

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Fort Bliss National Cemetery

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

Inter-World War National Cemeteries, 1934-1939

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 5200 Fred Wilson Boulevard

City or town: Fort Bliss State: Texas County: El Paso

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

<p>Signature of certifying official/Title: <u>Kathleen Schaefer</u></p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>		<p>Date</p> <p><u>1/14/16</u></p>
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<p>In my opinion, the property <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> meets <input type="checkbox"/> does not meet the National Register criteria.</p> <p><u>Marilyn [Signature]</u></p>		<p>Date</p> <p><u>12/1/15</u></p>
<p>Signature of commenting official: <u>SHPD</u></p> <p>Title:</p>		<p>Date</p> <p><u>Texas Historical Commission</u></p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

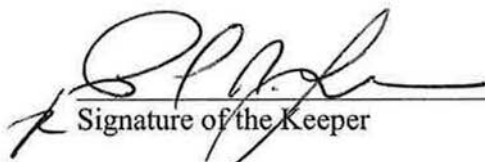
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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____


Signature of the Keeper

3/2/2016
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>5</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
<u>6</u>	_____	structures
<u>8</u>	_____	objects
<u>19</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Funerary/Cemetery

Domestic/Institutional Housing

Landscape

Recreation/Culture/Monument

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Funerary/Cemetery

Landscape

Recreation/Culture/Monument

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19th & Early 20th Century Revival/Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Concrete, Stucco, Mission tile (Spanish tile), Texas Pink Granite, Marble, Metal: cast aluminum and bronze

Narrative Description Summary Paragraph

Fort Bliss National Cemetery contains roughly 82 acres located at 5200 Fred Wilson Boulevard in Fort Bliss, Texas, adjacent to the city of El Paso. The cemetery is on land formerly belonging to the Fort Bliss Military Reservation, which the United States government established in the late 1840s at the conclusion of the U.S.-Mexican War. The conquest of former Mexican territories in the Southwest allowed the United States to strategically locate Fort Bliss along the banks of the Rio Grande. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Fort Bliss relocated multiple times before the United States Army settled on its current location in 1893.

Each time the fort relocated, so did its cemetery. The first recorded burials at Fort Bliss took place in 1863. The Army established the current Post Cemetery in 1893, and it encompassed approximately 2 acres with a capacity of 800 graves. This Post Cemetery is within the boundaries of Fort Bliss National Cemetery. A stone wall defines its boundaries.

The cemetery expanded after World War I, and Congress authorized the establishment of a national cemetery at Fort Bliss in 1936. Delays in funding, accompanied by deliberations about site location, stalled construction until 1939. The new national cemetery joined the original Post Cemetery for a total size of approximately 60 acres. The Army interred its first burial in the national cemetery on March 7, 1940. In 2000, the cemetery acquired additional acreage on its west side.¹ As of July 2014, Fort Bliss National Cemetery contained 40,283 gravesites that include 37,548 full-casket interments and 2,735 cremain interments.

¹ "Cemetery Safest Place in the World to Live, Says Expert, Who Has U.S. Caretaker Papers," *El Paso Herald Post*, November 7, 1939; National Cemetery Administration (NCA), "Fort Bliss National Cemetery," <http://www.cem.va.gov/CEMs/nchp/ftbliss.asp>, accessed August 6, 2008; Veterans Administration (VA), "National Cemetery Data, Fort Bliss National Cemetery" (San Francisco, CA: National Cemetery Supervising Office, 1975).

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Narrative Description

As first designed, Fort Bliss National Cemetery was as a simple rectangle with symmetrical interior streets. With a minimum number of streets, the cemetery's historic layout features a central drive from the main gate that winds south around the flagpole circle and finally separates in gentle curves away from the rostrum area. The remaining streets frame large portions of the cemetery roughly into rectangular units. Today, the cemetery's north border is Fred Wilson Avenue, while its east border fronts J.E.B. Stuart Road, its south fronts Haan Road, and its west fronts an athletic field.

The road layout at Fort Bliss National Cemetery is similar to plans proposed for the cemetery dating to 1936, though geometric designs eventually trumped more curvilinear concepts. The oldest parts of the cemetery retain the rectangle footprint with a generally symmetrical layout of burial sections. Roads maintain their historical configuration without imposing upon burial sections of the cemetery to grant additional access or use. Evenly spaced mature oak, ash, and elm trees planted along the roads create allées that offer shade and formality to the landscape design.

The roughly 4½-acre former Post Cemetery in the southeast corner of Fort Bliss National Cemetery remains accessible via bisecting East Drive and Second Drive South, which divides Post Sections A and C. East-west oriented drives divided all of the originally equally sized post sections, while an additional circular drive framed East Drive at its south end.² Though most of these drives are no longer present in the former Post Cemetery, this early cemetery section retains its ca. 1914 rubble granite wall. The 1940 stone wall enclosing the rest of the national cemetery is similar in appearance. The early wall stood approximately 3½ feet high. Planted grass and trees originally composed the cemetery landscape, but, as the result of a dramatic xeriscaping project in 2007, decomposed granite (a fine-grained aggregate) replaced sod throughout the cemetery.

The historic cemetery lodge dates to 1939 and now serves as an office. The lodge is located near the north entrance to the cemetery and faced east to the drive connecting that entry to the flagpole circle. The one story, side gabled building is in the Spanish Revival style, with concrete block walls covered in stucco and a mission tile roof. The restroom and visitor information center, constructed in 2007, mimics this style.

Road names include North Drive, East Drive, West Drive, Mall Drive West, Mall Drive East, First Drive South, Second Drive South, and Center Drive South. Additions to the road system in 2004 extend west from "North Drive," and break the symmetry of the cemetery. Executed in an intersecting, curvilinear pattern, the street additions are distinctly different from those within the older section of the cemetery.

² United States Army Signal Corps (USASC), Aerial Photograph, Fort Bliss, April 15, 1948, Historical File, Fort Bliss National Cemetery (FBNC), El Paso, TX.

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Doubled letters, such as “AA” or BB,” indicate newer burial sections at Fort Bliss National Cemetery, while single letters denote older burial sections, though there are a few exceptions. The exceptions (for example, Sections FF or O1) indicate the infill of newer interments in older burial sections, evidence of a widespread pattern among national cemeteries that attempted to take advantage of available space. With limited or no room for expansion, crowded national cemeteries eliminated former grassy border areas along burial sections and utilized them for interments. Since the newly developed area is relegated outside and to the west of the older section of the cemetery, the historic street pattern remains intact. Sections MA and MB hold memorial markers, and these sections are also examples of new burial sections worked into the older cemetery grounds.³

Fort Bliss National Cemetery’s headstones reflect the era of establishment. The style of headstone is a major distinguishing characteristic of national cemeteries established in the twentieth century. The style of headstone appearance changed dramatically between the Spanish-American War and World War I. The oldest style of government-issued headstone, for soldiers of the Civil War and Spanish-American War, are white marble with rounded tops and recessed shields on the face. The raised inscription includes the state of origin, unlike subsequent inscription practice, and rank if above private.

The predominant headstone at Fort Bliss National Cemetery is the upright white American marble cambered “General type” introduced in 1922 for World War I soldiers and those thereafter. This type of headstone measures 42 inches high, 13 inches wide, and 4 inches thick; approximately 26 inches is visible above ground. Inscriptions include the name, rank, regiment, division, date of birth, date of death, and home state. Originally, the emblem of belief on these headstones was limited to the Latin cross or a Star of David centered above the name of the deceased. The number of available emblem of belief options began to increase after World War II.

In addition, flat, government-issued markers are permitted in specific sections; at Fort Bliss, these are found in Sections C1 and H. In the 1930s, the War Department introduced flat headstones to accommodate veterans buried in private/local cemeteries that did not allow upright markers, such as the lawn park and memorial park cemeteries. Congress already authorized markers of “durable stone” in 1873, thus, the Secretary of War only needed to approve a new style—flat. The first flat marble markers were produced in 1936, with flat granite markers following two years later. They measure 24 inches x 12 inches with rounded edges. The same products are used interchangeably as memorial markers.⁴

The cemetery allowed private markers in Post Sections A, B, C and D, but there are only seven of these, all made of granite.

