



Corpus Christi, Texas



Officers and Their Families

Life Aboard Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, Texas

OFFICERS AND THEIR FAMILIES: LIFE ABOARD NAVAL AIR STATION CORPUS CHRISTI

Final Report

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Prepared by

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Introduction

This historical report is intended to preserve the story of the historic Senior Officers' Quarters at Naval Air Station (NAS) Corpus Christi. A 1994 intensive cultural resources survey (Thomason and Associates 1994a) identified the proposed King Street Historic District and the Ninth Street Historic District as eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The 10 single-family dwellings on King Drive as well as the nearby Officers' Club and Officers' swimming pool facility make up the King Drive Historic District. The Ninth Street Historic District is made up of five single-family dwellings for the Officers assigned to the hospital. Both districts were originally constructed during the World War II period and are eligible for the National Register due to their association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history (Criterion A) (Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000). Maps illustrating the location of the Senior Officers' Quarters at the naval air station appear on pages v, vi, and vii.

This historical report is in partial fulfillment of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Department of the Navy and the Texas Historical Commission regarding the King Drive Historic District and Ninth Street Historic District. The MOA outlined requirements to be met in order to mitigate the impact of a project entailing the demolition of five of the quarters on King Drive and five of the quarters on Ninth Street. The requirements, which were intended to expand upon historical knowledge of life in these quarters, were threefold: (1) to gather historical information through research and the collection of oral histories; (2) to develop interpretative signage; and (3) to develop this historical report. Interpretive signage developed in partial fulfillment of the MOA is presented below.

This historic report is based on documentary research and information collected in oral histories of former residents of the officers' quarters as well as individuals associated with World War II-era Corpus Christi. Historical research and oral history collection and transcription were performed by Nicholas J. Linville, Emily Powlen, Travis Fulk, and Meg Gaillard of Southeastern Archaeological Research, Inc. (SEARCH), under contract with Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Southeast (N69450-08-D-0064, Task Order 0014).

Historic documents, texts, and photographs of relevance to the history of the Senior Officers' Quarters and NAS Corpus Christi were largely gathered through archival and library research. In-person research was conducted at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland, the Naval Air Station Corpus Christi Library, the Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History, the Corpus Christi Public Library, and the Mary and Jeff Bell Library at Texas A&M University, in Corpus Christi, Texas. Research in published and Internet sources, including cultural resources reports, previous oral histories, and digital repositories, was conducted in support of on-site research. The oral histories collected as part of this project also were a bountiful source of information. A list of all sources utilized in the creation of this historical report can be found in the References section.

The oral history collection process followed published standards including the Oral History Guidelines of the Texas Historical Commission. Questions for interviewees were developed in

consultation with and with the approval of both the Navy and the Texas State Historic Preservation Office. The questions intended to gather information about life and family in the Senior Officers' Quarters at NAS Corpus Christi during World War II and later periods. Potential interviewees were included, but were not limited to, the Senior Officers who served at NAS Corpus Christi, members of their families, and Navy and civilian workers who were historically associated with the base. Generally speaking, individuals with firsthand knowledge of World War II-era NAS Corpus Christi were sought.

Interviewees were identified via several methods. Historical research resulted in many candidates. The suggestions of local historians (see Acknowledgments section) were useful in identifying interviewees, as were NAVFAC Southeast personnel and NAS Corpus Christi personnel. Above all, the interviewees themselves were especially helpful in identifying additional interviewees. The oral history interviews were conducted in person and via telephone. The recordings were then transcribed and edited. Electronic copies of the oral history interview transcripts are available by contacting either the NAVFAC Southeast Historic Preservation Officer at Building 903 Box 30A, NAS Jacksonville, Jacksonville, FL 32212, or the Texas Historical Commission, Division of Architecture, Project Review, at 512.463.6094 and History Programs Division at 512.463.5853.

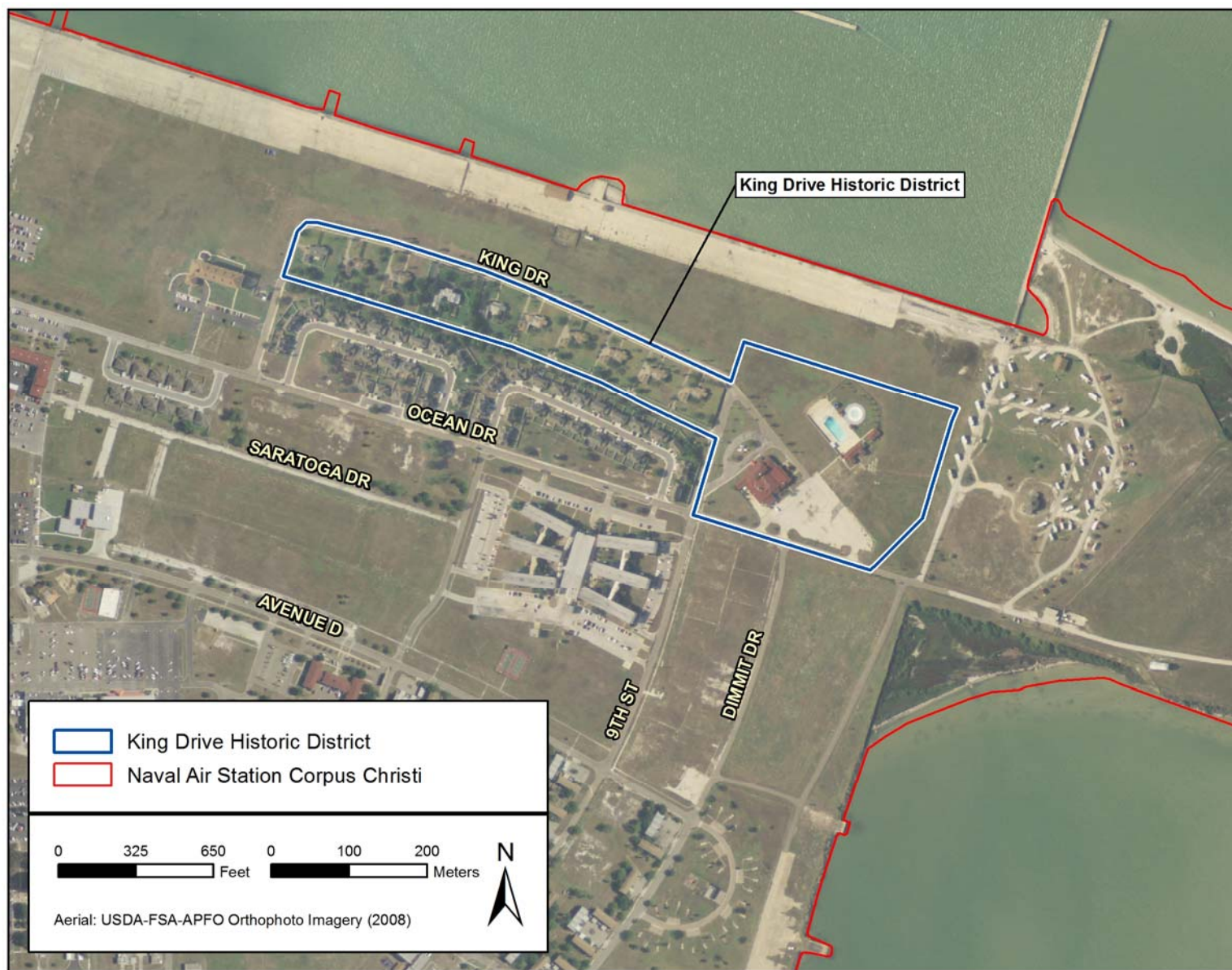


Visitors to NAS Corpus Christi view a patrol boat, Type Y (PBY), 19 August 1941.

Source: National Archives and Records Administration.



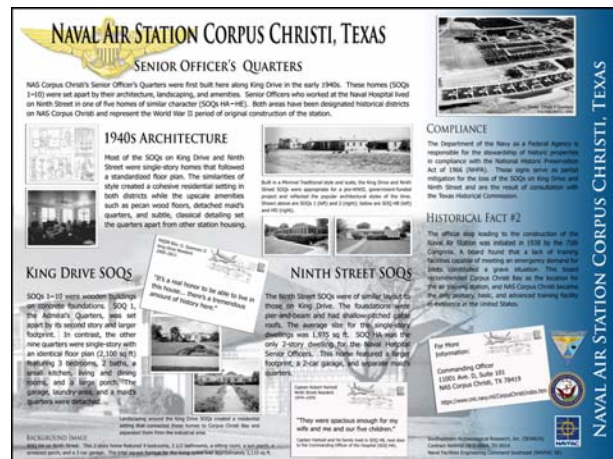
Aerial photograph of NAS Corpus Christi identifying present-day Senior Officers' Quarters.



Aerial photograph of the King Drive Historic District at NAS Corpus Christi.



Aerial photograph of the Ninth Street Historic District at NAS Corpus Christi.



Historical signage developed in partial fulfillment of the MOA.



Historical signage (mosaic) developed in partial fulfillment of the MOA.

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Appendix A: NAS Corpus Christi Oral History and Signage Interview Questions

On the cover: King Drive, Senior Officers' Quarters 9. Source: Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002.



Torpedo Bomber Douglas (TBD) Devastators fly in formation, 1941.
Source: National Naval Aviation Museum.

The Navy Comes to Corpus Christi

At the height of World War II in 1945, Naval Air Station (NAS) Corpus Christi was the largest naval air training base in the world. Skirting the shore of Corpus Christi Bay, the expansive base stretched across 2,500 acres. Nearly 1,000 structures graced the landscape, from barracks to hangars to administrative buildings. With underground utilities, miles of paved roads, and just over 30,000 personnel, the air station was brimming with activity, a veritable city in its own right that had emerged in less than five years. The constant coming and going of Navy airplanes, present since the beginning of the war, suggested that the base would remain vitally important in the decades to come. Texas proved itself a good home for the Navy because of the deep-seated patriotism present in the local culture. “I used to tell people that I’m stationed in Texas,” recalled Tom Wimberly, a Navy Captain who was stationed at Corpus Christi in the 1950s and again in the 1970s, “and they don’t do anything in Texas without saying a prayer and playing the national anthem and pledging allegiance to the flag.”

The idea of a naval air station on the Corpus Christi Bay was born in the 1930s during the Great Depression and in the context of the United States’ growing concern with the war in Europe. In May 1938, the United States Congress authorized the appointment of the Hepburn Board to investigate and report on the need for additional naval stations in the United States and its territories and possessions. Led by Rear Admiral Arthur Hepburn, the board conducted an



Tractors leveling sand dunes at Flour Bluff, 1940. Source: National Naval Aviation Museum.

extensive survey and submitted a report to Congress in December 1938. Among the recommendations was the establishment of an air training station on Corpus Christi Bay. With only 11 naval air stations in the country at the time, the Navy viewed the proposed site with great interest. Mostly undeveloped, close to the sea, and having favorable weather for flying, Flour Bluff, as the site was locally known, made such an impact that Congress provided the necessary funding in 1939 for the construction of the air station (Del Mar College 1995; Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000; NAS Corpus Christi 1941).

In the late 1930s, the Flour Bluff area was considerably rural but by no means bereft of life. High sand dunes along the bay attracted occasional beachgoers. Nearby were cottages and fishing piers. As in many places across Texas, cattle ranged upon the grassy and mesquite-covered acreage farther from shore. Several general stores, a few small farms, a nightclub, and a total of 40 families occupied the land that the Navy eyed for the air station. Gradually, the Navy acquired the Flour Bluff real estate, and by July 1940, the Navy had relocated the resident families and was ready to build (Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000; NAS Corpus Christi 1941).

In its aggressive push to convert the Flour Bluff landscape into a world-class naval air training station, the Navy needed a heavy investment of money, labor, machinery, material, and time. Of these, time was running short as Germany and Japan had made bold new strides, pushing the United States closer to war. In June 1940, construction at Flour Bluff commenced with an initial



Fence line at the construction site of NAS Corpus Christi, July 1940.
Source: National Naval Aviation Museum.

budget of \$50 million. As the year progressed, a construction site of Texas-sized proportions took over Flour Bluff as cranes, concrete mixers, tractors, bulldozers, steamrollers, and a day-and-night construction crew of nearly 10,000 set to work on the Navy's mission. Along with the Bureau of Yards and Docks and Navy-contracted construction companies, the City of Corpus Christi and Nueces County played an important role in the development of the base through the improvement of roads leading to the base and the importation of water before the station had installed water lines. By the end of December 1940, the base was 50 percent completed. Airplane hangars had taken the place of sand dunes, four runways replaced pasture for cattle, paved roads replaced dirt trails, and quay walls and bulkheads were now present along the bay where the natural shoreline had existed (Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000; NAS Corpus Christi 1941).

