

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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 listed in the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District
other names/site number Cape May Airport

2. Location

street & number Irregularly bounded by Forrestal Road and Monterre Road (formerly known as East Road), and the runways and taxiways to the north and east
city or town Lower Township
state New Jersey code NJ county Cape May code 009 zip code 08242

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I 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 nationally statewide locally. See continuation sheet for additional comments.
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet for additional comments.
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
other, (explain:)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3	1	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
4	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DEFENSE: naval facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION: air related
RECREATION AND CULTURE: museum
COMMERCE/TRADE: business

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

WORLD WAR II: utilitarian

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
walls WOOD; OTHER

roof SYNTHETICS: rubber; ASPHALT
other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

--see continuation sheets--

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.)

Property is:

- 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

A: Military

Period of Significance

1942-1945

Significant Dates

n/a

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

David C. Wood; Richard D. Wood; George Wood

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Ehret-Day & Briscoe

Primary location of additional data

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

Name of repository:

Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum

Name of Property

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property Approx. 11.31 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<i>Zone</i>	<i>Easting</i>	<i>Northing</i>	3	<i>Zone</i>	<i>Easting</i>	<i>Northing</i>
2				4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Joan Berkey, architectural historian

organization _____ date 5-8-2013

street & number 707 N. Delsea Drive telephone 609-861-2208

city or town Cape May Court House state NJ zip code 08210

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name County of Cape May, Ed Grant, County Administrator

street & number County Administration Building, 4 Moore Road telephone 609-465-1065

city or town Cape May Court House state NJ zip code 08210

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.470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section number 7 Page 1

Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District
Cape May County, NJ

Summary Description

Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District is comprised of a cluster of three buildings and one structure erected between 1942 and 1945 as part of Naval Air Station Wildwood, a WWII fighter-bomber training facility. The former air station stands on a 940+-acre tract and is now a county-owned facility, most of which comprises Cape May County Airport located in Lower Township, Cape May County, New Jersey. When completed in 1945, Naval Air Station Wildwood contained 126 buildings and structures; of these, 79 were sold by the federal government at war's end. Of the 47 that remained, 35 have been subsequently either moved off site or demolished. The 12 extant former air station buildings and structures, most of which are being adaptively-reused, are located at the south end of the tract in an industrial park that includes 24 additional buildings erected after WWII. The original WWII-era buildings and structures are clustered in the northeast corner of the industrial park, but of the 12 that remain, only four retain sufficient integrity to be within a historic district. The district comprises two hangars (No. 1 and No. 2), the operations building with control tower, and a sewage pump house located directly behind the operations building. Historic WWII buildings that have lost integrity are: an armament repair shop, a fire house with garage, a storehouse, a station maintenance building, a mess hall, an open storage shed, a paint and oil storage building, and a reservoir with pump house. Of the three buildings and one structure within the district, Hangar No. 1 is already listed individually in the State and National Registers of Historic Places with national significance. The industrial park is crisscrossed by several paved roads that date from the site's establishment as a naval air station and the station's original taxiways and four runways are located north and east of the industrial park. The tract is roughly bounded by Breakwater Road on the south and Fulling Mill Road on the north. The historic district is bounded on the north and east by the runways and taxiways, and on the south and west by two roads and airport tarmac. The Atlantic Ocean is approximately 7 miles to the east and the Delaware Bay is approximately 2.5 miles to the west. The historic district encompasses approximately 11.31 acres of the 940+-acre tract and consists of open, level ground with minimal landscaping.

Narrative Description

Naval Air Station Wildwood was established in 1942 on a large tract of land in Lower Township that had been purchased by Cape May County in the 1930s for the construction of a county airport. The Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) began planning the construction of four runways on the airport site for use by either the Army or Navy in early 1942. By April 1942, five months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, agreements were finalized that allowed the county to lease the site to the US Navy for use as a naval air station. Additional acreage was purchased to build the base and construction of the first and largest building, Hangar No. 1, began in October of that year.

The base was located at the south end of the 940+-acre tract, abutting Breakwater Road which travels east to west across the southern part of the Cape May peninsula. At the time, the tract consisted of open farmland along Breakwater Road surrounded by forestland.

The 1946 site plan of Naval Air Station Wildwood [fig. 6 in *Historic Photographs and Supplemental Images* section] depicts the 126 buildings that were erected on the site. The map shows the majority clustered between Breakwater Road (to the south) and four runways (located to the north and northeast).