³ Memorial headstones are furnished for eligible deceased active duty service members and Veterans whose remains are not recovered or identified, are buried at sea, donated to science or whose cremated remains have been scattered.

⁴ Design for Flat Marker, Box 17, Folder 4, Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, Department of Memorial Affairs (DMA), National Cemetery Historical File (NCHF), Records of the VA, Record Group 15 (RG 15), National Archives Building, Washington, DC (NAB).

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Traffic islands north of the rostrum hold monuments; one is adjacent to the POW/MIA flagpole. The headstone for Lieutenant Colonel William Bliss, for whom the cemetery and adjacent fort are named, sits in a place of honor in the center of the traffic island. His remains were reinterred at this site from a New Orleans cemetery in 1955 with full military honors. There are four Medal of Honor markers in the cemetery; two mark the remains of interments, and two are memorial headstones.⁵

Fort Bliss National Cemetery underwent a dramatic visual alteration with its transition to xeriscaping for much of the landscape (save for the median and sides of Mall Drives east and west, and the area directly around the rostrum). Likewise, new structures and newly developed burial sections expanded the historic cemetery. Nonetheless, this historic property retains a high degree of historic integrity. The surrounding streetscapes changed with developments at Fort Bliss, but those changes do not detract from the historic viewshed and traditional building heights that make up the surrounding built environment.

Contributing Properties (25)⁶

Buildings (5): Administration Building, Gate House/Pump House, Restroom and Visitor Information Center, Small Maintenance Facility, Large Maintenance Facility

Structures (6): Entrance Gates, Service Gates, and Enclosing Wall, Rostrum, United States Flagpole and Base, Post Section Wall, East Committal Shelter, West Committal Shelter

Objects (8): Military Order of the Purple Heart (TAPS) Monument, Military Order of the World Wars Monument, Pearl Harbor Survivors Association Monument, POW Memorial Monument, Bicentennial Tree Plaque, "Bivouac of the Dead" Plaque, "Gettysburg Address" Plaque, Gold Star Wives Monument

Buildings (5)

Administration Building (former Lodge): Construction of this Spanish Revival building, located at the entrance to the cemetery west of the Mall Drives, completed on September 9, 1939. Built as a lodge for the cemetery superintendent, the building is a single-story, concrete-block building on a concrete foundation with a stuccoed hollow tile exterior and Spanish tile-clad gabled roof. The lodge has overhanging eaves on the north and south elevations that stand in contrast to the flush eaves along the east and west elevations. Exterior features include a roof vent in the east gable and exposed rafter tails. There are four bays on the north elevation and

⁵ NCA, "Fort Bliss National Cemetery," 2008; NCA, Fort Bliss National Cemetery, Cemetery Survey Report, 2008; Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), "History of Government Furnished Headstones and Markers," History Program Collection (HPC), NCA.

⁶ The information provided in the building, structures and objects descriptions is compiled from several sources: NCA's 2008 Cemetery Survey Report; the "Buildings and Utilities" historic record and historic photograph collection from HPC, NCA; historic photograph collection from the Historical File, FBNC; original correspondence and maintenance ledgers from the National Archives and Records Administration; Cindy Van Bibber, cemetery director, conversation with author, October 28, 2008; and a site visit.

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five on the south, all containing fenestration except the right-most bay of the south elevation, where the front door lies. The west elevation has a projecting bay and a single door entry.

Contractor J.E. Morgan & Sons of El Paso, Texas constructed the three-bedroom, single-family dwelling. Originally, the east elevation holds the front door, which has two projecting bays; the latter formerly housed the entrance and front porch. Relocation of the entrance to the south elevation resulted in the enclosure of the original front door in the 1980s. Fixed metal windows replaced all original wood windows. New doors also replaced originals and the south elevation received an ADA ramp ca. 2007.

Gate House/Pump House: This small, square, stone building is adjacent to Post E. It is part of the ca. 1914 stone wall surrounding the old Post Cemetery. The building has an ornate, hipped metal-tile roof with a lantern at the apex, capped by a pyramidal roof with a finial. Exposed rafter tails highlight the open eaves. The foundation is concrete, while the walls are rough-cut, uncoursed rubble. There are two doors with iron screens on the east elevation and boarded windows on the remaining elevations. The stone walls for the old Post Cemetery extend north and south from this structure. This building served as a gate house for the original Post Cemetery and later as a pump house.

Restroom: Completed in 2007 is the restroom, located south of the Administration Building. It is a one-story, stucco-clad building with a concrete foundation and front-facing gable roof clad in Spanish tile to harmonize with the style of its historic neighbor. The building also contains information for visitors to the cemetery grounds.

Small Maintenance Facility: Completed ca. 2000, this small, gable-roofed maintenance building is in the same Spanish Revival style featured on the Administration Building. Red tiles cover the roof slopes while the white paint of the walls reference the stuccoed exteriors of Spanish Revival style buildings. It is in the southwest corner of the cemetery, now behind a cordoned-off maintenance yard at the terminus of West Drive. The work area looks to be packed dirt and hardscaping, with room for landscaping vehicles and storage.

Large Maintenance Facility: Completed in 2004 adjacent to Section CC in the northwest quadrant of the cemetery, this is a large, modern maintenance building with flat roof and masonry exterior. The maintenance yard is accessible from the exterior roadway as well as off the extension of North Drive. Parking spaces are across the access road from the enclosed maintenance yard; west of this parking is a secured area for equipment and large vehicles. Landscaping screens the utilitarian building and work zone from the adjacent burial sections.

Structures (6)

Entrance Gates, Service Gates, and Enclosing Wall: El Paso contractor J.E. Morgan & Sons completed the entrance gates in September 9, 1939 after a design by the Constructing Quartermaster. The gates front Fred Wilson Avenue at the intersection of the boulevard composed of cemetery Mall Drive East and Mall Drive West. The posts are stone painted beige

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with Texas Pink Granite bases. Stone finials cap the four main roughly 16-foot-tall posts, while the central post has a rounded pediment and the Great Seal of the United States in bas-relief on the front elevation. The central post connects to the flanking posts by iron picket fences and simple buttresses with scrolled caps. The side gateposts connect to a short wall with scroll-top, Mission-style coping. The gateposts, featuring simple hipped caps, flank the pedestrian entrances (4½ foot opening) and join the curved entrance wall; the latter is painted stone measuring approximately 6 feet tall and 1½ feet thick.

Installed in 1941 is a standard bronze plaque on the east gatepost of the main entrance gates. The plaque is in the 1930s style with an eagle and the words “Fort Bliss National Cemetery.” On the west gatepost of the main entrance, is another standard bronze plaque installed ca. 1973 that reads, “Veterans Administration, 1930.”

Located at the rear of the cemetery along its southern border terminating at Haan Road, these double iron-picket vehicular gates attach to uncoursed-rubble stone gateposts. These 1914-constructed gates served as the main entrance to the Post Cemetery. This entrance became a service gate ca. 1939, when contractors constructed the main entrance on Fred Wilson Avenue. As the original wall received additional stone courses, the height of the stone walls adjacent to the gateposts increased (see Wall – Post Section).

Built by the Works Progress Administration and completed by April 19, 1940, the native stone wall originally ran the entire perimeter of the national cemetery; it measures approximately 1,100 feet along the south and north borders, and 2,800 feet on the east and west borders. Built of irregularly coursed, rough-cut rubble granite, the wall is about 6 feet high by 1½ feet wide, with interior stone buttresses. Two openings in the wall in the northwest corner of the cemetery accommodate the extension of North Drive into a newer section, and a view southeastward into the historic Post Cemetery. Otherwise, the wall remains intact and in good condition with good historic integrity.