The US Navy commissioned the base on 14 March 1941, as Naval Air Advanced Training Center Corpus Christi. Later in the war, the present name, Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, was adopted. Captain Alva D. Barnhard was appointed commander. The first air cadets arrived in March, although airplanes did not arrive until May. At this time, the 2,050-acre base was only 70 percent completed but still ahead of schedule. Another \$50 million would be spent to expand the base before the war ended. Early in 1941, hydraulic dredging operations expanded the acreage from 2,050 acres to 2,500 acres (Del Mar College 1995; Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000; NAS Corpus Christi 1941, 1943).

On 1 November 1941, the first cadets received their wings, and several weeks later, the United States entered World War II after the 7 December attack on Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war by Nazi Germany. Gladys Renfro, who later was stationed in the region with her husband, recalled the attack as "just a complete shock to us that anybody would do that to our country." Robert Hoke Hartzell, later a Captain in the Navy and a resident of the Ninth Street SOQs, remembered the news of the Pearl Harbor attack as he experienced it in Royersford, Pennsylvania. "A friend of mine and I were walking down the street there in Royersford on that Sunday morning, I guess it was getting close to noon time, and we saw someone drive past and they were yelling out the window 'The Japs attacked Pearl Harbor.'"

The Pearl Harbor attack made NAS Corpus Christi busier than ever. Beginning on 18 December 1941, NAS Corpus Christi was a supply base for patrol boats, minesweepers, and other craft that participated in shore patrol, in addition to a primary training base for aviators. Also, on 21 December 1941, the base was designated a training ground for civilian enlistees. Furthermore, Corpus Christi provided training courses for aviators from Allied nations in Central and South America (Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000; NAS Corpus Christi 1943; *Naval Aviation News* 1944).

Needless to say, the population of Corpus Christi swelled as workers and military personnel arrived, many of whom were lonely and far from home. At various locales around town and on the base, so-called "tea dances" were held where young females from the area could mingle with men from the base on Sunday afternoons. Some local families invited the men into their homes for a break from the base routine. Mary Helen Paul, a resident of Corpus Christi at the time,



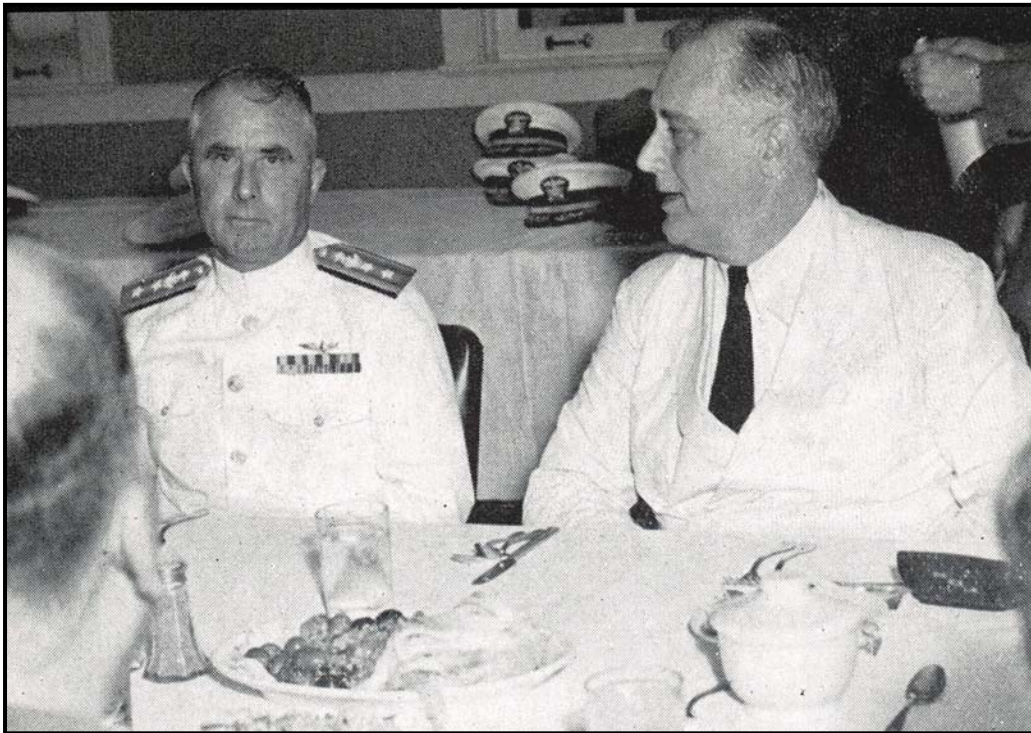
Naval Air Training Center Corpus Christi, August 1941.
Source: National Archives and Records Administration.

recalled that there was “hardly a Sunday” that her family did not have cadets as visitors to their home.

The purview of NAS Corpus Christi reached far beyond Flour Bluff. As headquarters for the Chief of Naval Air Intermediate Training Command (NATC), the base oversaw activities at NATC Pensacola (now NAS Pensacola) and NAS Atlanta. NATC Corpus Christi also included a handful of outlying fields that were spread out in the surrounding countryside of southeastern Texas—Rodd, Cabaniss, Cuddihy, Kingsville, Waldron, and Chase Fields—as well as 25 smaller landing fields. Located at Corpus Christi but separate from NATC were the US Naval Hospital, Naval Air Training Center Ward Island, and the US Naval Section Base (Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000; NAS Corpus Christi 1941, 1943; *Naval Aviation News* 1944).

Over 35,000 aviators received their wings at NAS Corpus Christi during World War II (NAS Corpus Christi 2012). The list of servicemen who trained at the base includes several notable individuals, some of whom were famous at the time of their service and others who went on to become recognizable figures in American history. They include game-show host Bob Barker, future President George H. W. Bush, astronaut John Glenn, movie stars Charles “Buddy Rogers” and Tyrone Power, and baseball player Ted Williams (Del Mar College 1995).

In an event that is remembered to this day, President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited the base on 21 April 1943. By this date, the United States was deep into campaigns against the Axis powers across the Pacific and the Atlantic, and many Navy pilots involved in the fighting had passed through Corpus Christi. As the President toured the impressive grounds of the base in the back of



President Roosevelt dines with the Commandant of the US Naval Air Training Center, Rear Admiral Alfred E. Montgomery. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.

a black convertible, he witnessed the embodiment of a world-class naval air training station that was, only a few years prior, merely a vision of military planners. This unique position in the realm of aviation was further solidified as the war progressed, even as the number of naval air stations in the nation tripled. “Despite the fact that the training center is just going into its fourth year, Corpus Christi presents a wholesome, well-established appearance of solidarity and efficiency,” a Navy publication reported in June 1944. “Its wide, clean, paved streets, huge hangars, well-kept buildings and barracks attest that here the Navy has a job to do—and is doing it” (Coletta and Bauer 1985; Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000; NAS Corpus Christi 1941; *Naval Aviation News* 1944:28).

After World War II, the US Navy proceeded to shut down many of its naval air stations. NAS Corpus Christi managed to survive this period of base closure by scaling back training programs and reducing the number of active personnel and civilian employees. Texas Senator Tom Connally also prevented closure by persuading members of Congress to block a vote to shut down the naval air station. NAS Corpus Christi, supporters argued, was unique for its superior facilities and resources, operational history, and the many millions that the Navy had invested in its development (Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000).

The Korean War (1950-1953), similar to the previous war, signaled an increase in training at NAS Corpus Christi. Cabaniss, Kingsville, and Chase Fields, outlying fields that had been closed in the post-World War II drawdown, were reopened to facilitate training. A new wave of funding supported NAS Corpus Christi. Also in this period, the Blue Angels, a jet aircraft demonstration team, made their home at NAS Corpus Christi (Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000).

NAS Corpus Christi felt the impact of the end of the Korean War in 1953. In 1955, the Blue Angels were reassigned from Corpus Christi to NAS Pensacola. Cabaniss Field, where jet training had taken place through the war, was closed. Seaplane training, underway since World War II at NAS Corpus Christi, also was terminated. This period of Navy reorganization also impacted civilian employees at NAS Corpus Christi as several thousand employees lost their jobs in 1958 when the Navy shut down the overhaul and repair facility at the base; however, within several years, the base was again hiring civilians in large numbers to support the functioning of the Army Aeronautical Depot Maintenance Center (ARADMAC), which repaired and rehailed helicopters (Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000).

During the Vietnam War period (1964-1975), the sporadic and limited nature of air opposition to US forces minimized the Navy’s reliance on jets. In fact, the Navy flight training program did not grow through the 1960s. Nevertheless, the latter half of the period brought significant change to the Navy’s aviation program, and NAS Corpus Christi again rose to prominence. In 1970, the various flight training commands of the Navy were combined into a single command headquartered at NAS Corpus Christi. The new command was called the Chief of Naval Air Training Command (CNATRA) and replaced the NAATC. CNATRA consisted of seven training air wings, or subcommands, spread across the Southeast from Corpus Christi to Glynco, Georgia. Over the years the number of wing commands has fluctuated (Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000).

Hurricane Celia in 1971 destroyed and damaged numerous buildings on base. The Navy was successful in garnering \$35 million for repairs, funding that was also used to pay for renovations, maintenance, and new construction across the base for several years to come. One of the most notable new constructions of the period was a new hospital to replace the 1941 structure that was completed during the buildup for World War II. The new facility, dubbed the Naval Regional Medical Center, assisted in serving the growing patient load from the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The \$10 million brick structure opened in December 1972. An equal amount of funding went toward new construction related to ARADMAC operations (Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000).

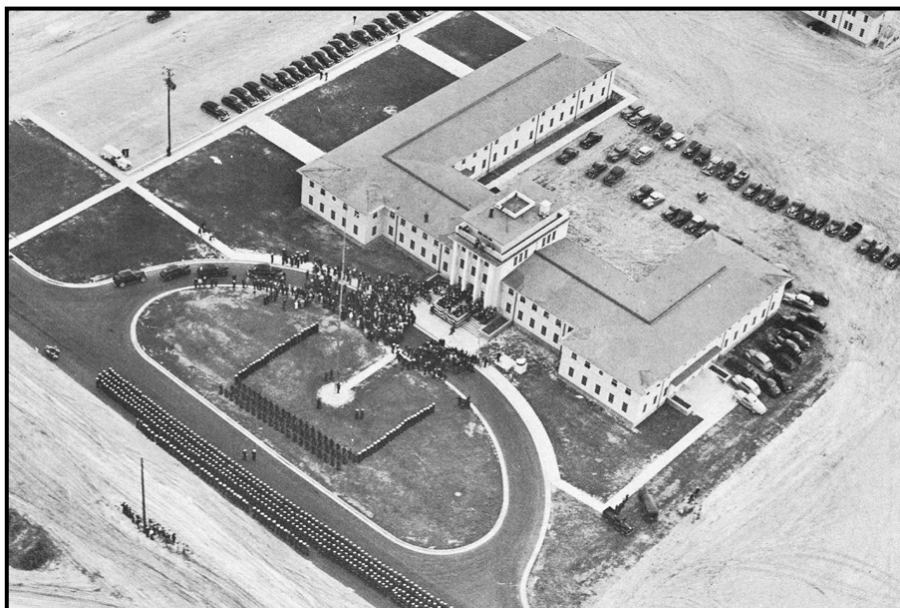
The end of the Vietnam War in 1975 signaled a push to reduce the expenses of the military. The Navy ventured to close NAS Corpus Christi for several years following the war. Local opposition was strong and carried all the way to Washington, DC, ultimately reaching then President Jimmy Carter, who advised a study of the potential impact of the base's closure. The 1978 study, which reported that 35 percent of Corpus Christi residents would lose their jobs and tens of millions of dollars in employee payroll would be lost if the base were closed, influenced Carter's decision to keep NAS Corpus Christi open. Interest in maintaining the base remained steady during the 1980s, when training increased along with defense budgets, combat readiness, and confidence in naval aviation. This increased training paid off during the Persian Gulf War of the early 1990s, a war in which naval power was fundamental to American victory (Hardy, Heck, Moore, and Myers, Inc. 2000).

