

GORGAS HOSPITAL, SECTION O
(Gorgas Hospital, Building 261) (*Obstetrical Building*)
Gorgas Road
Balboa Heights Vicinity
Former Panama Canal Zone
Republic of Panama

HABS No. CZ-11-G

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Intermountain Field Area
Rocky Mountain System Support Office
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(Gorgas Hospital, Obstetrical Building, Building 261)

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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-E	SECTIONS A AND B (Buildings 255 and 253)
HABS No. CZ-11-F	MORTUARY (Building 257)
HABS No. CZ-11-H	MAIN STAIRS AND PASSAGEWAYS

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

Present Owner: United States Department of Defense

Original Use: Obstetrical Building

Present Use: Clinics, Library, Health Club for USA MEDDAC-Panama

Significance: Building 261, constructed between 1948-1951, was the last of the permanent buildings constructed as part of the Italian Renaissance style healthcare complex. Designed to handle obstetrics and pediatrics, it was located on the east side of Gorgas Road adjacent to the Mortuary. Significant for its architecture, this imposing addition to the complex is compatible with the 1915-1919 era architecture. It is also significant for its role within American healthcare in the former Panama Canal Zone as the hospital complex reached maturity.

A. General Statement:

1. History:

Section O or the Obstetrical Building was designed in 1948 by Meade Bolton, architect, to provide expanded healthcare services to Canal Zone residents and employees. The building was constructed by the Panama Canal Company's Department of Operation and Maintenance and the Annual Reports of the Governor of Panama for 1949 through 1951 date its construction to those years. After construction, the building remained in the possession of the Panama Canal Company until it was transferred to the Department of Defense in 1979 in accordance with the Panama Canal Treaty of 1977.

2. Architectural Character:

Section O is a long, irregularly shaped building comprised of two rectangular wings that are angled in a northeast/south direction joined by a third wing that projects to the east. It is situated on a terrace that drops off dramatically to the rear of the building, a feature that allowed the construction of a sub-basement floor in the rear wing. Also, the north wing is situated on a higher elevation than the southern wing. With a shallow setback that allows for a sidewalk and curb, the building appears almost wall-like from Gorgas Road. Its rear elevation can only be viewed from an angle given the slope of the building site and the existence of a chain link fence that surrounds the building. Platforms and loading docks line the rear elevation of the south wing.

Bolton's design tied the new building into the older architecture by using paired windows flanked by structural columns, tiled hipped roofs on both primary and secondary roofs with projecting eaves, dripstone courses, and a projecting angled central wing with an upper story recessed terrace supported by columns and flanked by square and rectangular windows with disparate surrounds filled with block glass. The front elevation of the central wing, which originally served as the main entrance, was designed as the architectural focus of the building. The building is connected to Section B (Building 253) by a second story concrete bridge over Gorgas Road; connected to Section A (Building 255) by an underground tunnel; and further connected to the Main Hospital (Building 255) through a double floor bridge over the Emergency ramp entrance to the Hospital. There is a small parking area on the rear of Section O (Building 261) by the ambulance entry and loading area.

The historic fabric of the exterior is in good condition. However even though this building was originally constructed with windows, many of the original windows, five light awning types, have been replaced or infilled. Basement and sub-basement windows have been infilled with concrete while first and second floor windows have been replaced with modern fixed single plate windows. The upper story original windows are intact and the rear elevation central wing's glass block windows are also preserved. The building's interior, which is defined by a central corridor plan, has been extensively remodeled with most hospital furnishings removed. Only the second and third floor service wing areas contain original walls and flooring and an intact plan. The building is currently being remodeled.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions:

Section O is composed of three wings that contain 63,024 square feet. In plan, the central and southern wings form an L-shape. The northern wing is attached at an angle to the central wing. The north wing is 131' by 41'8," the central wing is 54'6", and the south wing is 91'6" by 41'8." Both the north and south wings are irregular in shape, with 10'6" rectangular projections at each end elevation. Also, the rear elevation of the north wing is recessed from the central wing intersection for a 28'2" span to provide space to adequately attach an upper story passageway to the central wing. The span is recessed 2'7."