Rostrum: The raised Neoclassical rostrum, completed December 7, 1940, stands within Section I on axis with the entrance. Constructed of Texas Pink Granite with a concrete foundation, the rostrum has a wood cornice and beadboard ceiling. Built by H.C. Shelton and Sons of Lawton, Oklahoma, the rostrum is semicircular in plan, featuring square posts set on square bases with recessed panels. Posts along the rear (south) elevation feature pilasters on the exterior and interior. The front elevation includes a central, integrated podium of Texas Pink Granite. It connects to flanking posts by a simple picket balustrade. A projecting cornice with closely spaced, decorative scroll-sawn rafter tails circumscribes the flat roof. Stairs lead to the rostrum from the rear elevation. The rostrum is approximately 353½ square feet, with a radius of 15½ feet and a foundation height of more than 3 feet. It is 11½ feet from the ground to the cornice line. Five circular, bronze military service insignia on metal posts are adjacent to and north of the rostrum, Section I. Each measure approximately 2 feet tall and represents one of the five branches of the United States Military. The cemetery installed these in the past few decades.

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United States Flagpole and Base: Located on an axis with the entrance at the intersection of the Mall Drives and North Drive is the United States Flagpole. Contractor Robert E. McKee of El Paso completed the flagpole by September 28, 1939. The tubular steel flagstaff sits on a Texas Pink Granite base featuring a star emblem. The flagstaff originally had a 250-pound bronze eagle finial; it now has a simple ball. As part of its original design, the base incorporated red and yellow pebbles “hand-picked from El Paso quarries” in the cement poured between the granite pieces of the platform. A bronze post-and-chain fence surrounded the base platform upon completion. Today the post-and-chain accent fence blends with foundation plantings grown at the edge of the platform.⁷

Post Section Wall: Completed ca. 1914, this stone wall encloses the original Post Cemetery composed Sections A-G. Constructed of irregularly coursed, rough-cut granite rubble, the wall measures approximately 300 feet x 725 feet with a gate on the south side and vehicular opening on the west side. Wall sections within the interior of the cemetery are 3 feet high; sections along the cemetery exterior are 7 feet high and approximately 1½ feet thick.

East Committal Shelter: Built ca. 2000 in Section C, this open-air committal shelter has uncoursed-stone corner posts supporting a pyramidal roof clad in Mission tile, a concrete floor, and low, built-in stone-and-concrete benches around the perimeter.

West Committal Shelter: Completed ca. 2004 in Section JJ, this committal shelter has uncoursed rubble pillars supporting a pyramidal roof clad in Mission tile with a concrete floor.

Objects (8)

Military Order of the Purple Hearts (TAPS) Monument: This is a low, granite block measuring approximately 2 feet high by 4 feet wide by 2 feet deep. It has an attached bronze plaque. Installed in 2002, this plaque is in the southwest corner of the traffic island holding the gravesite of Lieutenant Colonel Bliss. The Patriots and Ladies Auxiliary of Lone Star Chapter 393 of the Military Order of the Purple Hear presented the monument to the cemetery.

Military Order of the World Wars Monument: This is an upright polished, black granite block measuring approximately 2 feet tall by 2 feet wide by 1 foot deep with inscribed text. Installed in 1986, this is in the southeast corner of the traffic island that holds the gravesite of Lieutenant Colonel Bliss.

Pearl Harbor Survivors Association Monument: Installed in 1984, this is a low granite block measuring approximately 1 foot tall by 3 feet wide by 1 foot deep with a beveled face. It is in the traffic median separating Mall Drives East and West.

POW Memorial Monument: Installed in 1986, this is a granite memorial measuring approximately 2 feet tall by 4 feet wide by 1 foot deep with a slightly curved top and rectangular

⁷ “Cemetery Safest Place,” 1939.

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granite base. The monument rests on a concrete foundation. It is located at the foot of the POW/MIA flagpole in the traffic island holding the gravesite of Lieutenant Colonel Bliss. The American Ex-Prisoners of War, El Paso Chapter No. 1 donated the memorial. Erected in 1986, a 30-foot-tall steel flagpole flies the POW/MIA flag. The flagpole is next to the POW memorial, in the traffic island holding the gravesite of Lieutenant Colonel Bliss.

Bicentennial Tree Plaque: Installed in 1976, this is a small beveled granite block with an attached bronze plaque. The plaque is adjacent to a tree located at the fork of Mall Drive East and Mall Drive West, north of the rostrum, in Section I.

“Bivouac of the Dead” Plaque: Erected in 2003, this cast-aluminum plaque features a quatrain from the poem “Bivouac of the Dead” by Theodore O’Hara. A bevel-topped, square granite pedestal holds the plaque. It is east of the traffic circle surrounding the flagpole in Section A.

“Gettysburg Address” Plaque: Attached to large, upright rectangular granite slab measuring 71 inches tall and 41½ inches wide with a concrete base is the bronze “Gettysburg Address” plaque. The installation date for the plaque is 2012. It sits before the United States Flagpole and Base near the main entrance to the cemetery.

Gold Star Wives Monument: Located in the traffic island holding the gravesite of Lieutenant Colonel Bliss, this monument includes a bronze plaque on a slanted granite block atop a concrete base. The monument is 3 feet tall and 29 inches wide. The cemetery installed the monument in 2010.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Military

Social History

Period of Significance

1893-1936

1936-Present

Significant Dates

1936

1939

1940

1973

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

War Department

Works Progress Administration

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

Fort Bliss National Cemetery's significance rests in its position as one of seven national cemeteries established between World War I and World War II, specifically in 1934-1939. The increased veteran population, combined with the rapidly depleting burial space at existing national cemeteries, led to a series of federal legislation during this period aimed at establishing new cemeteries: Baltimore, Fort Snelling, Fort Rosecrans, Golden Gate, Fort Bliss, Long Island, and Fort Sam Houston national cemeteries. These seven properties are nationally significant under Criterion A for their association with the expansion of the National Cemetery System during the Inter-World War period. These cemeteries are physical shrines illustrating selfless sacrifices of the U.S. military, which expand upon the burial and memorial mission established during the Civil War through the first national cemeteries.

In 2011, the Keeper of the National Register confirmed National Register of Historic Places eligibility by issuing a clarification of policy stating that all national cemeteries are considered exceptionally significant and eligible for listing in the NRHP regardless of age, and that all buildings, structures, and objects located within the boundaries of national cemeteries are considered contributing elements to each national cemetery regardless of age.⁸

The first period of significance begins with the first burial at the Post Cemetery section now included in the Fort Bliss National Cemetery, in 1893, and ends with the establishment of the national cemetery in 1936. The second period of significance (1936-Present) at Fort Bliss National Cemetery begins with the establishment by Congress as a national cemetery. Due to the complex nature of cemetery development, Congressional establishment was chosen as the beginning date for the Inter-World War national cemeteries because all other dates occur due to the legislation.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Historical Background

The history of Fort Bliss National Cemetery melds with that of the adjacent military reservation, after which it was named. Its location is on former fort grounds and encompasses the Post Cemetery that served Fort Bliss. The fort as it exists today, near the City of El Paso, exists in contrast to the desert wilderness that hosted the first military post.

