

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
THEATER
(Building Number 7152)
Beaumont Drive
El Paso
El Paso County
Texas

HABS No. TX 3339-N

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Southwest System Support Office
National Park Service
P.O. Box 728
Santa Fe, NM 87504

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
THEATER

(Building Number 7152)

HABS No. TX-3339-N

- Location: Beaumont Drive, Fort Bliss, William Beaumont Army Medical Center, El Paso, El Paso County, Texas. The property is bounded by Fred Wilson Road to the north, Dyer Street to the east, Hayes Avenue to the south, and Alabama Street to the west.
- Present Owner: United States Army
- Original Use: Post Theater
- Present Use: Classroom, minimal use
- Significance: This building is deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under Criterion A and C as a contributing element to the proposed William Beaumont General Hospital Historic District (WBGHHD). This district encompasses the permanent and semi-permanent buildings constructed in the WBGH area at Fort Bliss between 1921 and 1945. These buildings contribute to the understanding of the hospital's role of providing medical service to thousands of American soldiers and their dependents during periods of both war and peace. The original wards no longer exist; however, the remaining buildings in the proposed WBGHHD depict the administrative, social and recreational environment of the hospital during the period of significance. Even though the period of construction of the buildings within the proposed WBGHHD spans over twenty years, they form a cohesive environment based on architectural styles, construction materials, and geographic proximity. Furthermore, this building meets NRHP criteria in that it possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. Original Construction Date: 1942
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: United States Army
4. Builders, Contractors and Suppliers: Unknown
5. Original Plans and Construction: The building essentially retains its original exterior appearance and building footprint. The interior has retained its original layout as designed for the auditorium.
6. Alterations and Additions: Although now used for lecture classrooms, the theater still maintains its original configuration and layout. In 1963, the interior of the theater was renovated. Renovations included adding new partitions to separate the entrance from the theater, and installing new floor covering. In 1967, the sound quality of the building was improved by adding acoustical panels to the walls and ceilings. The sprinkler system was upgraded in 1978. Along with these renovations, new fluorescent and spot lights were installed. The original theater seats remain.

B. Historical Context:

William Beaumont General Hospital was one of the U.S. Army's five original general hospitals. It opened at Fort Bliss on July 1, 1921 although the facility was not fully completed until the following year. The hospital originally consisted of forty-eight tile and stucco buildings with a bed capacity of approximately 414. The staff consisted of six officers, two nurses, and thirty enlisted men. William Beaumont General Hospital's original mission was to provide general medical care to border patrol troops stationed at Fort Bliss. By the 1930s, however, the hospital was serving the entire western portion of the Army's Eighth Corps area, providing health care to soldiers stationed at posts in Arizona, New Mexico, and western Texas.

When Congress authorized a limited peacetime mobilization just prior to the nation's entry into World War II, the Army initiated a major expansion program at William Beaumont General Hospital to increase its ability to handle the medical needs of the greatly expanding Army. During the World War II era, the hospital received new wards, instructional buildings, quarters, storehouses, repair shops, and recreational facilities. This

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
THEATER
(Building Number 7152)
HABS No. TX-3339-N
(Page 3)

new construction pushed the total number of buildings at the hospital to 174 and the number of available beds to nearly 6000. During the war, the William Beaumont General Hospital trained approximately 16,000 medical technicians, including over a thousand WAC recruits. The hospital also became a specialty center for plastic surgery, ophthalmic surgery, neuropsychiatry, and deep radiation therapy. In the last year of the war alone, some 26,358 patients received medical treatment at the hospital.

William Beaumont General Hospital was one of only ten, of the Army's sixty-three, general hospitals retained after World War II. Besides providing medical care to returning wounded soldiers during the conflicts in both Korea and Viet Nam, the hospital also provided general medicine and surgical services to veterans and personnel at Fort Bliss and other regional military installations. By the mid-1960s, the needs of the Army began to surpass the capabilities of the hospital. Consequently, the Army constructed a new, modern, twelve story facility to the west of the hospital. The new facility, known as the William Beaumont Army Medical Center, opened in 1972 and became the Southwest's major regional Army medical center.

Building 7152 is a theater constructed in 1942. It is one of the numerous buildings constructed at the William Beaumont General Hospital during World War II. The original cost for construction was \$30,393.48.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The post theater is an utilitarian building. It possess a gable roof with gable ends. The character of this building is simple and refined and was designed with a functional purpose, having a main open space to house the theater itself, and adjacent rooms for offices, storage, restrooms, and mechanical equipment.
2. Condition of Fabric: The exterior of the building is in fair condition. The interior has retained its original character and shape, but the original itself has been either covered or replaced. Overall, the building has been well maintained.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: The theater is 99'-0" in length and 37'-0" in width. It has a height of 14'-2 1/2" from ceiling to finished floor, and gradually slopes an additional 3'-0"

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
THEATER
(Building Number 7152)
HABS No. TX-3339-N
(Page 4)

toward the auditorium stage. The upstairs projection room is 9'-3" in width, and is 37'-0" in length. The floor area is approximately 4,702 square feet.