The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks had significant repercussions at NAS Corpus Christi. "I was base Commander when that happened and life changed," recalled Captain Rick Marcantonio. "The offices then had TVs in them so you could pick up the news and see if you were on the news, and the [Executive Officer in the next office] said, 'Hey, turn your TV on,' and 'some knucklehead just flew into one of the towers in New York.' And just as I turned it on, the second airplane flew in, and that's when we knew it was not an accident and that's when I ordered the base closed." In the aftermath of the attacks, the base upgraded security measures, sent home all nonessential employees, grounded all training aircraft, and searched cars (*The Corpus Christi Caller-Times* 2001b). Revenue for the Officers' Club, golf course, marine, bowling alley, Commissary, and Exchange decreased as ingress and egress became more exclusive. The tight restrictions that were instituted in this period largely remain in the present. Nevertheless, NAS Corpus Christi and south Texas have managed to maintain a close economic and social connection.

The importance of NAS Corpus Christi cannot be understated in regard to the history of the US Navy's presence in Texas throughout the twentieth century. Since its inception over 60 years ago, NAS Corpus Christi has trained more than 100,000 naval aviators. This figure represents well over half of all Navy aviators. Together with the Corpus Christi Army Depot (CCAD), the Chief of Naval Air Training Command is the largest employer in the Corpus Christi area and one of the largest in the region of South Texas.



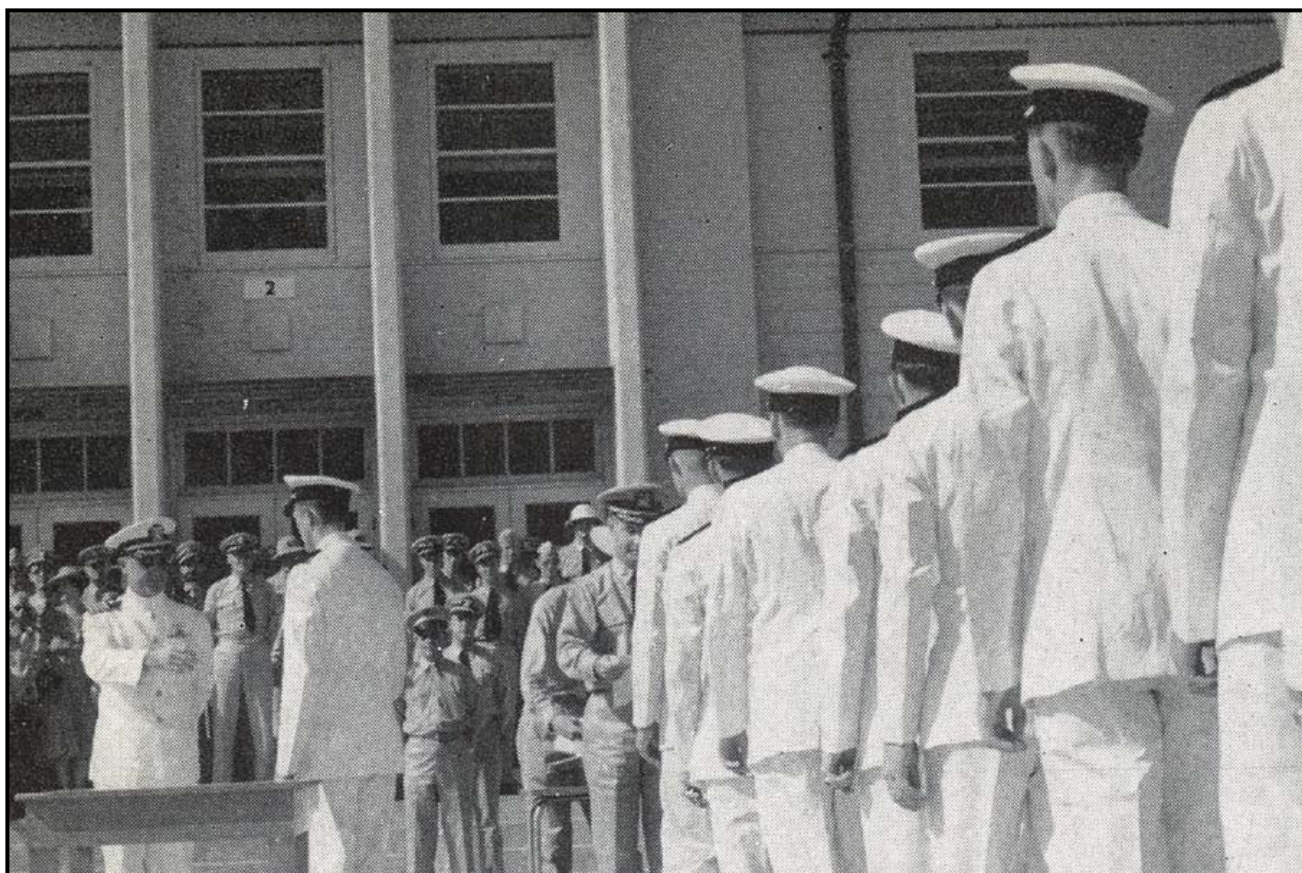
Aviation cadets at NAS Corpus Christi receive instructions, 1944. Source: *Naval Aviation News* 1944.



Commissioning ceremony, March 1941. Source: National Naval Aviation Museum.



Parade on review, 1941. Source: National Naval Aviation Museum.



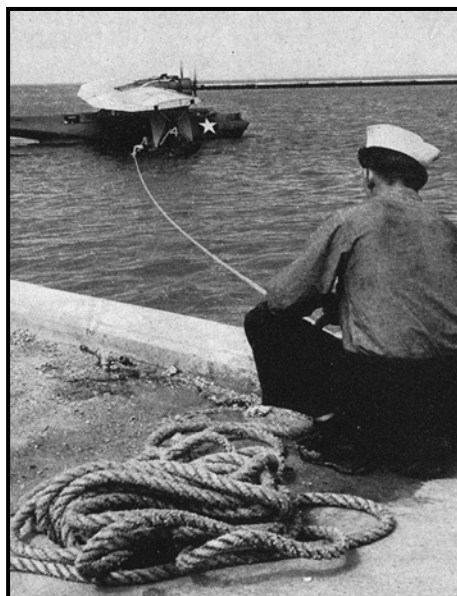
Cadet graduation. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



Building 1, ca. 1943, which now houses the Chief of Naval Air Training Command (CNATRA).
Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



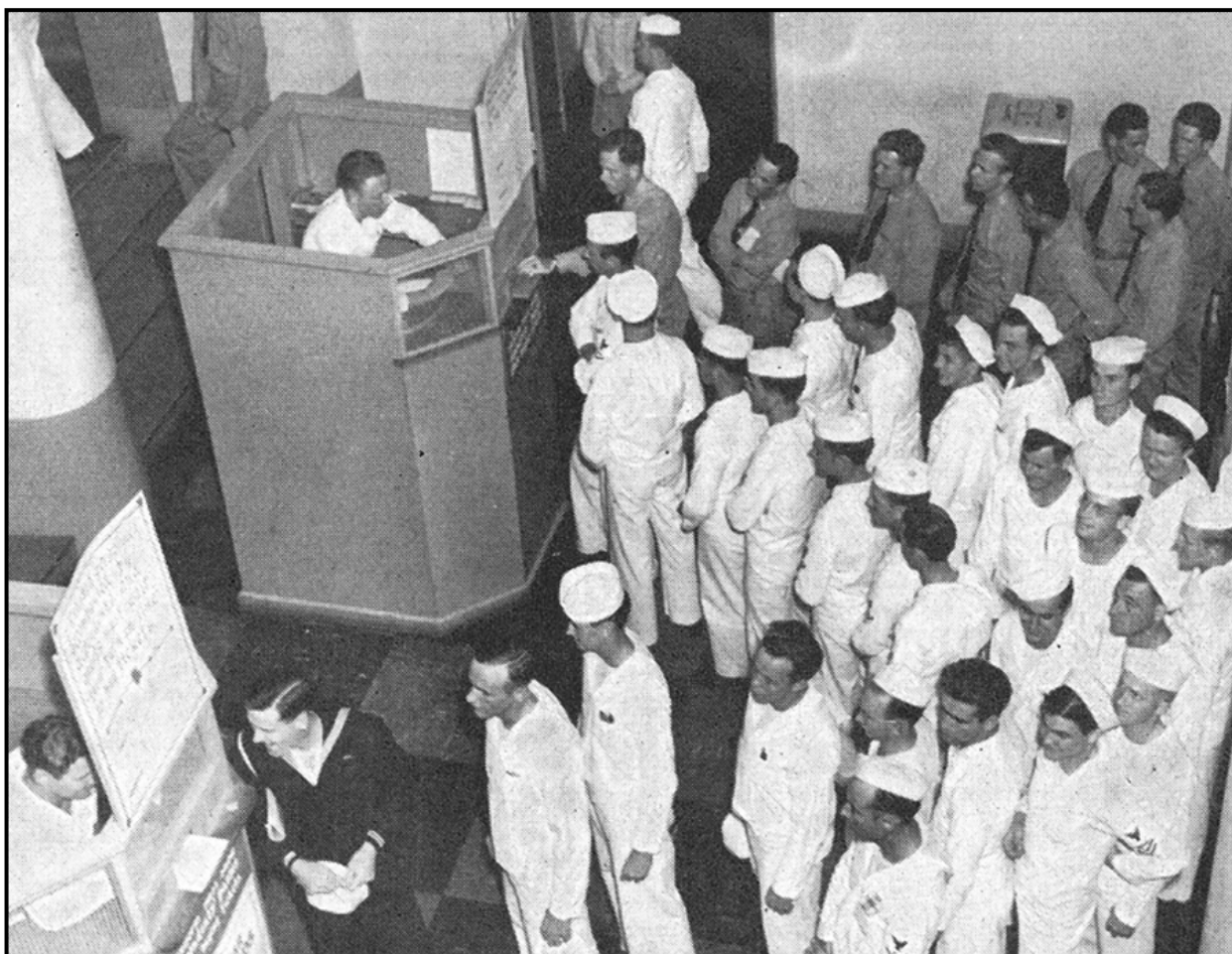
Aircraft recognition course at NAS Corpus Christi, ca. 1943.
Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



Sailor tendering a PBV at the waterfront at NAS Corpus Christi, ca. 1943. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



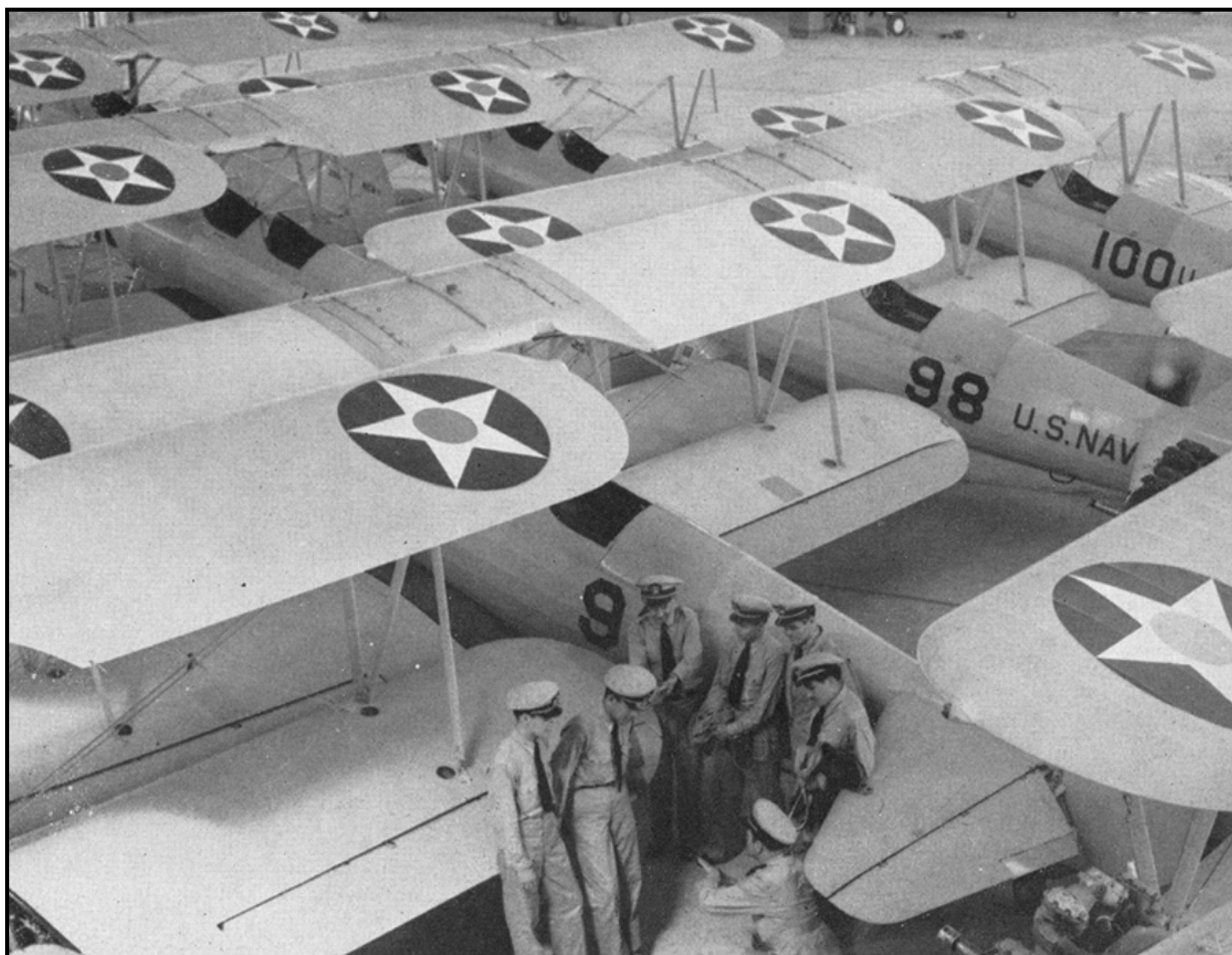
Scene from the mess hall at NAS Corpus Christi, ca. 1943.
Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



