

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

FORT SAM HOUSTON NATIONAL CEMETERY, ROSTRUM

HALS No. TX-3-B

Location: 1520 Harry Wurzbach Road, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

The Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery rostrum is located at latitude 29.476633, longitude -98.432971 (North American Datum of 1983). The coordinate represents the structure's approximate center.

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

Construction date: 1934

Builder / Contractor: unknown

Description: The rostrum is a hexagonal stone platform surmounted by a wrought-iron ornamental railing carried on cast-iron corner posts. A single flight of concrete steps bounded by stone cheek walls on the north side of the rostrum leads onto the platform from a walk at grade.

The rostrum is built of light-colored, roughly-coursed sandstone blocks placed on reinforced-concrete footings. The perimeter walls are articulated by a tooled water table and ovolo moldings under the overhang of the rostrum's concrete floor.

The rostrum measures 9' per side. Its overall dimensions are 18'-10" wide x 21'-5" deep x about 6' high.

Site context: The rostrum is located in the oldest part of Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, adjacent to the main entrance drive that leads past the superintendent's lodge and the flagstaff near what is now Section 1A. The rostrum is located about 120' east of the lodge and about 90' southwest of the flagstaff.

History: The post cemetery created at Fort Sam Houston in 1924 was enlarged in 1931 and designated as an addition to San Antonio National Cemetery, located five miles away. With funding from the Federal Emergency Administration for Public Works, the Construction Division of the Office of the Quartermaster General contracted for the construction of a superintendent's lodge in the cemetery in 1933, as well as for a public comfort station, entrance gates, rostrum, roads, walks, utility lines, and a boundary wall. All of these

improvements were completed in the first half of 1934. The addition was renamed Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery in 1937.

The rostrum was intended to serve as a speaker's platform for ceremonial occasions such as Memorial Day. The U.S. Army Quartermaster's Department, the agency responsible for the maintenance and improvement of the national cemeteries, erected rostrums in many of the cemeteries in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Funding limitations virtually stopped construction of new rostrums until 1931, when the Quartermaster Corps began building inexpensive concrete rostrums with metal roofs in selected cemeteries that lacked them. As the New Deal programs of the Roosevelt administration made funding available for public works in the mid 1930s, the army was able to construct increasingly elaborate rostrums using more impressive materials. The Fort Sam Houston rostrum, with its stone walls and decorative iron railing, is the first example of this change. The rostrum cost \$827.35, \$304.39 of which was for materials and \$522.96 for labor. The funding was provided through the Public Works Administration.

The rostrum originally featured a hexagonal speaker's table in the center of the floor. The table had a concrete top supported by a stone base and pedestal. The table was removed at an unknown date.

The 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:

Call, Lewis W. *United States Military Reservations, National Cemeteries, and Military Parks. Title, Jurisdiction, etc.* Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1907.

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

Office of the Quartermaster General. Construction Division. Rostrum for Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, 1933. Drawing no. 6842-1001. 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 out and measured drawings produced by HABS Architects Paul Davidson, Ryan Pierce, and Mark Schara.