The ground, first, second and third floors are all 6'9" in height for the north and south wings. The front elevation of the north wing has 14 bays, the front elevation of the south wing has eight bays. The front elevation of the central wing which contains the main entry area has three bays.

2. Foundations:

Foundations are constructed of poured-in place reinforced concrete.

3. Walls:

Exterior walls and structural columns are constructed of reinforced concrete. Details include: dripstone courses and decorative window molding, window and door cornices, and slightly recessed arches surrounding windows on the front elevation of the east wing. End elevations on

both the north and south wings have side elevation windows that are surrounded by recessed arches like those found on the front elevation of the east wing. Third story end elevation windows are also accompanied by small decorative balconies with an upraised bullet design.

4. Structural System:

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

5. Porches, Exterior stairs:

A recessed, two story terrace on the front elevation of the east wing above the bridge to Section B is supported by columns and accented by a concrete and metal balustrade. Section O has a concrete, raised rear elevation balcony with a shaped parapet with decorative molding on its fourth floor. This molding echoes the decorative molding on the main entry surround. Small, decorative concrete window balconies with an upraised bullet design occur on the end elevations of the north and south wing.

Concrete platforms are attached to the rear elevation of the south wing. As built plans identify these as ambulance, service, and garbage platforms. Two concrete exterior stairs to the sub-basement floor are located on the rear elevation of the north wing and the side elevation of the central wing.

6. Chimneys:

None.

7. Openings:

a. Doors:

The primary entry on the front elevation of the east wing is below street level, featuring decorative concrete molding in the door surround. Original double doors have been replaced. Secondary entrances occur on each end elevation of the north and south wing. The double frame and wire glass door and six light transom is recessed under the upper story window balcony on the north

wing end elevation. The entry on the south wing end elevation is framed by a more elaborate door surround that includes pilasters.

b. Windows:

Basement windows have been infilled with concrete. First and second story windows are replacement single plate fixed windows while the fourth floor windows appear to be the original five light awning type. Some windows on the upper stories have also been infilled. The block glass windows original to the rear and side elevations of the central wing are still intact.

8. Roof:

a. Shape and Materials:

Primary, secondary, and tertiary roofs are hipped and covered in Spanish tile.

b. Skylights, Vents

Semi-circular louvered vents are located on all roofs.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

The original floor plans show that a central corridor plan was used for all wings on all floors to provide access to smaller wards, private rooms, offices, treatment rooms, etc. The north and south wings have been extensively remodeled and the original plan is no longer intact. The basement floor's south wing has been converted for use as a medical library and the north wing is used for storage. The second and third story wings hold offices or are vacant. The central wing area on both the third and fourth floors have intact plans and are still outfitted as a hospital with tile corridors etc. The central wings upper story has been renovated into a health club and weight room.

2. Stairways:

There are three concrete stairways. One is located adjacent to the main entry in the central wing. The others are located in the end elevations of the north and south wings. The banded curved metal handrailing for the main entry stair is Art Deco in design.

3. Flooring:

Vinyl tile, ceramic tile, and carpet cover the concrete floors.

4. Walls and Ceiling Finishes:

Walls are painted concrete; acoustical tile ceilings were in place in the remodeled areas.

5. Openings:

Doors:

Interior doors were modern.

Windows:

No distinctive interior windows were noted nor hardware.

6. Decorative Features and Trim:

The main entry handrail was the most distinctive interior decorative trim.

7. Hardware:

None noted.

8. Mechanical Equipment:

a. Heating and Air Conditioning:

The building has central air conditioning.

b. Lighting:

The building's lighting is modern.

c. Plumbing Fixtures:

Plumbing fixtures are modern.

d. Conveyance System:

Two side by side elevators are located in the entry area in the central wing.

9. Original Furnishings:

None noted.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation:

Section O faces southwest towards Ancon Hill and fronts directly onto Gorgas Road with a shallow setback that allows space for a narrow sidewalk. It is built below street level and a retaining wall with metal bars protects the north wing from possible damage from traffic as the building lies within a curve in Gorgas Road. The central wing lies underneath the second story bridge over Gorgas Road which connects the building to Section B. This bridge entry currently acts as the main entrance for Section O. A parking lot is located to the rear of the building.

