



Cultural Resources Management through the Eyes of the Soldier

Project 12-514

Background:

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended) establishes the federal government’s policy to provide leadership in historic preservation and to administer federally owned or controlled historic properties in the spirit of stewardship. This project sought to discover, from a specific subgroup of the public (the soldiers and their families), what they value and place importance on within the historic environment of an installation, so that Department of Defense (DoD) cultural resources managers better fulfill their responsibility as stewards of historic properties and develop public awareness and appreciation of these resources.



To effectively understand and evaluate military communities, cultural resources specialists need to understand the cultural significance of an installation through the eyes of the soldiers and their families. As such, soldiers and their families are the “definers” of significance.

Their direct experience and knowledge about the military community and an installation and/or resources on an installation is the reason they are, by definition, consulting parties in relation to the identification and consideration of potential effects on a historic property. However, when evaluating historic properties, rarely do the professionals conducting the research have an opportunity to engage these primary stakeholders.

Objective:

This project has three primary objectives. The first was to survey and interview Soldiers and their Families to determine if they place importance on historic properties at an installation. The second was to determine what historic property types are important and why. The third objective was to determine how this information might inform the current cultural resources management program at Fort Benning and provide guidance, lessons learned, and recommendations for other cultural resources managers at other installations.

Summary of Approach:

The project involved a five-step methodology: (1) develop an online survey, (2) analyze the responses from the online survey to generate and enhance interview

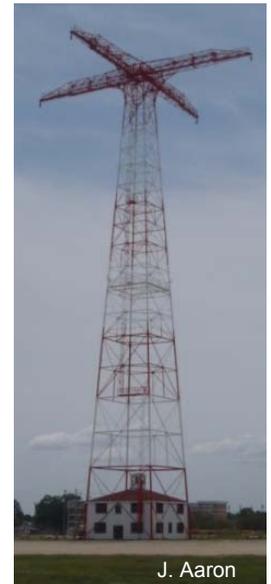
questions, (3) complete the interviews, (4) combine and analyze the information from the surveys and interviews, sorting the data by different aspects (age, rank, education, etc.) and (5) formulate recommendations, guidance, and lessons learned.

Benefit:

The project provides insight into what soldiers and their families consider to be important so these views can be integrated into proposed plans and programs. Surveys like the one presented in this report will also facilitate compliance with public involvement components of section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and Executive Order 13287, “Preserve America.” The cultural resource manager can incorporate the views of soldiers and their families into cultural resources management programs, thereby enhancing the relevancy of the installation’s cultural resources for the local military community. The project brought to the attention of some installation residents the many historic properties at Fort Benning.

Accomplishments:

The surveys and interviews revealed that the participants at Fort Benning are interested in the history of the installation and its buildings and structures, but less interested in how they are managed. However, historic preservation is not irrelevant to survey participants—Fort Benning has numerous historic properties and participants felt they should be preserved. The strongest support for historic preservation was for the Jump Towers—large, visible structures that define Fort Benning’s place as an Airborne School. The report provides detailed guidance and lessons learned from the study to assist cultural resources managers at other installations in planning and implementing survey projects.



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