Sailors in line for theater tickets at NAS Corpus Christi, ca. 1943.
Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



Corpsmen, nurses, and other hospital personnel at the first hospital at NAS Corpus Christi, ca. 1943.
Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



Hangar at NAS Corpus Christi, ca. 1943. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.

Being a Senior Officer

In the present, a naval Senior Officer is one who has attained the rank of Commander, Captain, Rear Admiral (lower half), Rear Admiral (upper half), Vice Admiral, Admiral, or Fleet Admiral. This hierarchy (in ascending order) has changed very little since World War II. The rank of Fleet Admiral came about via an act of Congress in 1944. Four outstanding World War II naval officers attained this rank: William D. Leahy (15 December 1944), Ernest J. King (17 December 1944), Chester W. Nimitz (19 December 1944), and William F. Halsey (11 December 1945). Since this period, the rank of Fleet Admiral has not been assigned, although naval officer handbooks still consider it the highest rank. An additional change in the hierarchy of naval Senior Officers since World War II was the replacement of the rank of Commodore with that of Rear Admiral (lower half) in 1985 (Connell and Mack 2004).

The operational responsibilities of each rank in the present time are essentially the same as in the latter half of the twentieth century. A Commander commands a frigate, destroyer, submarine, aviation squadron, or small shore activity and may also serve as the executive officer of a larger vessel or on the staff of a higher command. Captains usually command cruisers or larger ships, ballistic-missile submarines, or a squadron of attack submarines. In naval aviation, Captains generally command aircraft carriers, air-capable amphibious assault ships, carrier air wings, functional air wings, or special-mission air wings or air groups. They also serve in senior staff positions or have shore-based command assignments at installations including naval stations, naval air stations, naval air facilities, naval support activities, logistics groups, specialized centers or schools, test wings, or training air wings. The different levels of Admiral are determined by the number of stars, which correlates directly with experience and leadership qualities.

Similar to the broader trend in the Navy, the Senior Officer hierarchy at NAS Corpus Christi has remained steady since World War II. During the war, a Rear Admiral was the chief of all naval air training at the station, a Captain served as the Commanding Officer of the station, and a Commander served as the Executive Officer of the station (NAS Corpus Christi 1943). The same rank holds these positions today. Elsewhere in the hierarchy of the naval air station, changes have sometimes occurred. In the mid-1970s, a Captain served as Public Works Officer, whereas in the present, the same position is held by a Commander or Lieutenant Commander.

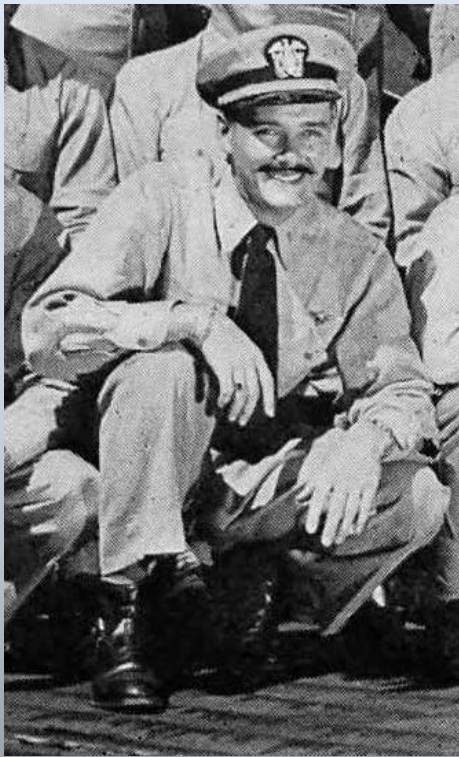
To reach the status of Senior Officer, one usually started at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland; Officer Training School; or Naval Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) at a university. In addition to getting an education, the cadet learned naval history, regulations, and leadership. There have been other paths to officer commissions, too. During World War II, the Aviation Midshipman Programs accepted high school graduates. Sometimes, an individual might transfer from another branch of the military or rise through the ranks of the Navy. The Nuclear Propulsion Officer Candidate Program (NUTOC) also produces naval officers (Mack and Paulsen 1991).

Once commissioned, a naval officer had to assemble an impressive career in order to reach the rank of Senior Officer. This path included, for many, advanced professional qualifications at

special Navy schools, education at senior war colleges and other postgraduate education, command of a ship or ships, command of a squadron or air wing, and service on staff positions, both on- and offshore. Through each step, the individual must demonstrate well-developed leadership skills, dedication, and knowledge. After one earned the rank of Senior Officer, the process of training and learning continued as the identification and resolution of challenges facing the Navy became a daily occupation (Mack and Paulsen 1991).

In addition to having demonstrated superior academic ability and technical qualifications, Senior Officers were in such a position because they acquired a thorough understanding of military courtesy, honors, and ceremonies. Courtesy mattered, from saluting, to utilizing the chain of

command, to the meticulous nature by which honors, official visits, and calls must be performed, to the display of flags and pennants, to ceremonies. Proper military behavior has always been an important component of the Navy officer's service reputation (Mack and Paulsen 1991).



"I have nothing but gratitude to the country and the Navy in particular, for all the experiences and adventures that I've had and the things they've done for my family over the years as well," recalled Captain Robert Hoke Hartzell, a former resident of the Ninth Street SOQs.

Photo: Captain Robert Hoke Hartzell aboard the USS *Bonhomme Richard* in 1952. Courtesy of US Navy 1952.

Navy social customs extended to the wives of the Senior Officers. An etiquette guide for wives was published in 1959 (Newport Fleet Officers' Wives 1959) and stated that they "should try (1) to put the junior officers' wives at ease on any social occasion; (2) to set a friendly tone for their group; (3) to accept and return official calls; (4) to feel a responsibility to newcomers in the area and to brides, welcoming them with a telephone call, and helping them to feel at home; and (5) to remember that they are often 'pipelines of information' regarding activities in the area, and must be sure that their group is informed, and is represented when it is part of a larger organization." Another such publication added, "You will find that the Navy expects as much from you in the way of integrity and dignity as it does from your husband" (Johnson 1968). Mary Helen Paul, whose husband, Paul Moore Paul, served as a Captain in the Navy, recalled the sense of responsibility she felt as the wife of a Senior Officer. "I believe that the military is just like business as anything else," she said. "The wife has got to be social, do nice things for the Admiral and his wife [or] whoever the command person is. I think it's just like business."

Since tours of duty were no longer than two years, a Senior Officer was never in one duty station for too long. Home was wherever one was assigned. Despite

the challenges and sacrifices, some who have lived the life of a Senior Officer express few regrets about their lives with the Navy. “I have nothing but gratitude to the country and the Navy in particular, for all the experiences and adventures that I’ve had and the things they’ve done for my family over the years as well,” remarked Robert Hoke Hartzell, a retired Captain who served in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, among other tours. Retired Captain Rick Marcantonio, former Commander at NAS Corpus Christi, echoed these sentiments. “I think it certainly has molded who I am and how I treat people.” For him, the Navy instilled strong values and a unique camaraderie. “You learn very quickly that if you treat people right, they’ll treat you right, and the Navy is such a close-knit organization that it proves it time and time again. There’s hardly a single city I can visit that I don’t know somebody in that I can pick up the phone and say, hey, do you want to go out to dinner? And, you know, you will have somebody who will want to jump at it because you had that kind of rapport with each other.” Even Paul Moore Paul, a 94-year-old retired Captain and World War II veteran who survived a kamikaze attack on his ship, the USS *Sangamon*, in 1945, cherished his career. “I never regretted having been in the Navy, and so it was all a plus.”



Lieutenant Commander G. L. Richard (left) and Lieutenant W. R. Malasovic (right).
Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



NAS Corpus Christi's Commanding Officer, Captain Richard A. Sampson (left), and Chief of Naval Air Training, Rear Admiral Billy D. Holder (right), 1971. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1971.



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1943 advertisement. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



Excerpt from 1991 handbook for officers illustrating when to salute.
Source: Mack and Paulsen 1991.

Senior Officers' Quarters at NAS Corpus Christi

A Senior Officer's service typically was split between sea and shore duty, each lasting anywhere from two to four years (Connell and Mack 2004). Shore duty, though not without its own challenges and heavy responsibilities, often was considered a welcome break from the discomforts of life at sea. The tight confines of a ship afforded the Senior Officer at sea few, if any, places away from the pressure of his or her duties; therefore, many a Senior Officer welcomed the opportunity to live in a house with family. At NAS Corpus Christi, these houses were the 10 Senior Officers' Quarters on King Drive, the five on Ninth Street, and two others, one on Rabaul Street and the other on Avenue D. Even as the Senior Officers' Quarters at NAS Corpus Christi aged and became somewhat outdated over the years, the occupants nevertheless expressed delight in the comfort they provided. "That was your kind of getaway place," recalled Captain Rick Marcantonio.

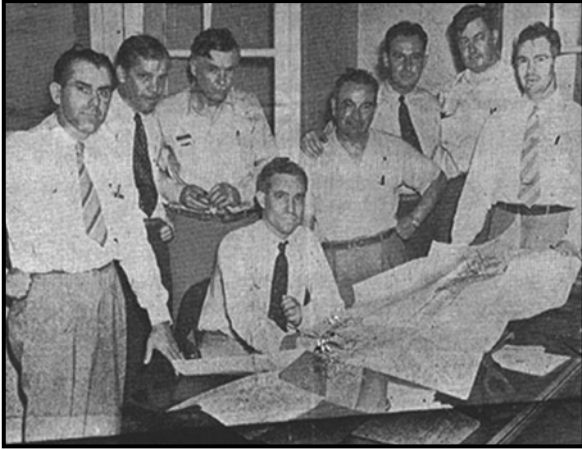
This concept of providing an autonomous space for Senior Officers that was secluded from the hubbub of the base dated to the earliest Navy bases in the United States and was upheld at NAS Corpus Christi when Navy planners laid out the base in the late 1930s. Aside from the palliative effect of separate housing for Senior Officers, the housing setup served a practical function, too. Unlike many Junior Officers and others who required housing on base, Senior Officers generally were older and had families. Therefore, standard quarters were not feasible simply for size reasons. Their high ranking also brought a level of prestige that was to be reflected in the size of their homes.