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The road system within the base was established by the Navy which named most of the roads after naval aircraft carriers operating during the war. [fig. 6 and 9] Two main roads travel diagonally in the south half of the base, and several main roads travel east-west/north-south in a grid-like fashion in the north half of the base. The main entrance, overseen by a guard house, was located at the junction of Lexington and Breakwater roads. The lower (southernmost) half of Lexington Road runs in a northwest/southeast direction and is intersected by Saratoga Road which runs in a northeast/southwest direction. The main east-west roads are North (now Forrestal) Road at the north end of the base, followed by Essex, Enterprise, Ranger, and Wasp. The main north-south roads are Hornet, Yorktown, Langley, and Monterey. Monterey Road (formerly known as East Road) and West Road defined the east and west boundaries of the base. Most of these roads are extant today, although some have been discontinued and others have been extended beyond their original termini.

Original structures and buildings within the base included a dispensary, several training buildings, many barracks and huts, a post office, a guard house, a photographic laboratory, a transmitter building, a morgue, a small arms building, dog kennels, storehouses, ready rooms, an air group command office, a billiard room, latrines, garbage houses, line shacks, a print shop, a commissary, heating plants, and a beauty parlor among others.

Structures that housed high explosives, fuses, and detonators were located at least 1500' to the northwest of the base for safety reasons. Similarly, the firing range and firing armory were located about 1500' to the northeast of the base.

The main entrance to the base was accessed, as it is today, from Breakwater Road which defined the southernmost boundary of the air station. Enlisted male personnel were housed in eight barracks that lined Saratoga Road, just north of Breakwater Road; the barracks were conveniently located close to the mess hall. Junior and senior officers were housed in a cluster of three separate barracks about 600' west of the enlisted personnel barracks. WAVEs were housed in a separate barracks just north of the mess hall. Recreational facilities, located at the west end of the base, included basketball and volleyball courts, an athletic field, and two tennis courts.

The main operations building with a control tower was of necessity located adjacent to the runways. Next in importance to flight operations were the two hangars, No. 1 located 300' to the west of the operations building, and No. 2 (a half-hangar) located about 300' south of the operations building. Close to the hangars were several ready rooms where flyers prepared for their flights, several aviation utility shops, an armament repair shop, a water reservoir with pump house, and the photo lab.

Training was undertaken in several buildings, none of which stand today. The Link trainer (flight simulator) building and the Gunairstructor (a fixed aerial gunnery trainer) building were sited two blocks west of Hangar No. 1 while a general-purpose training building was located south of the enlisted personnel barracks and faced Breakwater Road.

The mess hall, administration building, commissary, and ships service/post office buildings lined Lexington Road, the main access road. A flagpole was installed in the triangle formed by the intersection of Langley, Ranger, and Lexington roads, opposite the administration building. It is not shown in any of the site plans, but does appear in a photograph taken in 1943 when the base was commissioned.

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In April of 1946, the Navy turned the station over to the War Assets Administration (WAA) for disposition after the end of WWII. [fig. 9] On December 1, 1947, the station property was returned to the County of Cape May for use as a county airport, a use that continues today.

In May 1947, at least 79 of the 126 original buildings and structures were sold and moved off-site, among them store houses (40' x 60'), "huts" ranging in size from 16' x 16' to 20' x 48', a line shack (5' x 25'), a training building (35' x 260'), and the WAVE barracks (35' x 136').¹ Many of these buildings were relocated to various communities not far from the base; some are extant and most are highly altered from their original, war-time appearance. Some were moved to places as far away as Trenton, where a former training building and a storehouse were converted into barracks for State Police trainees. Another "large building" (original use not stated) became an industrial arts building at what is now the College of New Jersey north of Trenton.²

By February 1949, five companies had signed leases for buildings at the airport, signaling the beginning of an industrial park at the former air station. A site plan drawn for the Cape May County Airport in 1951 and updated to 1957 [fig. 9] shows that of the 47 buildings and structures not sold off after the war, 46 remained on the site at that time. Of these, 19 were buildings and the rest were structures like gasoline storage tanks, pump houses, the rotating beacon, and the water tower. Many were relatively-small structures originally used to store explosives and small arms at remote locations, and were being leased by the DuPont Company for storage. The largest buildings extant in 1957 were:

- Hangar No. 1
- Hangar No. 2
- Operations Building
- Mess hall
- Aviation Utility Shop "A"
- Administration Building
- Storehouse
- Maintenance Shop
- Garage/Fire House
- Armament Repair Shop