At the conclusion of the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-1848), the United States gained territories in the Southwest formerly belonging to Mexico. To protect the newly won lands and create a military presence in the area, the War Department established a military post at El Paso del Norte in 1849. In June of that year, a military procession accompanied by settlers and wagonloads of supplies began the trek to the newly designated post. The lengthy 673-mile journey started from

⁸ Keeper of the National Register, "National Register Eligibility of National Cemeteries—A Clarification of Policy." September 8, 2011. (Washington, DC: History Program Collection, NCA). Available at: http://www.cem.va.gov/pdf/Final_Eligibility_of_VA_cemeteries_A_Clarification_of_Policy_rev.pdf

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San Antonio and crossed the desert and hostile American Indian land. After three months, the weary group arrived at the military post on the banks of the Rio Grande. In 1854, the post was named after the recently deceased Lieutenant Colonel William Wallace Smith Bliss.⁹

Born in Whitehall, New York, in 1815, William Bliss graduated from United States Military Academy at West Point and served briefly in the infantry in skirmishes with the Cherokee from 1833-1834. Bliss taught math at the United States Military Academy until 1840, reentering field service from 1840-1845, when he became Chief of Staff to General Zachary Taylor. He served with Taylor throughout the military occupation of Texas and in the Mexican War. Bliss received praise for gallant and meritorious conduct in the late 1840s and married Taylor's daughter in 1848. When Taylor served as President of the United States, Bliss was his private secretary. In 1850, Bliss became adjutant general of the Western Division of the Army, headquartered in New Orleans. He died of yellow fever on August 5, 1853, just twelve days before his thirty-eighth birthday.¹⁰

The state of Texas seceded from the United States on February 1, 1861, leading Union Forces to abandon Fort Bliss. Confederate troops occupied the fort until 1862, when the Union victory at the Battle of Glorieta Pass in the New Mexico territory led the Confederate forces to retreat to San Antonio. The Confederates burned the fort before it could be re-occupied by the Union. El Paso remained in Union control for the remainder of the war.¹¹

After the cessation of hostilities, the United States Army rebuilt the post to help provide protection from American Indians for migrants traveling west. In May 1867, the Rio Grande flooded, damaging the fort and leading the Army to construct a new installation on higher ground. The Army completed the fort the following year and designated it Fort Bliss in 1869, before abandoning the fort in early 1877 as a casualty of Federal budget cuts. Later that year, in part due to the lack of a Federal garrison in the area, a dispute concerning the ownership of salt flats near the Guadalupe Mountains led to a short-lived but deadly conflict known as the El Paso Salt War. To restore order, the United States Army moved back into the area on January 1, 1878, where it remains a presence in El Paso today.¹²

The Army established and subsequently abandoned two further iterations of Fort Bliss. The Army deemed the first, a series of downtown warehouses rented in 1878, to be inconvenient due to traffic congestion. The Army founded the second west of the city, completing the fort in 1880.

The Southern Pacific Railway built tracks reaching El Paso in 1881, and in the following years constructed additional railroad lines converging on the city. The construction led to a significant

⁹ History of Fort Bliss, no date, 2, Border Heritage Center Collection (BHCC), El Paso Public Library, El Paso, TX.

¹⁰ History of Fort Bliss, 2; Department of the Army (DOA), "Fort Bliss National Cemetery," pamphlet (Washington, DC: Chief of Support Services, ca. 1980); NCA, "Fort Bliss National Cemetery," accessed June 1, 2010.

¹¹ Charles H. Harris, III and Louis R. Sadler, *Bastion on the Border: Fort Bliss, 1854-1943* (Fort Bliss: United States Army Air Defense Artillery Center, 1993) 2-3.

¹² Harris and Sadler, *Bastion*, 4-5.

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rise in population. El Paso's development into a railroad hub created additional responsibilities for the garrison at Fort Bliss, who protected the railroad lines. In a strange twist, the Santa Fe Railroad received congressional approval to run a line straight through the fort, bisecting the parade ground. By the late 1880s, the garrison already overwhelmed the facilities in this location, and the Army considered the frequent trains running through the fort to be dangerous. In 1890, President Benjamin Harrison signed into law a bill, providing funds for the construction of the final iteration of Fort Bliss on a site 5 miles east of downtown El Paso. In 1893, the first troops moved into the new installation, on the present site.¹³

Fort Bliss had a relatively quiet period between 1893 and 1910. The Indian Wars ended, and Fort Bliss played only a small role in mobilizing troops for the Spanish-American War (1898) and the Philippine Insurrection (1899-1902).

The onset of the Mexican Revolution in 1910 led the United States Army to strengthen Fort Bliss as a base camp for patrol operations protecting the border region from bandits. Although Fort Bliss had cavalry units at the post as early as 1895, the base remained primarily an infantry post. This changed in 1912, when the War Department realized that mounted troops were much more effective in border patrol, and began to convert Fort Bliss into a cavalry post.¹⁴

In March 1916, Pancho Villa, leader of a band of Mexican paramilitary troops, led a raid on the border town of Columbus, New Mexico for supplies. In response, President Woodrow Wilson ordered Major General John J. Pershing, stationed at Fort Bliss, to lead an expeditionary United States Army force into Mexico to capture Villa. The Mexican Punitive expedition lasted until February 1917. Despite multiple clashes with Villa's forces, Pershing withdrew to north of the border without capturing the guerilla leader.

During World War I, Fort Bliss served as a training center. It evolved from a gathering point at the beginning of the war to a demobilization camp after the Armistice.

By the 1920s, Fort Bliss was the most important military station on the Mexican border.¹⁵ The continuing unrest in Mexico led Congress to expand the post after World War I. At the time of the establishment of the national cemetery, Fort Bliss was the largest cavalry post in the nation.¹⁶

Cemetery Development

Approximately 5 acres of the national cemetery compose the former Post Cemetery for Fort Bliss. This portion of the cemetery holds ten roughly square-shaped sections: Post Sections A, B, C, D, E, F, G, K, N, and MB. Paved, tree-lined roadways formerly divided all ten originally equally sized sections, while a circular drive flanked the southernmost road section between what

¹³ Perry Jamieson, *A Survey History of Fort Bliss, 1890-1940* (Fort Bliss, TX: United States Army Air Defense Artillery Center, 1993), 7.

¹⁴ Leon Metz, *Desert Army: Fort Bliss on the Texas Border* (El Paso, TX: Mangan Books, 1988), 71; Jamieson, *A Survey History*, 20-21.

¹⁵ Harris and Sadler, *Bastion*, 65.

¹⁶ Jamieson, *A Survey History*, 462.

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are now Post Sections MB and N. By 1948, these drives began to disappear from this portion of the national cemetery.¹⁷ By 1978, only those portions of East Drive and Second Drive South that remain intact in the Post Cemetery today remained.¹⁸ A rubble granite wall framed the earliest roughly 2 acres of the Post Cemetery in 1914. This wall eventually served as the model for the 1940-constructed wall enclosing the rest of the national cemetery at that time. Though the greater Fort Bliss National Cemetery incorporated the Post Cemetery in 1939, its enclosing wall, as expanded in the interwar era prior to the establishment of the national cemetery, remains intact to date.

The National Archives includes a list of nineteen United States Army soldiers buried at the second location of Fort Bliss between 1863 and 1866. It is unclear what happened to these remains, as they do not appear in the historic burial ledger. The remains and or identities may have been lost during one of the relocations of the fort. A second list, dated September 3, 1886, includes nine burials in the previous Post Cemetery dating from 1883-1886; these remains were relocated to the new Post Cemetery when the fort established its permanent, current location in 1893.¹⁹

Fort Bliss changed from an infantry to cavalry post in 1914. At the same time, in the midst of the Mexican Revolution, the fort housed more than 60,000 troops. The Post Cemetery at this time totaled approximately 2 acres enclosed by a stone wall with a capacity of 800 graves. This small Post Cemetery gained about 2 more acres during the interwar years, tripling its capacity to 2,400 graves. When constructed in 1939, Fort Bliss National Cemetery incorporated the Post Cemetery within its boundaries.²⁰

The creation of Fort Bliss National Cemetery was the culmination of four years of coordinated efforts by the War Department's Quartermaster General offices in Fort Bliss and Washington, DC. In the early 1930s, San Antonio National Cemetery was the only national cemetery in Texas, and had limited burial space. The War Department's policy was to expand existing national cemeteries rather than create new ones, and in the case of Fort Bliss and other Inter-World War national cemeteries, they were either intended to supplement and expand existing facilities or to serve current burial needs of the armed forces. The burgeoning veteran population nationwide, with the addition of five million World War I veterans eligible for burial in a national cemetery, placed a strain on existing facilities. In 1929, a survey of available burial space in the eighty-four existing national cemeteries revealed just less than 200,000 available gravesites, a somewhat encouraging sum when the average burial rate was at 2,779 per year. However, crowded metropolitan-area national cemeteries such as Cypress Hills and Philadelphia interred a majority of these burials. This survey and other studies, along with support from local posts of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, convinced the War Department to

¹⁷ USASC, April 15, 1948.

