HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

FORT BLISS NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. TX-2-B

Location: 5200 Fred Wilson Boulevard, El Paso, El Paso County, Texas

The Fort Bliss National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 31.823395, longitude -106.423709 (North American Datum of 1983). The coordinate represents the structure's northwest corner.

Present owner: National Cemetery Administration,
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Construction date: 1940

Builder / Contractor: Unknown.

Description: The Renaissance Revival–style rostrum at Fort Bliss National Cemetery takes the form of a semicircular open-air pavilion. From a podium raised about 3'-6" above the ground, six heavy piers 11'-6" high rise to support an architrave, frieze, and nearly flat roof with deeply overhanging open eaves supported by rafter tails. The piers rise from pedestals and are ornamented with Tuscan-order pilasters on their inner and outer faces. The pilasters themselves feature inset dado panels with ovolo edge moldings. The piers are evenly spaced along the curving edge of the podium. Along the straight front edge of the rostrum, two square Tuscan columns on pedestals are evenly spaced between the corner piers, framing a lectern. The lectern front is ornamented by a blank memorial tablet. A flight of stairs leads onto the rostrum floor from the center of the curved side. A simple iron railing on vertical iron-rod balusters guards the stairs and encircles the podium between the pier pedestals.

The foundation and inner structure of the podium are concrete. The facing, piers, entablature, and lectern are built of cut blocks of Texas pink granite. The wood roof structure was originally clad in built-up roofing; the current roofing is unknown. Circular bronze medallions displaying the seals of the five branches of the military stand on metal posts across the front of the rostrum.

The rostrum's overall dimensions are about 32' wide x 24' deep x 20' high.

Site context: The rostrum is sited near the middle of the cemetery in Section I, on axis with the boulevard that leads from the main entrance into the grounds. It sits in one corner of a grassy, three-sided assembly area that is flanked by columbarium walls. The lectern faces north, toward the boulevard and entrance.

History: Fort Bliss National Cemetery was authorized by Congress in June 1936.[1] Funds for its development around the existing Fort Bliss post cemetery became available in 1939, and the cemetery's entrance gates, lodge, utility building, and flagpole were built that same year. The rostrum was completed December 7, 1940, at a final cost of $13,600. It was designed in the Construction Division of the Office of the Quartermaster General. The contractor appears to have been A. C. Shelton & Sons, and the granite was purchased from Premier Granite Quarries, Llano, Texas.

The national cemetery was transferred from the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Memorial Affairs Agency to the Veterans Administration (now the Department of Veterans Affairs) in 1973.

Sources:

Holt, Dean W. *American Military Cemeteries*. 2nd ed. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2010.

Office of the Quartermaster General. Construction Division. *Fort Bliss National Cemetery, Fort Bliss, Texas, Rostrum Type F*, Jan. 30, 1940. Drawing number 6782-108. National Cemetery Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.

Records of the Veterans Administration, Department of Memorial Affairs, National Cemetery Historical File (Record Group 15/A-1, Entry 25), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, General Correspondence and Reports Relating to National and Post Cemeteries (Record Group 92, Entry 576), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps. *Outline Description of Military Posts and Reservations in the United States and Alaska and of National Cemeteries.* Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1904.

Historian: Michael R. Harrison, 2012

Project Information: The documentation of lodges and rostrums in the national cemeteries was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), one of the Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief. The project was sponsored by the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) of the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Sara Amy Leach, Senior Historian. Project planning was coordinated by Catherine Lavoie, Chief of HABS. Historical research was undertaken by HABS Historians Michael R. Harrison and Virginia B. Price. NCA Historian Jennifer M. Perunko provided research and editorial support. Field work for selected sites was carried

[1] Public Law no. 681, June 15, 1936, 49 Stat. 1514.

out and measured drawings produced by HABS Architects Paul Davidson, Ryan Pierce, and Mark Schara.