The site plan identifies the buildings' tenants and shows that the buildings within the industrial park were being actively used for other purposes after war's end. Allegheny Airlines, the New Jersey Department of Defense, and the Civil Air Patrol had offices in the operations building, as did the County of Cape May. Hangar No.1 was home to United States Overseas Airlines (a privately-owned international airline), while Hangar No. 2 was used by Young's Flying Service which gave flying lessons and performed maintenance on airplanes. The mess hall was used as a canning house by F.H. Snow Canning Company, which also used the administration building and the station maintenance shop for storage. The County of Cape May used the

¹ "Notice of Availability for Sale, 79 Surplus Government Buildings and Fixtures," (undated newspaper ad, ca. April 1947), NASW Aviation Museum archives.

² *Trenton Times*, 7-21-1947, 8-25-1948.

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firehouse-garage building for the airport fire and maintenance departments, as well as the county road department. The large storehouse at the corner of Yorktown and North (now Forrestal) Roads was used by A.C. Anderson as a manufacturing facility. The New Jersey Department of Defense was using the armament repair shop as an armory. One new building was constructed—an extant 9-bay garage south of Hangar No. 2 that was occupied by the New Jersey Department of Defense; it is outside of the historic district boundaries.

Of the 19 WWII-era buildings and structures shown on the 1951 site plan, 12 are extant today (2012), in addition to one object (flagpole) and the runways, taxiways, and aprons. Located in an industrial park at the south end of the county airport tract, the buildings are as follows: hangar No. 1, hangar No. 2, operations building, fire house and garage, armament repair shop, store house, station maintenance shop, paint and oil storage, and the mess hall. Of these 12 buildings, only four—both hangars, the operations building, and the sewage pump house (now known as #94 boiler room)—retain sufficient integrity to be part of a historic district. Of the three buildings, Hangar No. 1 is a key building with national significance and was previously listed individually in the State and National Registers of Historic Places (1997).

The following key and contributing historic buildings and one structure, most identified by the building number assigned to them by the US Navy, comprise the historic district:

Building #1—operations building (contributing building) [photos 1,5,6,7,8]

Strategically located at the northeast corner of the industrial park where it has a commanding view of the airport's four runways, the operations building was among the first to be constructed between 1942 and 1943. [photo 1] It has an L-shaped footprint anchored by a 4-story tower in the northeast corner that is 6 bays wide by 6 bays deep. There is a 2-story ell behind (to the west) of the tower, a one-story garage wing (originally used as a firehouse) behind the 2-story ell, and a one-story wing attached to the south side of the tower. [photo 6,7,8] These sections match the original footprint shown on the 1946 site plan and are those seen in historic photographs. [fig. 1, 2, 10 in the *Historic Photos and Supplemental Images* section] Later, one-story additions are erected on the south side of the south wing (approximately 20' x 20'), the west side of the garage wing (a 1-garage bay addition) and the north side of the tower (an enclosed entry). [photo 6]

All sections are covered with aluminum siding (over original transite panels) and have cement block or poured concrete foundations. Most windows in the original part of the building are 1/1 double-hung wood sash which appear to be original and are protected by triple-track storms and screens. Those in the northeast corner of the original 1-story south wing are large, modern storefront-type single-pane metal windows that define what is now a restaurant. [photo 5] There is a modern, double-door (metal) entrance on the façade (east elevation) that is sheltered by a late-20th century flat-roofed portico supported by round columns. [photo 5] Roofs are flat, have extended eaves with aluminum covered soffits and fascia, and are covered with rolled asphalt. Doors on most elevations are modern metal replacements for the originals.

It is not known to what extent this may have been a standard, WWII-era design for operations buildings. A similar operations building and control tower is located at NAS Memphis, Tennessee, built at the same time. [fig. 12]

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Integrity:

Historic photographs [fig. 1, 2, 10] show that the building has had numerous alterations over the years. Its tower was originally topped with a windowed air traffic control/operations room (technically referred to as a “cab”) encircled by an open walkway. This feature was blown off in a storm in 1962 and was never replaced. Historic photographs also show that the south side ell was originally set back (to the west) about 15’ from the tower’s east wall, but this has now been extended forward so that it goes approximately 10’ beyond the tower’s east wall. Most of the window placements in the original L-shaped building are extant, except for those in the one-story south ell. One of the original garage/firehouse bays was removed and infilled with three windows, and the garage/firehouse ell was extended in 1977 with the addition of two windows, a door, and another garage bay.