¹⁸ USASC, Aerial Photograph, Fort Bliss, October 10, 1978, Historical File, FBNC, El Paso, TX

¹⁹ *General Orders No. 45* required the commanding officers of all military posts to set aside a cemetery for the burial of those who died while in service to the post or nearby posts, their families, and civilian government employees.

²⁰ History of Fort Bliss, 2; NCA, "Fort Bliss National Cemetery," 2008.

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request appropriations for additional national cemeteries throughout the next decade, resulting in the creation of the seven Inter-World War national cemeteries, including Fort Bliss. Veteran groups also brought attention to national cemeteries by helping to host and attend Memorial Day services, a role that continues today.²¹

Congress established Fort Bliss National Cemetery in an act of June 15, 1936 (Public Law No. 681), which also authorized the Secretary of War to set aside land for the new cemetery from the Fort Bliss Military Reservation. The Secretary of War selected the Fort Bliss area because of the large number of soldiers at the post as well as low construction estimates of just \$25,000. However, the different offices of the Army could agree upon no clear location for the new cemetery.

In July 1936, the Quartermaster General recommended that an area of 15 acres, including the Post Cemetery, be set aside for the new cemetery. The area selected was the adjacent nearly 10 acres lying immediately west of the Post Cemetery.

But in early 1938, Brigadier General Ben Lear, the Commanding General of Fort Bliss, and Colonel John Harris of the Quartermaster General's office agreed that the site was unsatisfactory, as access to the cemetery by civilian traffic would travel either through Fort Bliss itself or from Fred Wilson Avenue, a ¼-mile away from the cemetery. General Lear recommended that the War Department purchase a 12-acre parcel east of the Post Cemetery. This privately owned area was in arrears for taxes and the county approved the sale of the land.²²

The Office of the Quartermaster General, which preferred the site north of the Post Cemetery extending out to Fred Wilson Avenue, rejected General Lear's recommendation. The Office of the Quartermaster General considered this site to be superior for its future expansion opportunities adjacent to the cemetery. This site also relieved the post of cemetery traffic.²³

The Office of the Quartermaster General also considered using adjacent land south of the Post Cemetery, but the post needed that parcel for activities and the location of the cemetery in this area rendered it inaccessible except by way of Fort Bliss.

Debate regarding the location of the cemetery continued during the remainder of 1938 and the early part of 1939. However, it became clear that the area north of the Post Cemetery extending out to the county highway, including the Polo fields, was the superior site. General Lear insisted

²¹ Edward Steere, "Shrines of the Honored Dead: A Study of the National Cemetery System," (a series of six articles written by Steere, a historian with the Office of the Quartermaster General [OQMG]), *Quartermaster Review* (1953-54), 29; "Post Cemetery is Dedicated," *El Paso Times*, May 31, 1937; "Ask Change in Cemetery," *El Paso Times*, January 13, 1936.

²² *National Cemetery in United States Military Reservation at Fort Bliss, TX*, report prepared for the Committee of the Whole House, 75th Cong., 1st sess., May 24, 1937; Brig. Gen. Ben Lear, United States Army, to Maj. Gen. Henry Gibbins, Washington, DC, February 19, 1938, Folder 687 Fort Bliss 1940, General Correspondence "Geographical File" (GCGF) 1936-1945, Records of the OQMG, Record Group 92 (RG 92), National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD (NACP).

²³ Maintenance Ledgers, FBNC, DMA, NCHF, Records of the VA, RG 15, NAB.

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that cemetery funds had to bear the expense of relocating the polo field if the Office of the Quartermaster General chose this location. Colonel Harris wrote in March 15, 1939, that the Office of the Quartermaster General established the final location, and urged preparation of the cemetery for burials as soon as possible. Harris expected to complete the grave layout by April. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) funded the polo field relocation.²⁴

The plan encompassed 60 acres in a rectangular shape, including the old Post Cemetery. Plans outlined the entrance to the Post Cemetery on the southern border of the property, and the entrance to the national cemetery on the north border along Fred Wilson Avenue. A newspaper article from April 1939 published a rendering of the cemetery's proposed entrance showing with the superintendent's lodge, utility building, gates, and flagpole (fig. 1). The rendering shows the area dense with mature trees, shrubs, and grassy lawns. As the cemetery developed, the placement of the front gates, roads, flagpole, and lodge followed the plan portrayed in the rendering. Two entrance gates joined by a central fence and grassy island accommodated a boulevard running on axis south to the flagpole circle. Sidewalks lined the west road and encircled the flagpole plaza.

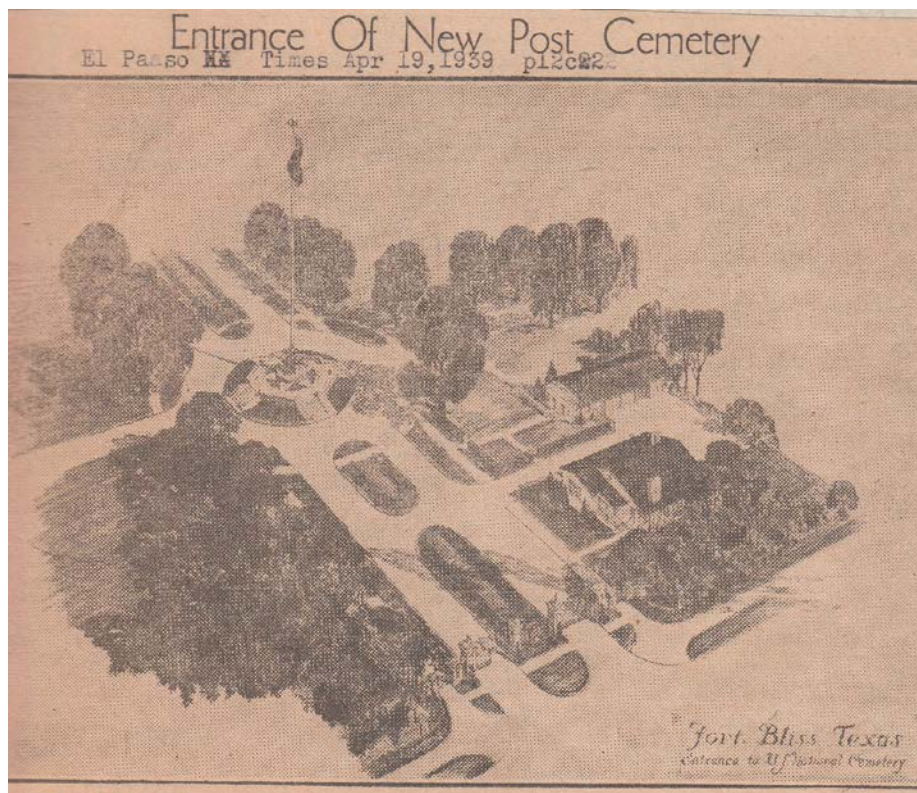


Fig. 1 Rendering of Fort Bliss National Cemetery, 1939.

²⁴ Col. John T. Harris, Quartermaster Corps (QMC), to Quartermaster, 8th Corps Area, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, February 13, 1939, Folder 687 Fort Bliss 1940, GCGF 1936-1945, Records of the OQMG, RG 92, NACP; Col. James R. Hill, QMC, to Col. John T. Harris, Office of the Quartermaster, Washington, DC, March 3, 1939, Folder 687 Fort Bliss 1940, GCGF 1936-1945, Records of the OQMG, RG 92, NACP; Capt. H.O. Godwin, Constructing Quartermaster, QMC, to the Quartermaster General, Washington, DC, March 25, 1939, Folder 687 Fort Bliss 1940, GCGF 1936-1945, Records of the OQMG, RG 92, NACP.