Due to the greater responsibilities on the job and the proven aptitude of these individuals, the Navy felt that they and their families deserved more commodious quarters. Moreover, the social obligations of Senior Officers, and particularly Admirals, were greater than those of lower-ranking individuals. Their position as leaders meant that they hosted dinners, calls, and visits on a fairly regular basis. The Admiral hosted a yearly "At Homes" party where young cadets and other important newcomers were welcomed to his home and garden. Such events could not be accommodated in standard housing. Given the fact that their occupants were high-ranking men and women of influence on base, the Senior Officers' Quarters on King Drive and Ninth Street at NAS Corpus Christi were "a point of great interest all the time," in the words of



The Senior Officers' Quarters on King Drive and Ninth Street at NAS Corpus Christi were "a point of great interest all the time," in the words of former Public Works Officer Robert Shackelford, who oversaw their upkeep for a period in the 1970s.

Photo: Robert H. Shackelford, ca. 1970.
Courtesy of Robert H. Shackelford.



Commander L. N. Moeller, seated, confers with the private contractors who built NAS Corpus Christi, 1940. Source: *The Corpus Christi Caller-Times* 1940.

former Public Works Officer Robert Shackelford, who oversaw their upkeep for a period in the 1970s.

The proximity of the Senior Officers' homes to one another promoted camaraderie and a sense of community as reflected in the following quotes from former occupants. According to Rick Marcantonio, "It was nice to have people your age group, having kids the same age group, people with the same responsibility level near you, that you could commiserate with and kind of not be interrupted by everybody else. That was very nice." Tom Ford, a Captain who lived in King Drive quarters in the mid-1990s, remembered, "We had parties at the Admiral's house. We'd all go down to the Admiral's house

and drink and have fun. . . . There was a lot of friendship." He added that the Officers' Quarters was "a very friendly atmosphere. . . . You'd go over [to your neighbor's house] and say 'I need to borrow a cup of sugar,' 'I need to borrow a cup of scotch,' or 'I need to borrow a beer.'" The link between one house and the next went beyond merely living in the same neighborhood, explained Ford:

It's different in the Navy. You move into a neighborhood and you may already know some of those people from before. . . . So you have instant knowledge, you work with them, so . . . you have a quicker relationship, you have much more in common, you see them on a daily basis, you work with them, and you have more in common to talk about, more in common to do with them.

The increasing presence of women in the armed forces was reflected in the occupants of the SOQs at NAS Corpus Christi, particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, when several high-ranking female Senior Officers arrived to the base. Captain Nancy Lescavage was assigned as Commanding Officer of Naval Hospital Corpus Christi from 1997 to 1999 (*The Corpus Christi Caller-Times* 1998). During her tenure, she occupied Quarters H-A on Ninth Street. Captain Nancy "Nan" Honey took command of Naval Station (NS) Ingleside in 1997, serving until 2001 (*The Corpus Christi Caller-Times* 2001a). Like all previous commanders of NS Ingleside, Honey was provided housing at NAS Corpus Christi. She occupied quarters on Ninth Street. In 2000, a local newspaper reporter asked Honey why she chose such an untraditional line of work, and particularly in the mid-1970s, when she received her commission. "I didn't want a traditional job," Honey replied. "I was interested in traveling. I was interested in the opportunities to do something different from time to time" (*The Corpus Christi Caller-Times* 2000:2).

In 2002, NAS Corpus Christi received its first female Commanding Officer. Captain Paula Hinger had entered the Navy in 1978, and earned her wings at NAS Corpus Christi in 1981, one



The future site of the King Drive Senior Officers' Quarters under development in May 1941. The foundations of the SOQs are visible at right. Photographer facing northwest. Source: National Archives and Records Administration.

of four women who earned their wings that year. Hinger served as Commanding Officer from 2002 to 2005. Hinger lived in the quarters on Ninth Street (*The Corpus Christi Caller-Times* 2002).

King Drive

When the Navy laid out the plan for the Senior Officers' Quarters at NAS Corpus Christi in 1941, the goal was to create a private and exclusive space that felt more like a contemporary suburban neighborhood than a military base. Large lots with manicured lawns, sidewalks, landscaping, and pleasant views were the goal. The King Drive quarters were the first to be constructed and have since been reserved for the CNATRA, the Base Commander, and CNATRA staff. These structures were situated along the northeastern corner of the base along Corpus Christi Bay. Before construction could commence, the area had to be stabilized through dredging. A seawall was established and fill placed behind it to create the land upon which the quarters were constructed (*Naval Aviation News* 1944). Robert and Company, an architectural firm out of Atlanta, designed the houses on King Drive while local contractors Brown, Bellows and Columbia constructed the homes, which were completed in July and August 1941, several months after the base was commissioned. Early plans named the road Joyland Drive, but soon the name was changed to King Drive, presumably in honor of the King family, who once grazed cattle in the area and whose descendant, US Representative Richard Kleberg, was influential in the establishment of the base. Originally labeled alphabetically (A through J), the King Drive quarters ultimately were distinguished by number (1 through 10).

King Drive, a National Register of Historic Places-eligible historic district consisting of 10 houses, appears much as it did during World War II. Robert and Company produced one floor plan for all of the nine one-story quarters. The only notable variation from one to the next was subtle differences in the facades. Like many other World War II-era structures on base, the officers' quarters on King Drive were somewhat lacking in details. Nevertheless, their architectural style was representative of the times. The King Drive quarters were built in the Minimal Traditional style, a style popular across the United States, which typically incorporated, among other features, little to no ornamentation, only one or two stories, a detached garage, short eaves, and built-in cabinetry (Thomason and Associates 1994b). Indeed, one of the only enhanced features of the nine houses was their pecan wood floors. The nine quarters had very standard floor plans. The main entry led directly into the living room and featured a central brick fireplace. Two doorways led from the living room into the rear sunroom. A dining room, breakfast nook, pantry, and narrow kitchen adjoined the living room on the west side. A long corridor extending from the living room led to three bedrooms and two bathrooms. The double garage, maid quarters, and laundry area were attached to the house by a breezeway.

The occupants of King Drive appreciated the appeal that the original designers of the quarters intended. Tom Wimberly, who lived in the quarters in the 1970s as a Captain, admired the bayfront setting, recalling that "you could stand at your kitchen sink and look and see the bay down to downtown." Though rather plain in style, certain elements of the architecture of the quarters were fondly remembered, particularly the pecan wood floors. "It was interesting to see, you know. The outside of the houses at Corpus were nothing to brag about. . . . It was very, very

plain, and it just didn't look like a whole heck of a lot, but the inside, when you looked at the hardwood pecan floors, was just gorgeous," recalled Rick Marcantonio. "I had never seen pecan wood look so nice as in those houses."

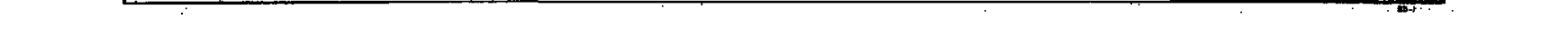
The focal point of the 10 houses on King Drive was the two-story house, constructed in July 1941, that was designated for the highest-ranking officer on the base, usually an Admiral or Rear Admiral. Though this house, known as Quarters 1 and sometimes as the Admiral's House, was fairly modest in style, its architectural signature was Classical Revival. Multistory, classical detailing, columns, a center entry hall, and a rectangular shape characterized this style that was popular until the mid-twentieth century (Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002; Thomason and Associates 1994b). Though renovated several times, the home retains the look and feel it had at the time of its 1941 completion. "It's a real honor to be able to live in this house," the current occupant, Rear Admiral William G. Sizemore, remarked. "It's got a tremendous amount of history associated with it."

Both the King Drive quarters and those on Ninth Street featured a detached garage that, in the 1940s and 1950s, contained a small living quarters for a maid or a steward. Maids and stewards were common in officer housing in the US military since at least the nineteenth century. In the Navy, stewards often were assigned to Senior Officers, whether on sea or shore duty. The custom became less common by the 1960s, but up to that time, stewards served as the personal valets of the Senior Officers. They shined shoes, cleaned rooms, washed laundry, and performed an assortment of other tasks for their superiors (Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002; Latty 2004).



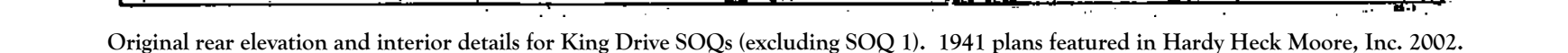
"It's a real honor to be able to live in this house," remarked Rear Admiral William G. Sizemore, the current occupant of SOQ 1. "It's got a tremendous amount of history associated with it."

Photo: William G. Sizemore, ca. 2011.
Courtesy of NAS Corpus Christi.











King Drive Senior Officers' Quarters in August 1941. Photographer facing south.
Source: National Archives and Records Administration.



Commander Erl C. B. Gould, Executive Officer of the air station, in the yard of his quarters on King Drive, 1943. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



King Drive Senior Officers' Quarters, February 1943. Photographer facing northeast.
Source: National Archives and Records Administration.



Quarters 1 (left) and Quarters 2, King Drive, 1943.
Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



RADM Charles P. Mason in his yard at the Admiral's House, 1944.
Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1944.



Senior Officers' Quarters 1, also known as the Admiral's House, on King Drive,
August 1941. Source: National Archives and Records Administration.



Senior Officers' Quarters 2, King Drive.
Source: Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002.



Senior Officers' Quarters 2, King Drive.
Source: Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002.



The much-admired pecan wood floors of the King Drive SOQs.
Photograph of SOQ 7. Source: Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002.



The Officers' Club, located at the east end of King Drive, as it appeared
in 1942. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1942.

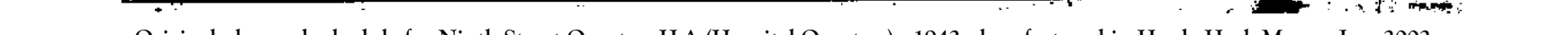
Ninth Street

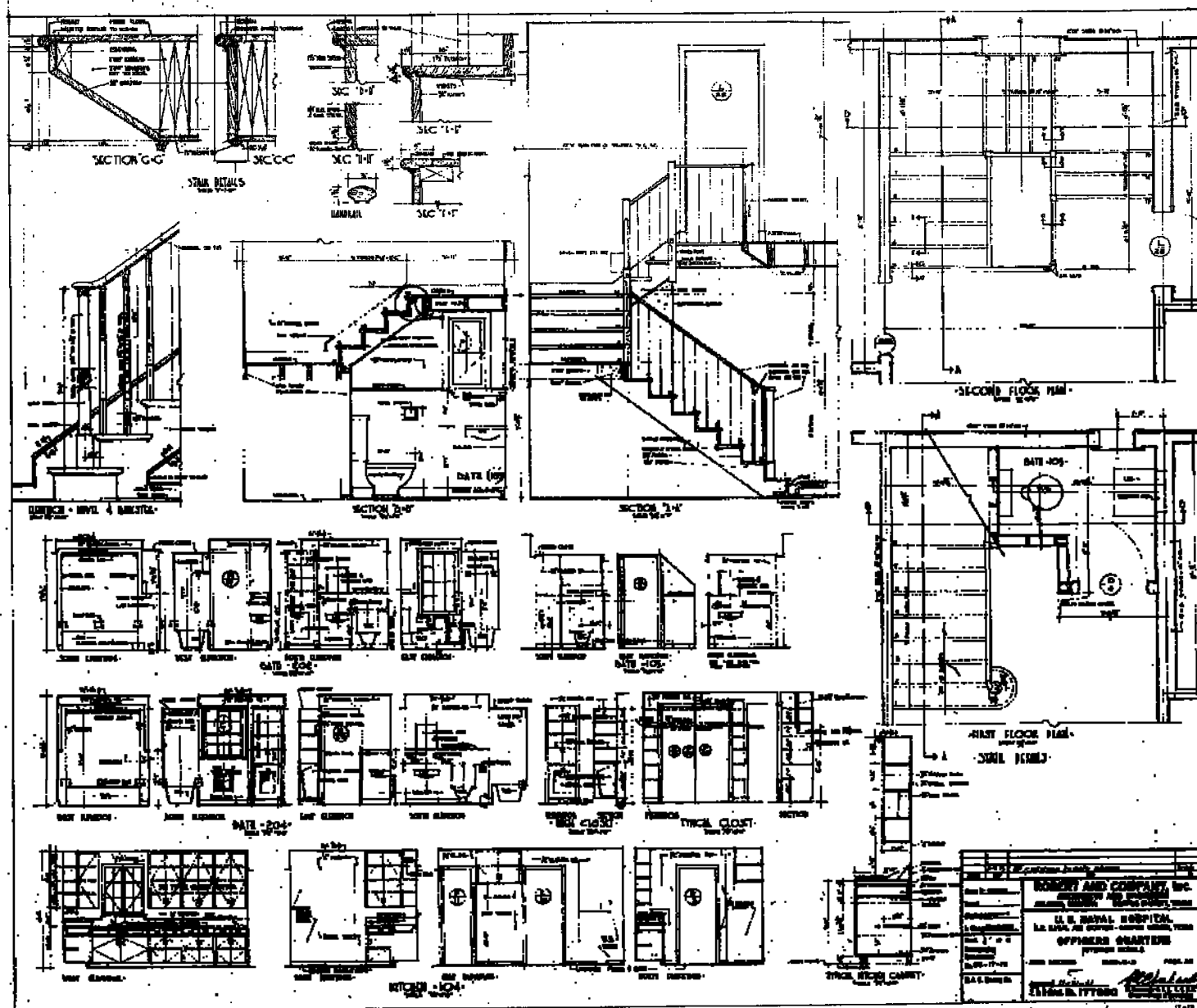
Aside from naval air training, NAS Corpus Christi held an important position in the Navy as the location of a US Naval Hospital that served the Gulf region. The completion of this 500-bed facility in 1941, along with the arrival of high-ranking medical personnel, necessitated the construction of appropriate quarters. Robert and Company, the same firm that designed the King Drive quarters in 1941, approached the design of the Ninth Street quarters with a vision similar to the earlier project. Five houses were planned and designated H-A, H-B, H-C, H-D, and H-E (“H” standing for Hospital). Brown, Bellows and Columbia completed the construction in 1942. The Ninth Street SOQs were reserved for the Commanding Officer of the hospital and Senior Officers assigned to the hospital, with few exceptions. Sometimes the hospital quarters were provided to CNATRA staff, and during the years that NS Ingleside was operational (1988-2010), the Commanding Officer of that base resided in the Ninth Street SOQs, although they were still referred to as “Hospital Quarters.” Today, they are a National Register of Historic Places-eligible historic district.

