) Dallas through the storage of ammunition. It is significant as a distinctive example of military architecture and is a tangible link to the World War II pilot training mission of the base. It retains a very high degree of integrity and conveys a strong sense of time and place.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: Original architectural plans were not located during research efforts. However, the Crews report indicates that the building was completed in 1941 as part of the first major building program at NAS Dallas, which commenced in 1941 with an appropriation of \$1.2 million. The exact date construction began is unknown.

2. Architect: The architect or project officer of record is unknown.

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3. Original and subsequent owners: United States of America, Department of the Navy.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: General contractors were Henger Construction Company (location unknown).
5. Original plans and construction: No original plans for this building were located.
6. Alterations and additions: There are no apparent alterations to the underground portion of the bunker. An undated drawing prepared by the Public Works Department at NAS Dallas provides specifications for the construction of the gabled-roof entry shelter. The condition and appearance of this drawing is similar to others at the base drawn in the late 1970s. It is unknown whether the entry shelter replaced an original or is an addition. The building retains a high degree of architectural and physical integrity and conveys a strong sense of time and place.

B. Historical Context:

Before America's entry into World War II, Congress began to appropriate funds for a massive military building program in order to prepare for eventual wartime mobilization. When the National Defense Act of 1940 was passed, the Navy received money to build three identical Naval Reserve Air Bases (NRABs) at Atlanta, New Orleans, and Dallas. Construction at NRAB Dallas began in the winter of 1940-1941. As part of the \$1,211,000 construction project, the Navy built an underground ammunition bunker on the 30.70-acre site they leased from the Army Air Corps at adjacent Hensley Field. During 1941, NRAB Dallas was relatively small in size and has only a few buildings, including two hangars, a barracks, and several support buildings. The initial mission of the base was to provide primary flight training and ground crew training.<sup>1</sup>

There is very little information pertaining to the construction of the Underground Ammunition Bunker. Although Robert and Company, an architectural firm from Atlanta, designed the other buildings at the base constructed at this time, it is unclear who was responsible for the design and construction of the bunker. No original plans were located. It is thought that ammunition for planes and for the defense of the base were stored in the bunker. The building was placed underground for safety reasons, but also to hide it from possible enemy reconnaissance. In a 1944 station inventory, all 49 buildings and facilities were

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listed by name and number except for the two ammunition bunkers, which had no name listed next to their building number.<sup>2</sup> This reflected the military's attitude regarding secrecy about armament facilities: It was important to the defense mission of the base for the Navy to remain vague about its ammunition facilities.

There have been no visible alterations to the underground portion of the bunker since World War II. When NAS Dallas closes in 1998 as a result of the 1993 Defense Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission recommendations to reduce military spending through closure and consolidation of bases, the bunker will revert to the City of Dallas, which owns the land on which the bunker is located.

Notes

1. *Dallas Times Herald*, 15 May 1941, n.p.
2. Plot Plan, 23 May 1943, Public Affairs Office, NAS Dallas, Texas.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Underground Ammunition Bunker is meritorious as a highly intact example of a World War II underground ammunition bunker as used by the Navy in association with Naval aviation training. It is a two-room, one-floor underground ammunition storage facility.
2. Condition of fabric: The Underground Ammunition Bunker, which is not in current use, is in fair condition with its original features intact.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The rectangular-plan Underground Ammunition Bunker contains 395 square feet. Interior dimensions of the larger room are approximately 12 feet wide by 21 feet deep.
2. Foundation: The bunker rests on a poured-concrete foundation.

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3. Walls: The bunker is subterranean and has no exposed exterior wall surfaces. However, poured concrete is utilized for subterranean wall surfaces.

4. Structural system, framing: The bunker utilizes a load-bearing masonry (concrete) structural system.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: Access to the bunker is provided via concrete steps that go below ground level. The steps are covered by an above-grade, wood-frame, front-gabled shelter. Unpainted board-and-batten siding covers the steps leading to the belowground entrances. This shelter may be a nonoriginal addition.

6. Chimneys: Each of the two rooms has a domed, terra-cotta ventilation stack that extends above the earthen mound.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: An original, riveted-steel door with four, fixed-pane windows provides access to the bunker. A sliding steel lock operated by a lever-like handle secures the bunker.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The bunker is covered by a poured-concrete roof slab topped by mounded earth planted with grass. The roof of the entry shelter is front gabled with rolled roofing.

b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves of the entry shelter have exposed rafter ends.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: The bunker consists of two rooms separated by a concrete wall.

2. Stairways: Entry to the bunker is accomplished by concrete stairs that descend from ground level.

3. Flooring: The flooring is concrete.

4. Walls and ceiling finishes: The walls and ceilings are concrete.

5. Openings:

a. Doors and doorways: An original, riveted-steel door with four, fixed-pane windows provides access to the second room in the bunker. It is identical to the entry door.

b. Windows: The bunker contains no windows since it is underground, but does receive natural light through the circular ceiling shafts on which the exterior ceramic ventilators are mounted. It is not known whether the current ventilators are original.

6. Decorative features and trim: Except for those elements described in other sections pertaining to the interior, no decorative features and trim were identified.

7. Hardware: The interior door is secured by a sliding steel lock operated by a lever-like handle.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The bunker faces east and is located in a level area of the installation devoted to the maintenance, repair, and operation of aircraft. Nearby are a variety of operational support buildings devoted to the maintenance, repair, and operation of the base. The hangars and runways are located to the northwest and Mountain Creek Lake is to the east and south. The original Hensley Field facility is to the north-northwest.

2. Historic landscape design: This portion of the installation is industrial, and there is no attention to decorative landscaping, except for the occasional small area of grass. Ground surfaces are primarily poured-concrete with asphalt roads. This treatment has created a large access area for vehicles and equipment and is in keeping with the historic character of the area. The area immediately around the bunker is planted with lawn and enclosed by a chain-link fence and gate. The historic street patterns in the area, and the relationship of the nearby buildings to the streets and the runways, remains relatively intact.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original architectural drawings: No original plans or drawings were located at NAS Dallas for this building. One drawing, showing the specifications for the aboveground entry shelter, appears to date from the late 1970s.

B. Early views: No early views of the bunker were located.

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

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Dallas, Texas. NAS Dallas. Public Affairs Office. Maps.

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.

*Dallas Times Herald*, 15 May 1941.

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

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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 Eisenhower recorded the historic resources with large-format black-and-white photographs.