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Southwest of the entrance were the lodge, along with a parking lot and utility southwest of the building. A 1948 aerial view of the cemetery confirms that the plans in the rendering came to fruition (fig. 2)

Fig. 2 Aerial view of cemetery grounds, 1948 (USASC)



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This view also reveals that the burials began in the northern half of Section E, adjacent to North Drive. Letters designated burial sections, and the road system served as dividing lines for most of the interior sections. Rectangular sections of varying size enclosed the road system.²⁵

The setting of the new national cemetery was initially somewhat disparate; a desert and large fort nursery to the east, and a polo field to the west. To the south was a portion of the fort and open land traversed east-to-west by Cemetery Road, which accessed the original entrance to the Post Cemetery. The area to the north was crossed by Fred Wilson Avenue and beyond that a barren tract containing an east-to-west railroad and a spur that ran south along the east side of the cemetery property.²⁶

During the planning phase of the cemetery in March 1939, Colonel Harris developed a site plan in anticipation of the cemetery superintendent using the layout to plan burials. The construction of the roads and sidewalks was a secondary consideration for the War Department, which suggested that it was necessary to “proceed along certain lines and first construct the buildings and inclosure (sic), flagstaff and base,” and then work on roads, curbs, and water and sewer systems. Workers completed the superintendent’s lodge, utility building, and entrance gates by early October 1939, while the flagstaff and base neared completion by that time. To expedite construction and meet the opening date deadline in March 1940, workers laid out approximately 400 feet of the northernmost part of the cemetery with paved concrete curbed streets. The Office of the Constructing Quartermaster commented in an April 24, 1940 letter that although the office recommended asphalt, workers used concrete due to extreme heat. The Southwest heat had a tendency to cook the oil out of the black asphalt roads carrying little traffic, causing them to crumble and check badly. The same letter reported the recent completion of the cemetery wall and the start on the rostrum. Improvements such as the construction of roads, walks, curbs, water and sewer system, seeding, landscaping and fertilizing soon followed.²⁷

In 1944, a representative from the Quartermaster General’s office recommended planting grass throughout the entire cemetery property instead of just in the sections where burials occurred. He excluded from his recommendation a small 5-acre plot at the extreme south end of the property used as a nursery for the cemetery. At the time, World War II prisoners of war (POWs) maintained the grass and planted trees and shrubs. The cemetery installed a sprinkler system in 1944-45, and cemetery Superintendent Anthony J. Nettke continued to plant palm trees, shrubs, and grass during his tenure; he transferred to Golden Gate National Cemetery in 1945. Despite the desert conditions, grass planted in the cemetery survived enough that by 1947, a newspaper article described the “green-carpeted grass” in the cemetery. A 1948 aerial view of the cemetery depicts a concentration of oak and elm trees in the post section, with young ash trees planted

²⁵ “Entrance of New Post Cemetery,” *El Paso Times*, April 19, 1939; USASC, April 15, 1948.

²⁶ USASC, April 15, 1948; “Beautiful Site at Fort Bliss May Become National Cemetery,” *World News*, May 24, 1936.

²⁷ Secretary of War Harry H. Woodring, to Hon. R.E. Thomason, Washington, DC, October 4, 1939, Folder 687 Fort Bliss 1940, GCGF 1936-1945, Records of the OQMG, RG 92, NACP; Maj. Barlow Winston, Constructing Quartermaster, QMC, to Col. Charles C. Reynolds, QMC, Washington, DC, April 24, 1940, Folder 687 Fort Bliss 1940, GCGF 1936-1945, Records of the OQMG, RG 92, NACP.

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along the roadways forming allées. A few cypress trees adorned the front part of the cemetery and flared out in a line around the sides and rear of the rostrum. Grass is present in a somewhat patchwork appearance. Dark circles on the image represent the locations of thriving grass within the reach of revolving water sprinklers.²⁸

Labor hired for the cemetery and through the WPA constructed the national cemetery. The New Deal labor program, begun in 1935, primarily completed small-scale new construction, rehabilitation, and/or landscape improvement projects that could be completed in a year or less. In addition to the initial cemetery appropriations in excess of \$44,000, the cemetery received a second \$25,000 WPA project, of which approximately \$22,000 paid for labor and \$3,000 for supplies. This left Captain H.O. Godwin, Constructing Quartermaster of Fort Bliss, responsible for supplying labor for general clearing and grading, and quarrying stone for the wall. Godwin requested an additional \$56,260 in March 1939 for labor and materials needed to create infrastructure and roads. Local veteran groups continued to support the cemetery's establishment and in an April 24, 1939 letter to Senator Morris Sheppard (D-TX), noted that the cemetery needed an additional \$60,000 to accelerate its construction to meet the needs of the significant number of military personnel in El Paso. Representatives from two camps of United Spanish War veterans, three Veterans of Foreign Wars, three American Legion posts, and one Retired Personnel Association lobbied for the opening and dedication of a new national cemetery at Fort Bliss; advocates from the nearby base joined their cause. By October 1939, the request for appropriations resulted in another \$75,000 allotment from the WPA for completion of a stone wall, roads, and other work.²⁹

The initial flurry of construction at the cemetery accomplished a great deal. WPA labor built the native rubble-stone wall that encloses the cemetery, which was completed on April 19, 1940. Workers completed the flagstaff and base, which featured Texas Pink Granite, on September 28, 1939. Local contractor J.E. Morgan and Sons of El Paso built the one-story utility building (no longer extant), the superintendent's lodge, and the entrance gates and fences, which all had an official completion date of September 9, 1939. The buildings and gates utilized similar materials and styles to convey a harmonious group of structures; stucco and stone convey the Spanish Revival style, reflecting the architectural traditions typifying the American Southwest. An unknown builder completed the Texas Pink Granite rostrum, located centrally on the cemetery grounds, on December 7, 1940.³⁰

Levering Brothers, Inc., the company that fabricated the bronze *General Orders No. 80, National Cemetery Act, Memorial Day Order*, and "Gettysburg Address" plaques for Baltimore, Fort Sam Houston, Long Island, Fort Rosecrans, and Fort Snelling national cemeteries, sent a similar style

²⁸ "Fort Bliss National Cemetery Cont'd," no date, HPC, NCA, Washington, DC; "Cemeteries Prepared for War Dead," *El Paso Times*, September 14, 1947; USASC, April 15, 1948; "Fort Bliss N/C," no date, HPC, NCA, Washington, DC.

²⁹ Godwin to Quartermaster General, March 25, 1939; John H. McCormack and Joseph Bradford, to Hon. Morris Sheppard, Washington, DC, April 24, 1939, Folder 687 Fort Bliss 1940, GCGF 1936-1945, Records of the OQMG, RG 92, NACP; Woodring to Thomason, October 4, 1939.

³⁰ War Department, "Buildings and Utilities, Fort Bliss National Cemetery," photocopy, HPC, NCA, Washington, DC; Winston to Reynolds, April 24, 1940.

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of plaque to Fort Bliss National Cemetery, and perhaps to Golden Gate National Cemetery, but they were subsequently removed. Golden Gate and Fort Bliss national cemeteries now have similar plaques dating to 2011 and 2012, respectively.³¹ Such plaques are common installations at national cemeteries. However, this style of plaque, set upon an upright granite stand, may be specific to Inter-World War cemeteries.