2. Foundations: The foundation is a poured-in-place concrete slab with footings.
3. Walls: Exterior walls are constructed of hollow clay with stucco.
4. Structural System: The structure is an 12" load bearing hollow clay tile wall system on concrete foundation. The roof structure is of wood trusses and 2 x 8 purlins.
5. Porches, Exterior Stairs: A concrete porch is located at the front entrance at the southeast facade. 4 x 4 chamfered wood columns support the porch. Pipe railing located approximately 3' above grade spans between the columns. The flat roof of the porch serves as a second story deck. Both a single door and double-hung window open to the projection room. A fire ladder is located on the west side.
6. Chimneys: None
7. Openings:
 - a. Doors: The primary entrance consists of a pair of metal panel doors, which include panic hardware. Single metal emergency egress doors are located at both sides at the main entrance area, and double metal emergency egress doors are located on both sides near the stage in the auditorium.
 - b. Windows: Double-hung six-over-six-light wood sash windows flank the entrance doors.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, Materials: The roof is a gable with flush gable ends. It is constructed of 3 x 6 bottom chord beams with 2 x 6 joists, and 3 x 10 top chords with 2 x 8 purlins. On the purlins is 1" sheathing finished on the exterior with shingles. The interior is finished with gypsum insulation board, and a drop acoustical ceiling has been added.
 - b. Dormers, Vents: A ridge vent spans approximately one half the length of the building.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor Plans: The theater building is rectangular in plan with the main entrance on the southeast facade. The primary entrance is positioned under a flat-roof porch. A projection room is on the partial second floor above the entrance vestibule.
2. Stairways: A stairway is in the east corner of the building. It begins within the office and leads up to the projection room.
3. Flooring: The floor throughout most of the theater, including the auditorium, has been carpeted. The entrance lobby, restrooms, and office are finished with vinyl tile. The stage retains its original exposed hard wood flooring.
4. Wall Finishes: The exterior wall finish is painted stucco. Typically, the interior wall finishes are painted gypsum wall board, with acoustical wall panels on some sections. The partition walls near the entrance are constructed of brick and painted white.
5. Ceiling Finishes: A 2' x 4' panel acoustical tile drop ceiling has been added throughout the theater as its finish.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doors: The interior doors are five panel, wood-painted single doors. There are interior doors for the office, restrooms, and storage rooms.
 - b. Windows: The interior finish on the windows are painted white.
7. Decorative Features and Trim: Few decorative features are visible. In the bathrooms there is quarter-round ceiling/wall moulding. The ticket office remains in the entrance lobby. This office, with a window, has wood paneling with trim.
8. Hardware: Little original hardware exists since the original exterior doors have been replaced with metal doors. The interior wood doors retain their original handles and latches.
9. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning: The heating, ventilating, and air conditioning duct work is positioned above the drop ceiling. The metal vents are placed within the drop ceiling grid.

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
THEATER
(Building Number 7152)
HABS No. TX-3339-N
(Page 6)

- b. Lighting: Florescent lighting within the drop ceiling and inset incandescent lights have been added to the auditorium. Attached florescent lights are in the entry lobby, and bare incandescent bulbs are in the restrooms.
 - c. Plumbing Fixtures: Each bathroom contains exposed piping to the facilities. A Halsy Taylor water fountain is in the entrance lobby.
10. Original Furnishings: The original wood-and-metal theater seats have been retained.
- D. Site:
- 1. General Setting and Orientation: The post theater has been incorporated into the site of the William Beaumont Army Medical Center in El Paso, Texas (Figure 1). The front of the building faces southeast ward towards Beaumont Drive. The gymnasium is to the east, and Pipes Drive runs on the northwest end of the building.
 - 2. Historic Landscape Design: The historic landscape of William Beaumont General Hospital was renowned for its beautiful array of shade trees, shrubs, lush lawns and flower gardens. Between the grounds inception in 1920-1921 and the gradual reduction of maintained acreage in the 1950s, the landscape was referred to as the “paradise in the desert.” Gardner William Reeves was most likely in charge of any planting plan or landscape design that may have governed the layout of the grounds. Today, only scattered residual vegetation and landscape features remain, and most of these have been installed since the period of significance. There are currently two shrubs framing the facade of Building 7152. These have been planted since the period of significance, and it is unknown whether their appearance resembles the historic setting. The remaining landscape is composed of exposed soil, scattered grasses, and paved areas.
 - 3. Outbuildings: None

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- A. Architectural Drawings: The large format archival architectural drawings were found on file at the Offices of the Directorate of Public Works and Logistics and the Directorate of Environment, Historic Preservation Team, Fort Bliss, Texas. Drawing numbers for the original construction drawings, dated May 1942, are drawing numbers BH-B-2/1, BH-B-2/2, BH-B-2/4, and BH-B-2/5. These include plans, elevations, sections, and details. Additional drawings include new divider walls and floor cover dated April 1963 with the drawing number WB-405, repairs and acoustical upgrade dated July 1967 with the