The largest of the five Senior Officer houses on Ninth Street was Quarters H-A. Similar to Quarters 1 on King Drive, Quarters H-A was a two-story house that featured Colonial Revival influences. H-A was home to the Commanding Officer of the Naval Hospital, which was within walking distance. Following the pattern at King Drive, the houses adjacent to H-A were built in Minimal Traditional style and displayed one-story designs. Their floor plans were basically identical, differing only in their facades (Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002; Thomason and Associates 1994b). “I thought it was pretty nice, really,” recalled Robert Hoke Hartzell, a retired Captain and former resident of the Hospital Quarters. “They were old houses. Probably dated back to, you know, the 1940s, but they were, you know, kept in pretty good shape and they were spacious enough for my wife and I and our five children, so we enjoyed our stay there.”



Morning Colors at NAS Corpus Christi, 11 July 1941.
Source: National Archives and Records Administration.

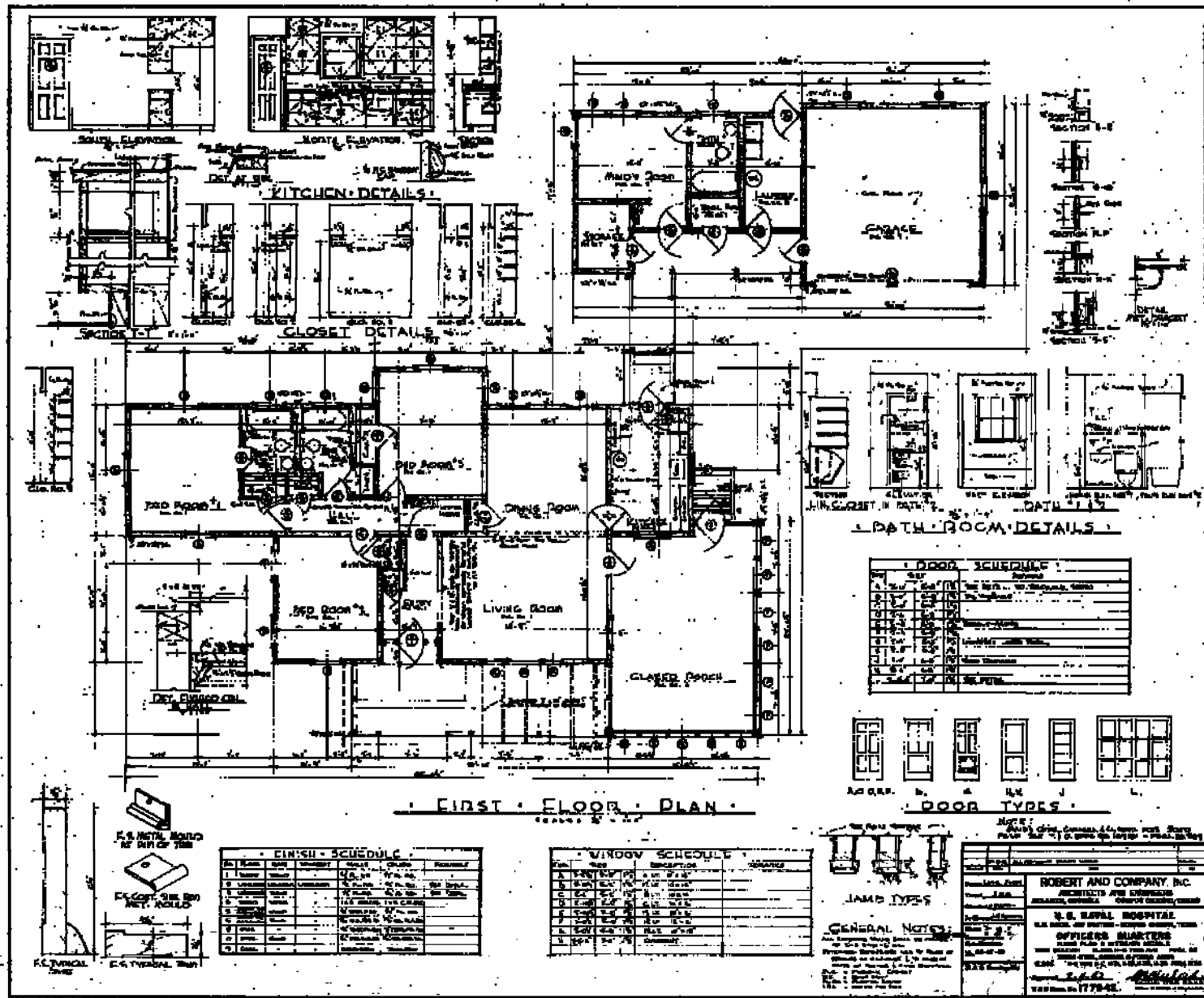




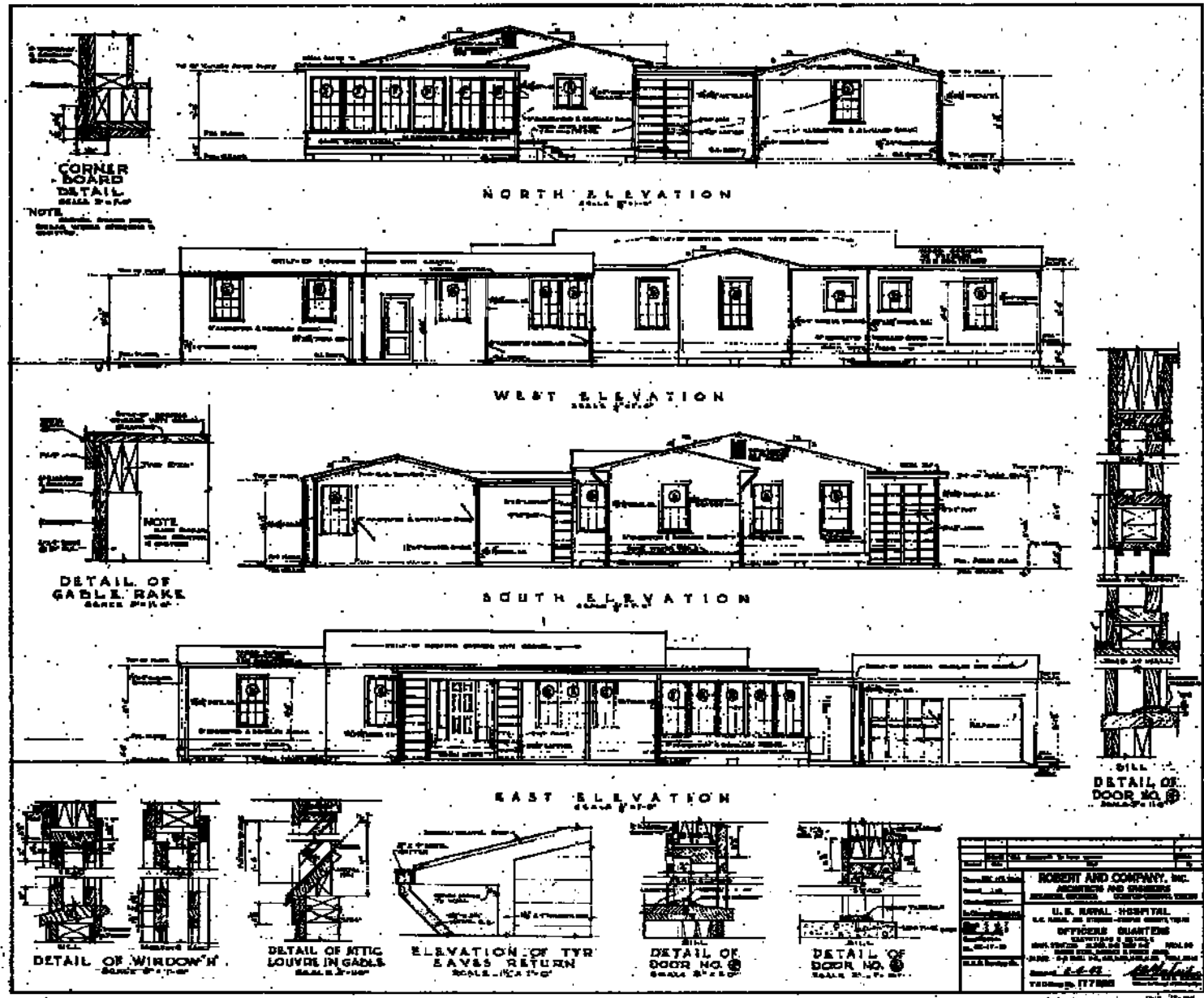
Original interior details for Ninth Street Quarters H-A (Hospital Quarters). 1942 plans featured in Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002.



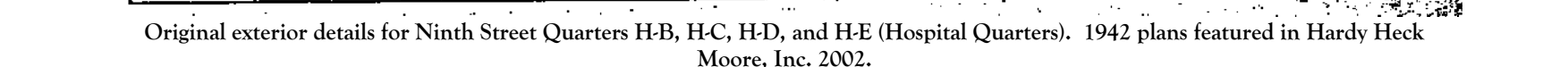




Original floor plan and interior details for Ninth Street Quarters H-B, H-C, H-D, and H-E (Hospital Quarters). 1942 plans featured in Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002.



Original interior details for Ninth Street Quarters H-B, H-C, H-D, and H-E (Hospital Quarters). 1942 plans featured in Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002.





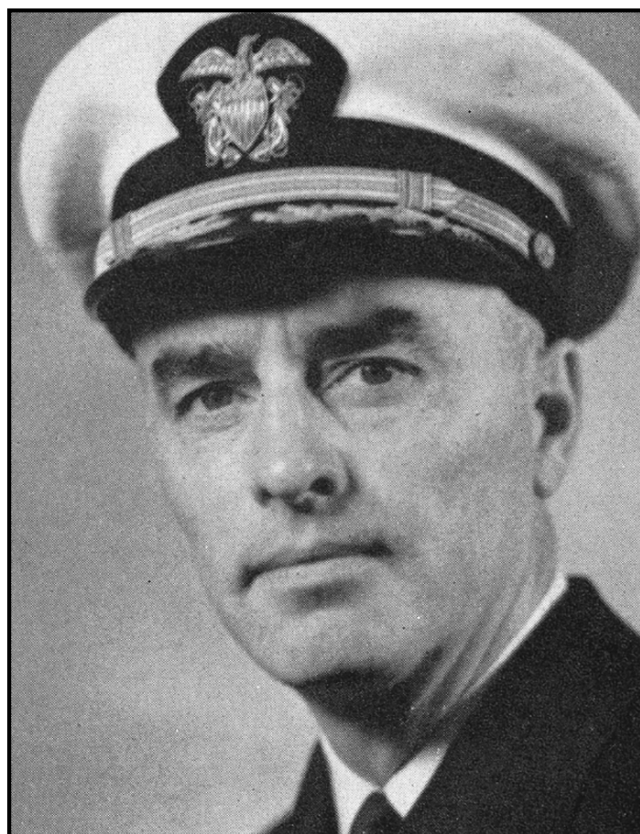
Quarters H-A on Ninth Street, the Hospital Executive Officer's home, nearing completion in May 1942. Source: National Archives and Records Administration.



