

Perspectives in the Preservation of Cold War Era Cultural Resources

During the Cold War, the architecture of California military bases reflected three somewhat contradictory trends. First, for the comfort of its troops, especially the officer corps, the military built administrative and residential buildings that were commodious and fashionably Modern. Second, the military valued nimbleness and flexibility in its training and relied upon essentially temporary buildings for most operational purposes. Third, the military in California was heavily involved in weapons development and testing, giving California bases hundreds of very permanent and very odd looking research and test facilities.

In the first category, the military adopted Modernism because it was the stylish look of the Cold War. Here and there, military designers called upon well-known Modernist architects, as with the Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill buildings at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, or Richard Neutra in his design of what is still called the Neutra School in Lemoore. More often, the Modernist buildings were the work of lesser-known private architects, such as Stanley Gogerty, who laid out the Modern buildings at the weapons station at China Lake, or by unnamed architects at the Bureau of Yards and Docks, who designed the beautiful Building A33 at SPAWAR, San Diego.

The vast majority of Cold War buildings, however, were built to be inexpensive and easily modified or moved. If one searches for the site of some great Cold War advance, the odds are great that it was accomplished in some variation on a Butler Building. This range of Cold War architecture was not built to last and probably will not last.

The third category includes a huge variety of buildings and structures associated with the Cold War weapons development and testing program, which was so vital in California. These were the opposite of the Butler Buildings; they were extraordinarily well-built and were dedicated to very specific purposes and could not easily be adapted. These would include the famous rocket test tracks at Edwards and China Lake; the massive rocket test stands and silos at Vandenberg; the great radar facilities like the PAVE PAWS at Beale; "always-ready" SAC bomber hangars at Travis; and so forth throughout the state. In terms of Cold War design that was historically significant and of intrinsic interest, these development and testing facilities are especially important.

The power point will discuss issues outlined above; update the current concerns with Department of Defense installations within National Historic Landmarks and the challenges with the adaptive reuse of installations closed during Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) where Cold War Era buildings are extant.

For additional information on historic military buildings and structures of California, please visit:

<https://www.denix.osd.mil/denix/Public/ES-Programs/Conservation/Legacy/Historicbuilding/CA/historicbldg.html>