2. Historic Landscape Design:

None identified. Royal palms are sporadically planted along the front elevation of the building.

3. Outbuildings:

None.

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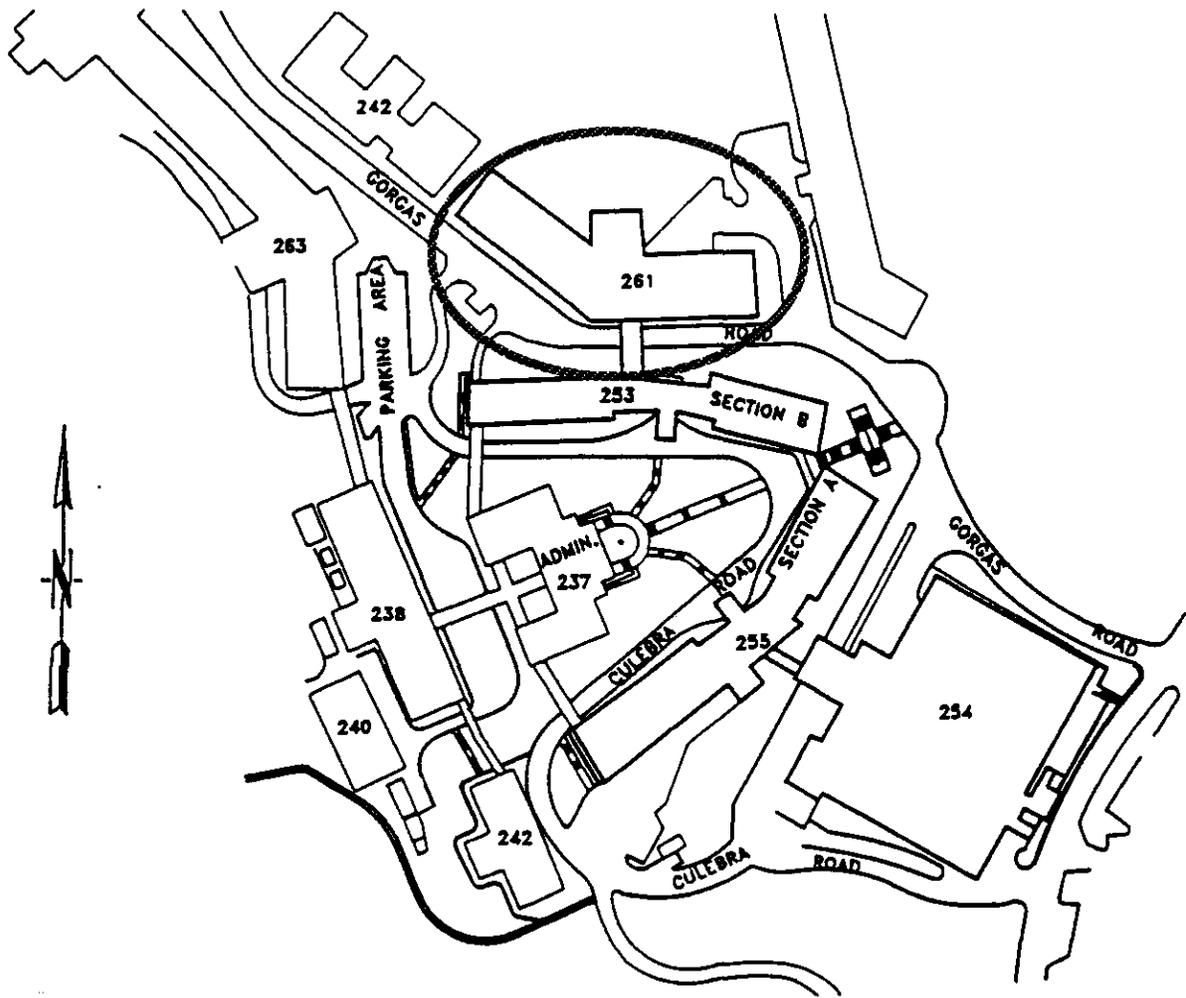


Figure 1 Map, 1996 (original located at Real Property Office, Corozal).
Mapmaker unknown.
GORGAS ARMY HOSPITAL COMPLEX