

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

FORT ROSECRANS NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. CA-7-B

Location: Cabrillo Memorial Drive, San Diego, San Diego County, California

The Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 32.688781, longitude -117.244198 (North American Datum of 1983). The coordinate represents the location of the structure's lectern.

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

Construction date: 1936

Builder / Contractor: unknown

Description: The rostrum at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery comprises a monumental stela located at the rear edge of a low, wide platform about 53' wide x 25' deep. The platform is raised a few steps above the surrounding ground and is defined along its curved rear edge by low walls with built-in benches that project from either side of the stela. The stela is essentially a large block that rises about 15' from a 4'-high base and is capped by three additional stepped blocks. There are two panels inset into the front of the stela; the lower, larger one frames a bronze plaque displaying the text of the Gettysburg Address. The smaller, upper one is empty. A stepped speaker's podium in front of the stela supports a lectern. The low walls to either side of the rostrum terminate in battered corner posts.

The rostrum platform, walls, corner posts, benches, podium, and lectern are built of reinforced concrete on concrete foundations. The stela is built of hollow-core tile that is covered by an external shell of concrete.

Site context: Originally covering about 8 acres but now encompassing more than 77.5 acres, Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery stretches along the ridge of Point Loma, the peninsula on the seaward side of the channel into San Diego Bay. Dramatic views of the Pacific Ocean and the bay are available throughout the cemetery. The rostrum sits at the end of a grassy median about 185' inside the entrance gates on the eastern, or bay, side of the cemetery. The west-facing rostrum is located in a grassy assembly area immediately inside the entrance gates, west of Section F. It originally faced the cemetery flagstaff, which was installed between the rostrum and the gates, but the flagstaff was moved to the west side of the cemetery when the current administration building was built there in 1957.

History: The post cemetery at Fort Rosecrans Military Reservation, in use since the nineteenth century, was enlarged and designated a national cemetery in 1934 to accommodate the burial of veterans of the U.S. armed forces. It was the second national cemetery on the Pacific Coast; the first one, at San Francisco, was established in 1884. In 1935, necessary improvements were designed for the expanded cemetery, including new drives, a superintendent's lodge, a utility building, a flagstaff, and the rostrum. These structures were completed in 1936, with new entrance gates and perimeter walls following in 1938.

The rostrum, intended as a speaker's platform for ceremonial occasions such as Memorial Day, was a simplified version of the rostrum constructed at San Francisco National Cemetery in 1915. It was completed May 20, 1936, at a cost of \$909.55. The builder contracted by the U.S. Army's Office of the Quartermaster General has not been determined.

The cemetery was transferred to 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.

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.

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