The War Department (renamed the Department of Defense in 1949) pressured for money and materials as well as the order of construction in an effort to open the cemetery “without sacrificing the plan for establishing a national cemetery at Fort Bliss of such beauty of layout, construction and general planning that it will be a national shrine.” The efforts resulted in the first burial in the new cemetery on March 7, 1940: Sgt. James F. Featherstone, Quartermaster Corps, in Section E, Grave 8741.³²

Fort Bliss National Cemetery hosted a dedication ceremony ten days later on Sunday, March 17. The event had more than 1,000 attendees. Right Rev. Frederick B. Howden, Episcopal bishop for New Mexico and Southwest Texas, delivered the dedication address. Other speakers followed, including former Mayor Tom Lea, as spokesmen for the veteran organizations. He predicted that the cemetery would earn the moniker “Arlington of the Southwest.” Congressman R.E. Thomason, one of the men responsible for drafting the legislation to create the cemetery, sent his regards from Washington, DC and complimented the veterans of El Paso for their “unselfish and unremitting efforts” to obtain a suitable burial place. The simple ceremony included a performance of the National Anthem by the 7th Cavalry Band, an invocation by a reverend, and a benediction by a rabbi.³³

Cemetery director Anthony J. Nettke continued to improve the cemetery grounds through the early 1940s. Nettke occasionally used POWs imprisoned at Fort Bliss for labor. Italian and German POWs fertilized grassy areas and areas soon to be planted with grass and planted trees and shrubs in 1944. In summer 1945, Nettke supervised German POWs painting the interior of the lodge building, and “an excellent job was performed.”³⁴

Changes and Improvements

Following completion of the construction of the Fort Bliss National Cemetery in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the landscape did not markedly change during the subsequent sixty years. By 1965, the developed areas of the cemetery stretched from Fred Wilson Boulevard to First Drive

³¹ C.C. Reynolds, Col., QMC, to BNC Supt., July 26, 1940, Folder 293.6, BNC Baltimore, Maryland 1940, GCGF 1936-45, Records of the OQMG, RG 92, NACP.

³² Woodring to Thomason, October 4, 1939; “Cemeteries Prepared,” 1947.

³³ “El Paso Joins Army in Dedication of New National Cemetery Here,” *El Paso Times*, March 18, 1940; “Program, Dedication Exercises held at Fort Bliss National Cemetery,” March 17, 1940, Folder 687 Fort Bliss 1940, GCGF 1936-1945, Records of the OQMG, RG 92, NACP.

³⁴ “Fort Bliss National Cemetery Cont’d,” no date.

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South, in addition to the Post Cemetery. By 1988, plans commenced to develop the proposed Center Drive South and Second Drive South in the southern half of the property.³⁵

As with other national cemeteries, Fort Bliss has a number of notable burials, including Medal of Honor recipients and Colonel Bliss, for whom the fort was named. In 1955, the City of New Orleans condemned the decaying Girod Street Cemetery, which included the grave and monument for Colonel William Wallace Smith Bliss, to make way for a new building and highway. The Army took this opportunity to remove Bliss's remains and the large marble grave monument. A cast-iron coffin reportedly perfectly preserved Bliss' remains, which a glass casket window displayed. He was reburied in the Fort Bliss National Cemetery in the grass traffic island on axis with the cemetery entrance. A standard, marble headstone marked the grave.³⁶

By the end of 1968, the cemetery had 3,222 interments, with almost 17 acres undeveloped. In 1984, the VA reduced grave size from 5 feet x10 feet to the smaller 4 feet x 8 feet in an effort to extend the life of national cemeteries; here the change resulted in an additional six years of burials. At the time, Fort Bliss National Cemetery marked interments by laying flat granite markers in Sections C1 and H in the northeast corner of the cemetery rather than upright headstones. The cemetery then interred 700 burials per year, utilizing 40 of its 60 acres.³⁷

During the 1980s and 1990s, Fort Bliss National Cemetery and the VA itself evolved. In 1989, the VA gained cabinet-level status and was renamed the Department of Veterans Affairs (also known by the abbreviation VA); in 1998 the National Cemetery System became the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). By the 1990s, cemetery officials foresaw depletion of burial space, and in 1998, the fort donated 22 acres of land west of the cemetery to NCA to provide more burial area. Even so, in 2000, the cemetery had about 33,000 burials and the director anticipated a potential closing date of 2005, as the cemetery had only about 4,000 gravesites left. The new property became a \$1.3 million expansion project, including new roads, a maintenance building, and a committal shelter. Planning for the new section continued into 2000, with construction beginning soon after. Work finished in the new space in 2003. It is large enough to support 20,000 more burials with an estimated casket and cremation space depletion date of 2025.³⁸

Passage of the *National Cemetery Act of 1973* (Public Law 93-43), signed on June 18, 1973, provided for development of the National Cemetery System. The act transferred eighty-two of the eighty-four national cemeteries to the Veterans Administration (VA). The two exceptions were among the oldest and most recognized properties: Soldiers' Home and Arlington national

³⁵ DOA, "El Paso Presents: Fort Bliss U.S. Army Air Defense Center, Unofficial Guide, 1965" (El Paso, TX: Denton Publications, 1965), 14, Border Heritage Center Collection (BHCC), El Paso Public Library, El Paso, TX; DMA, "Fort Bliss National Cemetery, Pamphlet 40-4M, October 1988" (Washington, DC: VA, 1988).

³⁶ "Body of Col. Bliss Located in New Orleans Cemetery," *El Paso Times*, November 11, 1955; "Fort Bliss National Cemetery," 2008.

³⁷ "Government Cuts Grave Size at Cemetery," *El Paso Times*, March 18, 1984.

³⁸ "Bliss to Add 22 Acres for More Graves," *El Paso Times*, May 27, 2000; "Fort Bliss National Cemetery," ca. 1980.

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cemeteries. The eighty-two cemeteries joined twenty-one that the VA already administered as part of VA medical centers. Also transferred from the Army were thirty-three soldiers' lots, government lots, and Confederate cemeteries that dated to the Civil War. Within the VA, Fort Bliss became part of the National Cemetery System (NCS); the NCS was elevated to become a departmental bureau, the NCA, in 1998.³⁹

NCA initiated a water-conservation facelift at the cemetery that drastically changed the landscape in 2006-2007. The cemetery's grounds featured grass and shrubbery for many years, although the grass struggled to survive in the arid climate. NCA removed most of the grass in the cemetery and installed native decomposed red granite from the nearby Franklin Mountains. Fort Bliss is the first national cemetery to undergo such a landscape conversion, although conservation efforts take place across the national cemetery system.⁴⁰ Plantings of flowers, trees, and shrubs softened the new landscape and created vibrant contrast to the white marble headstones and red gravel. While the dramatic landscape alteration initially generated some erosion and slumping issues, reported widely in the media, the cemetery grounds offer a colorful resting place in harmony with the desert surroundings.⁴¹

Other changes to the cemetery surrounding the xeriscaping project and the early years of the twenty-first century include the addition of two committal shelters (2000 and 2004), a new maintenance facility (2004), and a restroom and visitor information center (2007). The construction of the new visitor information center and adjacent parking lot required the demolition of the service building and restroom building (originally constructed in 1939). In 2007, the superintendent's lodge added an ADA ramp. During the same project, workers enclosed the front porch of the building and replaced the windows. Today, the lodge serves as administrative offices.⁴²

A primary defining characteristic of Fort Bliss National Cemetery is the neat rows of graves themselves. Marked by upright white marble headstones and flat markers aligned in straight rows, these resting places for America's honored dead make this cemetery a site of importance for not only Fort Bliss, El Paso and Texas, but the nation.

Fort Bliss National Cemetery is a well-maintained and somewhat secluded plot of ground despite the proximity of the interstate highway to its northern edge. The stone wall enclosing the cemetery sets it apart from its busy surroundings near the highway, and though some elements of the cemetery have changed, it still retains many important aspects of its Inter-World War era

³⁹ Dean W. Holt, *American Military Cemeteries: A Comprehensive Illustrated Guide to the Hollowed Grounds of the United States, Including Cemeteries Overseas* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1992), 5, 409; Donald E. Johnson, *A Study of the National Cemetery System* (Washington, DC: VA, 1974), 15; VA, *Report on the National Cemetery System*, prepared in response to Public Law 99-576 (Sec. 412), Veterans Benefit Improvement and Health-Care Authorization Act of 1986 (February 1994).