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
 THEATER
 (Building Number 7152)
 HABS No. TX-3339-N
 (Page 7)

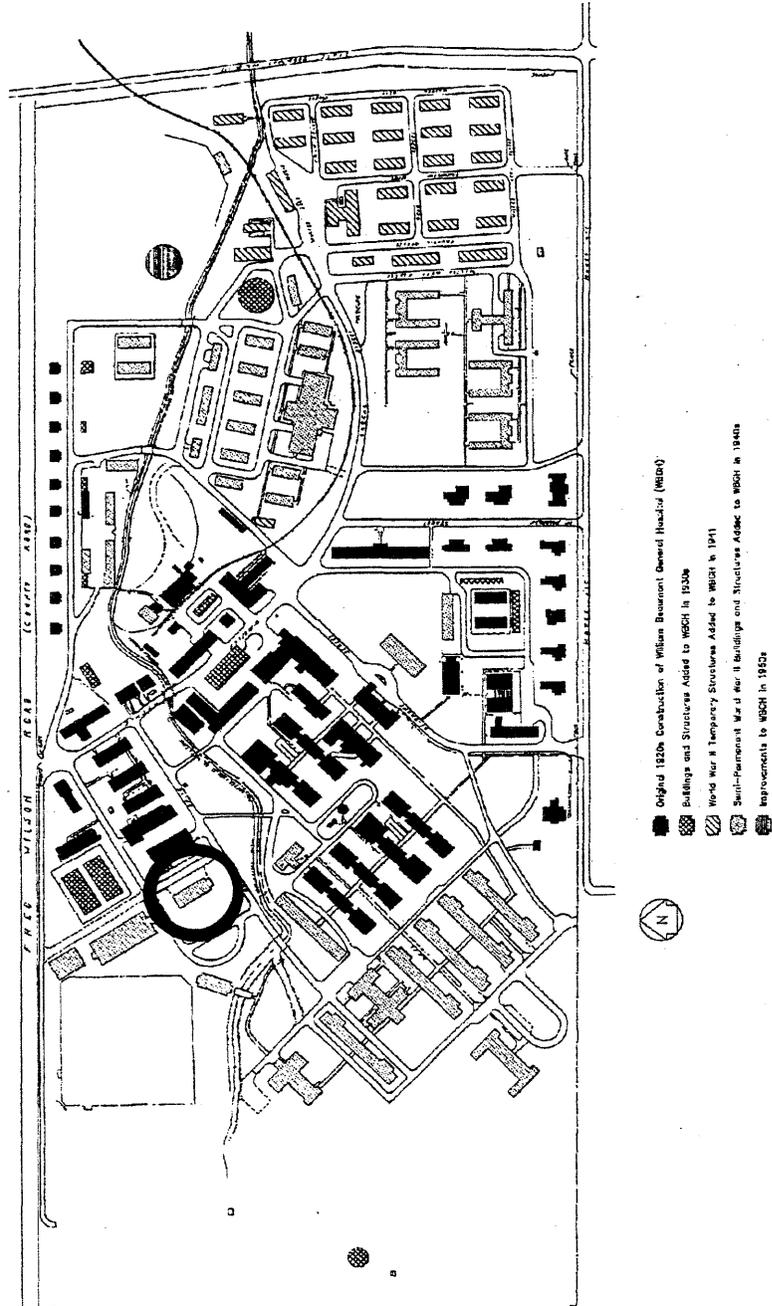


Figure 1: Building Location Map

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
THEATER
(Building Number 7152)
HABS No. TX-3339-N
(Page 8)

drawing number WB-466, and repairs to fire sprinkler system dated February 1978 with the drawing number FB-5303. A small scale plan of the building was documented in 1942.

B. Early Views: A collection of historic photographs is housed in the Office of the Directorate of Environment, Historic Preservation Team, Fort Bliss, Texas.

C. Interviews: None

D. Bibliography:

Fort Bliss Real Property Management Office - Office of the Quartermaster General
Records

Fort Bliss IFSM Data August 1994

Fort Bliss Facility List

Map of Post Area - William Beaumont General Hospital, July 1945

Texas Historic Sites Inventory Form - Texas Historic Commission, July 7, 1989

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: None

F. Supplemental Material: None

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

The project was sponsored by the Office of the Directorate of Public Works and Logistics, Fort Bliss, Texas. Documentation was coordinated through Ms. Vicki Hamilton, Architect, Office of the Directorate of Environment, Historic Preservation Team, Fort Bliss, Texas. The project was completed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers Construction Engineering Research Laboratories (USACERL). The project was completed at the USACERL Cultural Resources Research Center. Ms. Sheila Ellsworth served as project architect. The project researchers were Mr. Patrick Nowlan, Dr. Susan Enscoe, and Ms. Amy Lamb. Mr. Martin Stupich produced the large format photographs included in the report.