Quarters H-A on Ninth Street, 2002. Source: Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002.



Captain R. R. Gasser, Commanding Officer of the US Naval Hospital and former resident of the Hospital Quarters, 1943. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



Captain A. C. Smith, Senior Medical Officer of the US Naval Hospital, 1943. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1943.



Quarters H-D on Ninth Street. Source: Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002.



Quarters H-B on Ninth Street. Source: Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002.

Rabaul Street and Avenue D

Two additional Senior Officers' Quarters are located away from Ninth Street and King Drive: SOQ 11 and SOQ 12. SOQ 11 is located near the North Gate of the base at the end of Rabaul Street. SOQ 11 is known by several names, including the Charles Raymond House, Facility K, and the CCAD House. This two-story, wood and brick, vernacular construction was completed by local resident Charles Raymond in 1936 before the base was developed. After the base purchased

the house from Raymond, it served as another home for Senior Officers assigned to the base; however, in more recent decades, SOQ 11 has served as the home for the Commanding Officer of the CCAD. The home has been extensively altered in terms of architecture and therefore does not retain its historical integrity for eligibility in the National Register of Historic Places (Thomas and Associates 1994b).

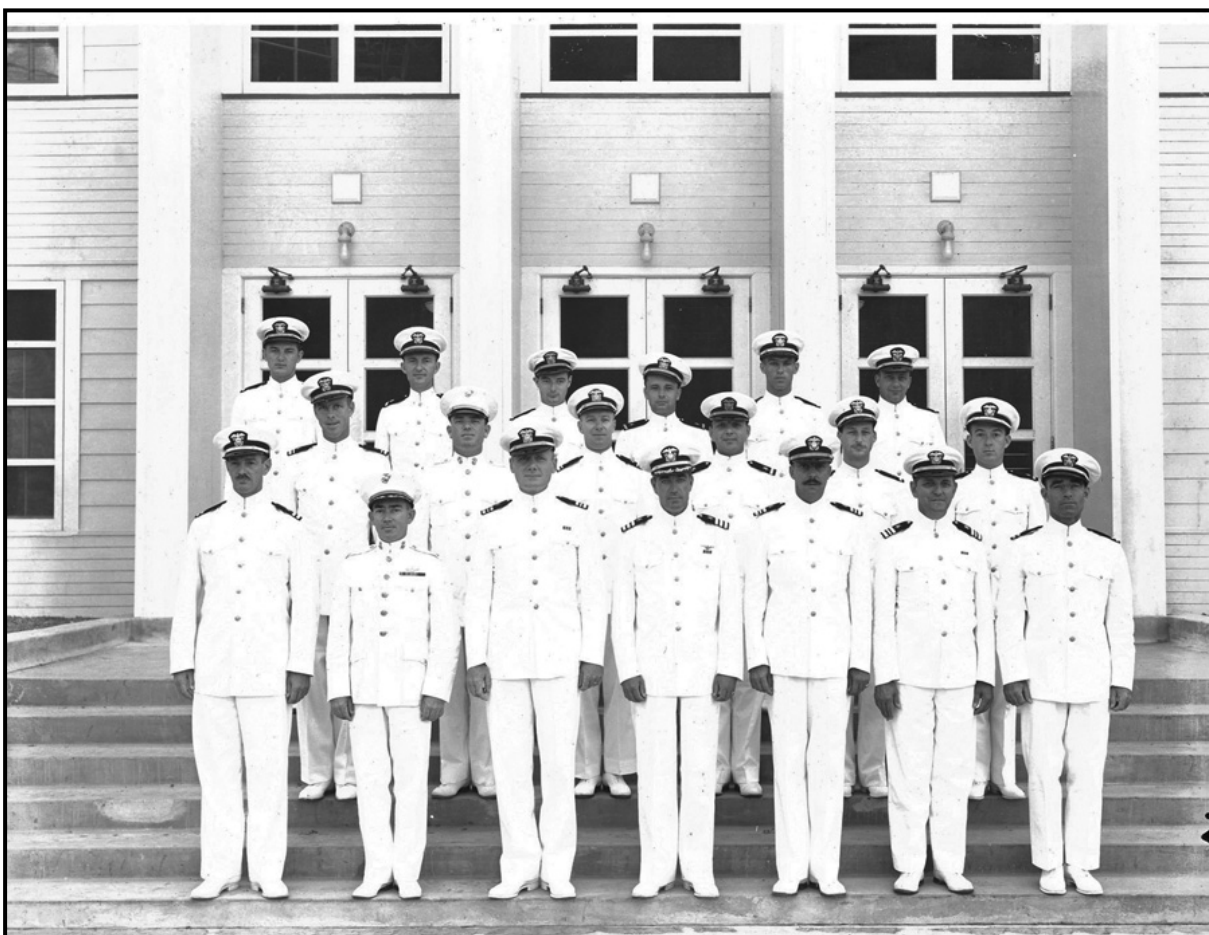


SOQ 11, the Charles Raymond House, on Rabaul Street, ca. 1944. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1944.



SOQ 12, the Lewis Powell House (also known as the Rock House). Source: Hardy Heck Moore, Inc. 2002.

SOQ 12 is located on Avenue D, and is alternatively known as Quarters L, the Rock House, and the Ernest Powell House. Powell built the house in 1936 when the Flour Bluff area was a popular vacation spot. The Tudor Revival-style bungalow was one of the only stone structures in Flour Bluff. The Navy utilized the structure for a Senior Officers' Quarters when base construction began in 1940. According to interviewee Tom Ford, the Rock House later served as the home assigned to CCAD officers. SOQ 12 is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing element in the Lexington Boulevard Historic District. The Lexington Boulevard Historic District was not a focus of this study.



Naval Air Training Command Staff, 1941. Source: National Naval Aviation Museum.

Family Life in the Senior Officers' Quarters

Despite the unique demands of sea and shore duty, Navy Senior Officers strove to maintain the basic family life of the average civilian. The quarters at NAS Corpus Christi, as well as other areas of the base, were built with this desire in mind. Living on base had definite benefits. "You were close to the commissary and the PX and you could really get by without even coming into town," recalled Gay Wimberly, wife of retired Captain Tom Wimberly. Adding to the convenience, as well as the sense of community on base, were recreational amenities including a swimming pool, a theater, a fitness center, a bowling alley, and an Officers' Club. The "O Club," as it was called, was a popular place within walking distance of both the King Drive quarters and the Ninth Street quarters. Tom Ford recalled that there "was always something going on over there," whether a dinner or a winging ceremony for new cadets.

Corpus Christi Bay itself also provided a recreation outlet. Several former occupants of the Senior Officers' Quarters recalled fishing and other water sports as a favorite pastime. "It was nice to go . . . out in front of your house and go to the seawall and go fishing," remembered Rick Marcantonio in reference to his home on King Drive. For Captain Tom Wimberly, acquiring a ski boat was an early priority when he arrived at NAS Corpus Christi. "We bought a boat right away and we started going waterskiing. We had first water-skied out there opposite the [King Drive] quarters, and so on, until we were skiing out there one day and we went up close to the shore and a fisherman held up his catch and it was a little hammerhead," recalled Wimberly with laughter. "The kids didn't want to ski out there anymore."



Captain H. E. Born inspects Petty Officers at Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, 1959. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1959.



“We had two sets of bunk beds,” recalled James Flatley III, who lived in one of the King Drive quarters as a boy in 1947. He later became an Admiral in the Navy. “The four of us [children] were in the same room when we were in quarters. Wasn’t a problem. I got the top bunk.”

Photo: Jim H. Flatley III. Courtesy of US Navy.

Senior Officers’ wives took part in social organizations such as the Officers Wives Club (Johnson 1968). Gay Wimberly, a former resident of King Drive, recalled such a club at NAS Corpus Christi in the 1970s. The club, which met on a monthly basis, existed primarily for socializing and community service projects. She also recalled that the group buried a time capsule near the Chief of Naval Air Training Command (CNATRA) Building.

Holidays were kept in much the same manner as other families in the United States. “Well, in those days, we always bought or had our own Christmas tree, and we’d put it up and celebrate Christmas like American families do, you know,” remembered Tom Wimberly. On Halloween, trick-or-treaters went door to door. Living on a military base does not appear to have separated the Senior Officers and their families from American cultural traditions.

The base chapels also were important to the social life of those who lived onboard NAS Corpus Christi. Since its inception, the naval air station has had a chapel. The original chapel hosted both Protestant and Catholic services. In the present, the air station has separate chapels for Protestants and Catholics.

Children who lived in the Senior Officers’ Quarters on base were no different than children elsewhere, with the exception that many of their activities took place with

the Navy base as a backdrop. In the early years of the quarters, as in more recent times, children attended local public or private schools as there was no school on base. Their home in the quarters was sometimes cramped. “We had two sets of bunk beds,” recalled James Flatley III, who lived in one of the King Drive quarters as a boy in 1947. His father, Captain James H. Flatley, was an accomplished World War II aviator and director of naval air training at Corpus Christi. The Flatleys had four boys. “The four of us [children] were in the same room when we were in quarters. Wasn’t a problem. I got the top bunk.” The junior Flatley also watched the aircraft overhead with amazement and inspiration. In his adult years, he became a naval aviator and rose to the rank of Admiral.

For James Flatley, the base was a vast playground when he was not busy delivering newspapers or participating in Boy Scouts. “Yeah, we did things kids do,” he stated when asked about what it was like to be a boy on the base. “There were a lot of vacant barracks around there because the war had wound down, and there was more capacity than there was a need for. So, we used to run through these haunted barracks.” He continued:

One of them had a Coke machine in it. The old fashioned, big red thing. Nickel. You'd get a Coke. And somebody cut the corner off the coin box . . . and they kept filling the Coke machine up. And I'd go over there and buy a dozen Cokes and get my nickel back every time. I'd carry them home. So, boy things you know.

Flatley was not the only young person creating occasional mischief on base. "We were sitting in the quarters one night and I heard this big crashing, booming sound and rushed out into the backyard," Tom Wimberly related. A palm tree had fallen. Investigating more closely, Wimberly noticed that "it didn't just break and fall, it had been sawed. Somebody had cut it down and we didn't know who had done it." Later, they learned that another boy on base, the son of the Chaplain, had cut it down as a prank.

Children also enjoyed the wonders of living on Corpus Christi Bay. Flatley and other children explored sea life around one of the base piers. "They had a big light on it," he remembered, "and the shrimp would swarm and the fish would swarm, and we'd go down there and catch either shrimp or fish, depending on how it was going that evening."

Along with the family of the Senior Officer, there often were other occupants of the households on King Drive and Ninth Street, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, when maids and stewards were employed in the homes. The Flatleys employed an African American steward during their time at the base in the 1940s. He lived in a small apartment that was attached to their garage. What life may have been like for this individual, whose name has been forgotten, and the many others like him who served in the quarters is unknown.

Many Senior Officers who lived in the quarters noted that the sense of family often permeated beyond the walls of his or her respective quarters. "We'd set up and, you know, we'd have dinner at one house one night and everybody would just show up," Rick Marcantonio recalled. Bring whatever you had." Tom Ford also experienced this closeness during his time at NAS Corpus Christi. "So, everybody was close, camaraderie, every Friday night everybody would go to the club, you know, we'd have parties at people's houses. Saturday, people would get up and a lot of people would go to the gym and we'd do things together," he said. "We'd go take picnics together." The bonds they created often held strong beyond retirement from the Navy.



"It was nice to have people your age group, having kids the same age group, people with the same responsibility level near you, that you could commiserate with and kind of not be interrupted by everybody else," remembered Captain Rick Marcantonio about life in the SOQs.