⁴⁰National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona was the other early example.

⁴¹ Van Bibber, October 28, 2008; "Fort Bliss Cemetery Sinking," *El Paso Times*, September 15, 2007; VA, *5 Year Capital Plan, 2005-2010* (Washington, DC: VA, 2005), 94; Associated Press, "Xeriscaping at Fort Bliss Draws Criticism From Families," *Laredo Morning Times*, June 18, 2007.

⁴² Van Bibber, October 28, 2008.

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appearance. In spite of the major xeriscaping project, minor road changes, acreage additions, and the construction of new buildings, structures, and monuments, Fort Bliss National Cemetery retains its integrity. Its overall location remains intact despite acreage increases and changes to its surroundings have been gradual over time. The xeriscaping project successfully sustained the workmanship, design intent, and feeling of the cemetery.

Medal of Honor Recipients (4)⁴³

The Medal of Honor is the highest award that can be bestowed upon Armed Services personnel. The honor recognizes an act of valor performed in action against an enemy force. The headstones of the recipients installed or replaced since 1976 feature the Medal of Honor emblem in gold. Headstones prior to 1976 may list the medal in text only.

Staff Sergeant Ambrosio Guillen, United States Marine Corps. Sergeant Guillen was a platoon sergeant who participated in the defense of an outpost forward of the main line of resistance in Korea. His unit became pinned down during an attack on the outpost. He deliberately exposed himself to gunfire while directing his men into defensive positions. Wounded in battle, he continued to direct his men until they defeated the enemy into withdrawing. He died of his wounds shortly after the battle on July 25, 1953, and is buried in Section E, Grave 9171.

Corporal Benito Martinez, United States Army, killed in action in Korea. Corp. Martinez's position was attacked by the enemy and instead of retreating, he remained at his post for six hours killing several enemy combatants and refusing assistance by telephone, making a last call to let his company know the enemy was converging on his position. His actions allowed the Americans to regroup and mount an organized defense. He died September 6, 1952, and was buried in Section B, Grave 366-A.

Corporal Frank Brattling, Indian Campaigns, Company C, 8th United States Cavalry. Corp. Brattling distinguished himself in service near Fort Selden, NM, July 8–11, 1873. Brattling was part of a 465-mile tracking and engagement of a group of American Indians who had stolen cattle. When within 20 paces of the group, Brattling was shot through the heart. He is recognized in the Memorial section.

Private George Hooker, Indian Campaigns, Company K, 5th United States Cavalry. Private Hooker distinguished himself at Tonto Creek, Ariz., January 22, 1873. He was killed while defending his company's position and cited for gallantry. He is recognized in the Memorial section.

⁴³ This section was compiled with information from George Lang, Raymond Luther Collins, and Gerard White, *Medal of Honor Recipients, 1863-1994: World War II to Somalia* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1995) and the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, "Full Archive," <http://www.cmoHS.org/>, accessed June 1, 2010.

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Other Notable Burials

There are fifty-five Chinese air cadets who perished during training activities at the fort from 1942 to 1947. They are buried in the post section D.

There are twenty-two German, seventeen Italian, and three Austrian World War II POWs, and three Japanese civilian internees. Many of these were reburied at Fort Bliss in the post section in 1946. These individuals died and were originally buried at prisoner-of-war and interment camps in Florence, Arizona (POW Camp Lordsburg), and Roswell, New Mexico.

A German civilian scientist who conducted research at Fort Bliss during World War II is also interred in the Fort Bliss National Cemetery.

A small group of Buffalo Soldiers is buried in Section FF.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscapes Survey # TX-2

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: El Paso Public Library, University of Texas, El Paso, National Archives, Fort Bliss National Cemetery

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

Fort Bliss National Cemetery
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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 82.149

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 31.826010 | Longitude: -106.427284 |
| 2. Latitude: 31.826194 | Longitude: -106.421999 |
| 3. Latitude: 31.819864 | Longitude: -106.421811 |
| 4. Latitude: 31.819808 | Longitude: -106.425437 |
| 5. Latitude: 31.822198 | Longitude: -106.425665 |
| 6. Latitude: 31.822177 | Longitude: -106.427235 |

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Zone: 13N | Easting: 364946 | Northing: 3522039 |
| 2. Zone: 13N | Easting: 365433 | Northing: 3522045 |
| 3. Zone: 13N | Easting: 365436 | Northing: 3521336 |
| 4. Zone: 13N | Easting: 365101 | Northing: 3521341 |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Fred Wilson Avenue bounds the cemetery on the north, while a railroad spur and J.E.B. Stuart Road line the east perimeter. The cemetery's stone wall forms the south boundary, which runs parallel to and approximately 300 feet north of Haan Road. The western boundary follows the western stone wall for the southern portion, but near First Drive South juts westward for approximately 550 feet before heading due north to meet the northern border along Fred Wilson Avenue.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary of this site is consistent with the boundaries of the currently developed landscape of Fort Bliss National Cemetery. That landscape is within the greater legal boundary of Fort Bliss. Burial space and cemetery support buildings and structures compose the acreage within the boundary of Fort Bliss National Cemetery.

Fort Bliss National Cemetery
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kristie L. Person and Staci Richey, Historians
organization: New South Associates, Inc.
street & number: 6150 E Ponce de Leon Avenue
city or town: Stone Mountain state: Georgia zip code: 30083
e-mail: kperson@newsouthassoc.com
telephone: 770-498-4155
date: November 3, 2015

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

Photographs

Photo Log

Name of Property: Fort Bliss National Cemetery
City or Vicinity: Fort Bliss, Vicinity of El Paso
County: El Paso State: Texas
Photographer: Staci Richey
Date Photographed: October 26-29, 2008

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 37. View to southwest, Entrance Gates
- 2 of 37. View to west, Gates and Wall
- 3 of 37. View to south, Entrance Gates
- 4 of 37. View to east, Gates and Wall
- 5 of 37. View to west, Lodge Façade
- 6 of 37. View to east, Lodge Rear Oblique
- 7 of 37. View to northeast, Lodge Rear Oblique
- 8 of 37. View to southwest, Restroom and Visitor Information Center Oblique
- 9 of 37. View to east, Flagpole
- 10 of 37. View to south, Flagpole Base

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- 11 of 37. View to south, Mall Drive West
- 12 of 37. View to southwest, Rostrum Façade
- 13 of 37. View to southwest, Rostrum Façade
- 14 of 37. View to north, Rostrum Rear
- 15 of 37. View to north, From Rostrum
- 16 of 37. View to northwest, Traffic Median
- 17 of 37. View to south, Lieutenant Colonel Bliss Grave
- 18 of 37. View to southeast, Section A
- 19 of 37. View to north, East Drive
- 20 of 37. View to northeast, East Committal Shelter
- 21 of 37. View to south, Wall and Buttress
- 22 of 37. View to southwest, Wall
- 23 of 37. View to northeast, Section K
- 24 of 37. View to southwest, Memorial Section
- 25 of 37. View to southwest, Rear Gate
- 26 of 37. View to northwest, Gate House
- 27 of 37. View to northeast, Gate House
- 28 of 37. View to southwest, Road and Wall
- 29 of 37. View to south, Southern Wall
- 30 of 37. View to northwest, Section J
- 31 of 37. View to south, West Drive
- 32 of 37. View to southwest, Maintenance Building
- 33 of 37. View to east, First Drive South Landscaping
- 34 of 37. View to northwest, Section I
- 35 of 37. View to west, New Maintenance Building
- 36 of 37. View to northwest, New Section
- 37 of 37. View to south, Section FF

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.