**Photo: Rick Marcantonio, 1989.
Courtesy of US Navy 1989.**



Captain Paul J. Knapp and family, 1961. Source:
The Corpus Christi Caller-Times 1961.



Mrs. John Perry, wife of the Admiral, hosts a gathering in the
Admiral's Quarters, 1950. Source: *The Corpus Christi Caller-*
Times 1950.



The family of Senior Medical Officer T. D. Boaz in their quarters on Ninth Street. Source: *The Corpus Christi Caller-Times* 1947.



The family of Captain James H. Flatley in their quarters on King Drive. Interviewee James H. Flatley III is present at the far right. Source: *The Corpus Christi Caller-Times* 1947.



The family of Commander Albert H. Wilson, administrative aide to the Naval Air Training Command, in their quarters on King Drive. Source: *The Corpus Christi Caller-Times* 1947.



Living room of unidentified Senior Officers' Quarters on King Drive, dated November 1954. Source: Seabee Museum Archives.



Bathroom and dining room of unidentified Senior Officers' Quarters on King Drive, dated November 1954. Source: Seabee Museum Archives.

A Testament to History

“There’s tremendous history here,” noted the current Chief of Naval Air Training, Rear Admiral William G. Sizemore, with regard to NAS Corpus Christi. Whether cadet, commandant, engineer, welder, or secretary, thousands of individuals have passed through the base, which still maintains a position of prestige among US military installations. The naval air station was a chapter in their lives and bound them together. The Senior Officers who served at the base and their families represent a piece of this larger picture. Their words are a testament to the story of the base and, more broadly, the story of the US Navy in Texas in the mid-twentieth century.

Former residents of the Senior Officers’ Quarters fondly remember the social gatherings, from formal affairs such as the At Home parties to simpler occasions such as trick-or-treating on Halloween. Even the children who once lived on the base, now with children and grandchildren of their own, recall the detail of their assigned home’s kitchen, the curtains in the living room, or the bunk beds they shared with siblings. They remember fishing in the bay, and Sunday dinners at the Officers’ Club. It is not just the history of these structures that is important, but the fact that the families living in them created a home here, if for only a brief time. Through their tenure at NAS Corpus Christi, the Senior Officers and their families gave the structures meaning and significance, while creating a place on the landscape of NAS Corpus Christi that is remembered. Having stood for nearly three quarters of the century, the Senior Officers’ Quarters on King Drive and Ninth Street were the setting for many memories. While the passage of time has taxed the physical integrity of the quarters and rendered many of them obsolete, their story thrives in the recollections of those who called them home.



“I used to tell people that I’m stationed in Texas,” recalled Captain Tom Wimberly, who was stationed at Corpus Christi in the 1950s and again in the 1970s, “and they don’t do anything in Texas without saying a prayer and playing the national anthem and pledging allegiance to the flag.”

Photo: Tom Wimberly, ca. 1970.
Courtesy of Tom Wimberly.



Lineman guiding in flight trainers, ca. 1942. Source: National Naval Aviation Museum.

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Capt. Tom Ford, USN, Retired, Corpus Christi, Texas

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Cecelia Venables, Special Collections, Mary and Jeff Bell Library at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi, Texas

Gay Wimberly, Corpus Christi, Texas

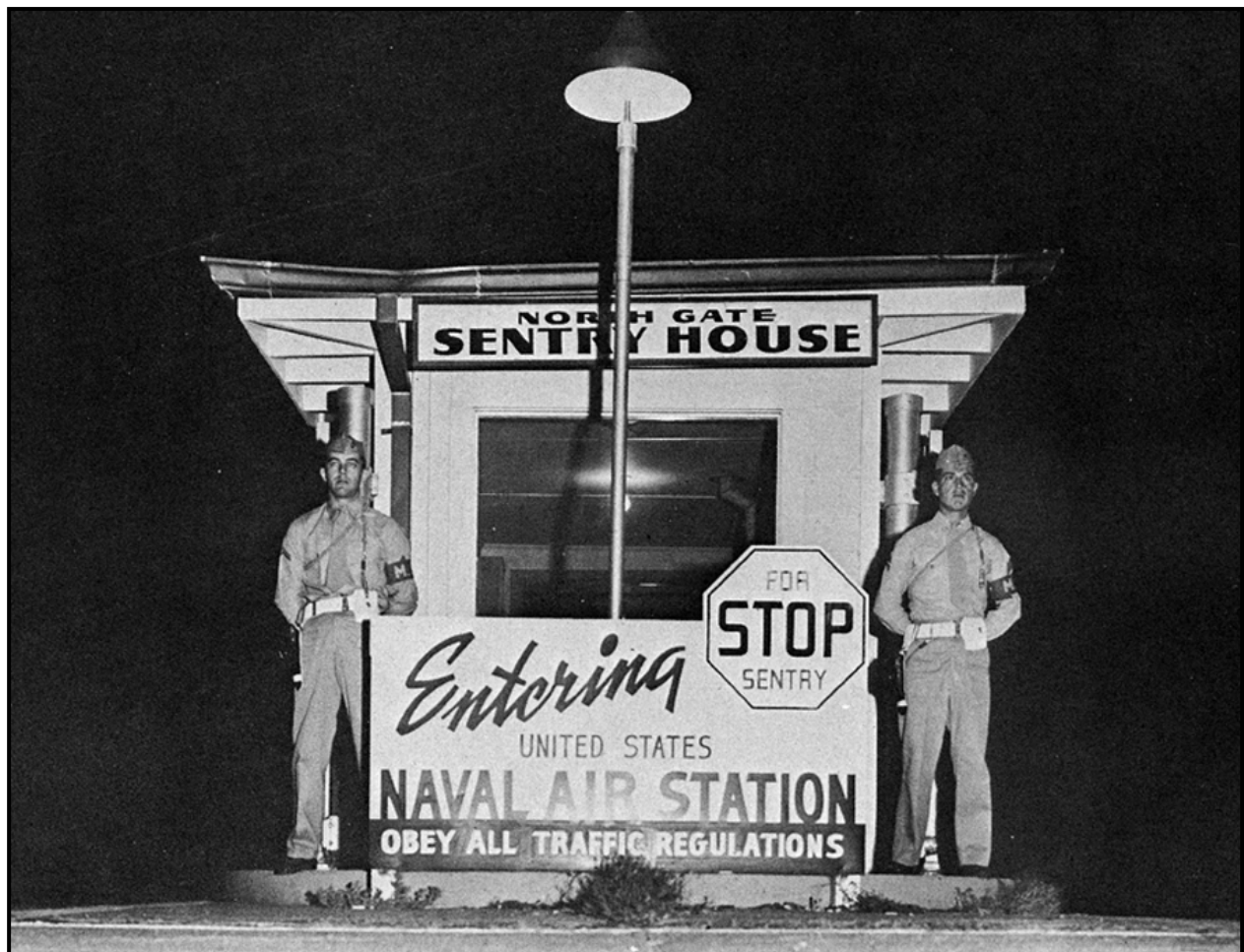
Capt. Tom Wimberly, USN, Retired, Corpus Christi, Texas

Len Winter, NAVFAC Southeast, Jacksonville, Florida

Caroline Wright, Texas State Historic Preservation Office, Texas State Historical Commission

Carla Young, Naval Air Station Corpus Christi

Don Zuris, Corpus Christi Museum of Science and History, Corpus Christi, Texas



The north gate of NAS Corpus Christi, 1954. Source: NAS Corpus Christi 1954.

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**Appendix A: NAS Corpus Christi
Oral History and Signage Interview Questions**

For Children of Senior Officers

What was your father's name? What aircraft did he train in/fly? (Follow-up questions related to military career – see Senior Officers questions below)

When did your family move to NAS Corpus Christi?

What was your father's role at NAS Corpus Christi?

How old were you when you moved to NAS Corpus Christi?

Did you have any siblings that lived in the house?

How long did you live at NAS Corpus Christi?

Were you stationed at NAS Corpus Christi more than once?

What do you recall about your neighborhood at NAS Corpus Christi? Provide photos of houses.

What do you recall about the house you lived in? Provide photos of houses.

Tell us about the other children in the neighborhood.

How did your home at NAS Corpus Christi compare to your home at other installations?

Did most family activities (shopping, holiday events, schooling, socializing, entertainment, etc.) take place on base or in the city of Corpus Christi and nearby communities?

Where did you go to school?

Where did you play (playground, swimming pool, recreational area, etc.)?

Where did your father/mother/family move after NAS Corpus Christi?

What did your father/mother do in the years following NAS Corpus (ex. become an Admiral, a presidential advisor, work for the Pentagon, retire into civilian life, serve in Vietnam, etc.)?

How do you think father/mother's time at NAS Corpus Christi influenced the remainder of their career?

When you recall your time at NAS Corpus Christi, what first comes to mind?

Do you have any additional memories of that time and place that you would like to share?

Tell me about any friendships you made during your time at NAS CC

What did you do after your time at NAS CC?

Describe how the war (if applicable) affected your family.

For Civilian Workers

Give me some examples of what your family did that you felt specifically helped the war effort?

Tell me about your involvement in community activities during the war, and how did that make you feel?

Tell me about women or minorities in your community whose lives were dramatically changed through their roles in the war effort.

How has your wartime service changed you through the years?

Where were you when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

For how long have you been/were you employed at NAS Corpus Christi?

Where did you work before you came to NAS Corpus Christi?

What was your position during the time you worked at NAS Corpus Christi?

Explain some of your duties/jobs as the [insert position; ex. Maintenance Chief, Housing Director] for the SOQs.

How were the SOQs set apart from the rest of the base/How were they different?

What were some of the most important events to impact the base and your position?

Is there anything about the life and neighborhood in the SOQs that you think should be remembered?

Do you have any additional memories you would like to share?

For Senior Officers

When did you enter the Service?

Where were you living at the time?

Why did you join?

Why did you pick the service branch you joined?

Tell me about your first days in service.

What did it feel like?

Tell me about your boot camp/training experience(s).

How did you get through it?

Which war(s) did you serve in (WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf)?

Where exactly did you go?

Do you remember arriving and what it was like?

What was your job/assignment?

Did you see combat?

How has your wartime service changed you through the years?

Where did you live before you came to NAS Corpus Christi?

When did you move to NAS Corpus Christi?

How long did you live at NAS Corpus Christi?

What was your role/duty at NAS Corpus Christi?

What was your home at the SOQs like?

Tell me about women or minorities in your community whose lives were dramatically changed through their roles in the war effort.

How were the SOQs set apart from the rest of the base; how were they different?

How did your home at NAS Corpus Christi compare to other SOQ housing you have experienced?

Did most family activities (shopping, holiday events, schooling, socializing, entertainment, etc.) take place on base or in the city of Corpus Christi and nearby communities?

What were some of the most important events to impact the base and your position?

How do you think your time at NAS Corpus Christi influenced the rest of your career?

When you recall your time at NAS Corpus Christi, what first comes to mind?

Is there anything about the life and neighborhood in the SOQs that you think should be remembered?

Do you have any additional memories you would like to share about your time at NAS Corpus Christi?

How has your military service changed you through the years?

For Naval Hospital-related Interviewees

When did you enter the Service?

Where were you living at the time?

Why did you join?

Why did you pick the service branch you joined?

Tell me about your first days in service.

What did it feel like?

Tell me about your boot camp/training experience(s).

How did you get through it?

Which war(s) did you serve in (WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf)?

Where exactly did you go?

Do you remember arriving and what it was like?

What was your job/assignment?

Did you see combat?

Where did you live before you came to NAS Corpus Christi?

When did you move to NAS Corpus Christi?

How long did you live at NAS Corpus Christi?

What was your role/duty at NAS Corpus Christi?

What was your home at NAS Corpus Christi like?

How was your neighborhood set apart from the rest of the base; how was it different?

How did your home at NAS Corpus Christi compare to other SOQ housing you have experienced?

How did life in the SOQs on Ninth Street differ from those on King Drive?

Did most family activities (shopping, holiday events, schooling, socializing, entertainment, etc.) take place on base or in the city of Corpus Christi and nearby communities?

What were some of the most important events to impact the base and your position?

How do you think your time at NAS Corpus Christi influenced the rest of your career?

When you recall your time at NAS Corpus Christi, what first comes to mind?

Is there anything about the life and neighborhood that you think should be remembered?

Do you have any additional memories you would like to share about your time at NAS Corpus Christi?