Building #34—Sewage Pump House (contributing structure, now known as #94 boiler room) [photo 6,8,9]

Located immediately behind (west of) the operations building, the stucco-covered terra-cotta block sewage pump house is a one-story tall structure with a rectangular footprint approximately 16’ wide by 8’ deep. A ventilator pipe emerges from the center of the flat roof and the rear (west) elevation has a louvered window opening. The façade (east elevation) features two modern metal doors and the north side elevation contains a window opening now infilled with a small louvered opening. There are no openings on the south side elevation.

Integrity:

The building appears to retain its original footprint and original terra-cotta block construction, now covered with stucco. Historic photographs [fig. 1 and 2] show a window on the west wall which is presently infilled with a louvered opening.

Building #2--Hangar No.1 (key building) [photo 2,3,10,11]

Hangar No. 1 is a 2½-story, two-bay, wood structure that was one of the first to be built at the air station. Placed upon a poured concrete pad foundation in 10’ x 20’ sections, the north and south “lean-to” elevations are placed atop approximately 4’ of concrete block and are sheathed in asbestos board (transite panels) over mitre-cut wood boards. Twelve full-height telescoping doors form the east and west elevations; these doors retract into door pockets at each corner of the hangar. The structural supports and roof truss are constructed of bolted wood members and the roof is constructed of five layers of 5/8” gypsum board. Two clerestoried floors of offices along the north and south elevations are entered from the two 120’ x 200’ bays. The building encloses 2,558,000 cubic feet of space.

The 290’L x 219’W x 51’H full hangar is constructed of bolted wood Pratt trusses in 10’ panels at the roof level, bolted cross-braced vertical supports at the north and south interior elevations and bolted center supports, which form the division between the two bays. Larger truss members are constructed of smaller members bolted together. The structure contains two 120’L x 200’W bays for airplane storage and maintenance, along with rows of offices and workrooms that form the north and south elevations. Two ribbon rows of clerestory, double-hung wood sash windows are located along the north and south exterior elevations, which are constructed of mitre-cut wood boards covered with 4’ x 8’ vertical asbestos boards attached with nails.

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The east and west elevations have twelve telescoping, 29'6" high, top-hung metal-frame doors which are set in metal tracks in the concrete floor. The doors slide open into pockets at each corner of the structure. These pockets are also constructed of mitre-cut wood boards covered with 4' x 8' vertical asbestos boards. The top $\frac{3}{4}$ of each door consists of three tiers of 16 light windows and the lower half consists of battened plywood panels. A narrow wood canopy shelters the manually-operated mechanism from which the doors are suspended. A small entry door is located at the north corner of the west elevation doors.

The two-story rows of offices on the north and south interior "lean-to" elevations – so called because they are located outside of the truss system – originally contained offices and work areas, including offices for the commanding officer, the flight officer and the engineering officer, equipment repair rooms, locker rooms and washrooms, and carpentry shops. These rooms are separated from the bays by clerestoried, square, pivot windows set in plywood partition walls. The second floor is reached by two staircases on each elevation. The second floor hallway is an un-enclosed gallery that is open to the bays. The original interior finish for the offices and stairwells – visible in sections under later layers of paint – was plywood stained a dark walnut color.

Two poured concrete propeller pits are located at the northwest and southwest interior corners of the structure behind the door pockets. Propellers were placed on concrete supports suspended over the pits which allowed the propellers to be spun while undergoing repair. Windows and doors retain original hardware. A mechanical pivoting mechanism opens and closes the truss-level windows; chains at the second floor galleries operate the mechanism. A deluge sprinkler system remains attached to the roof truss system and its original activation stations also remain.

At the northeast exterior corner of the building is a 3-story section with a modestly-pitched gable roof. This section contains what was originally another control tower (on the north elevation, extant, see photo 15) and more offices.

A concrete taxiway and apron surround the east, west, and north elevations of the structure and the adjacent operations building is immediately to the east. North of the hangar, the land is open and reaches to Fulling Mill Road to the north.

The hangar is the "Standard Wood Hangar" designed by the Department of the Navy. The architect, Albert Kahn, a consultant to the military services beginning during World War I, produced many of the designs for naval installations – especially those for air hangars – and it is possible that he designed the Standard Wood Hangar. The siting, heating system, and interior details were designed by Sherman Sleeper Associates, an architectural and engineering firm located in Camden, New Jersey. It is estimated that 20-30 hangars of this type were constructed during World War II, including USNAS Atlantic City, New Jersey (demolished), USNAS Oceana, Virginia (extant), and USNAS Corpus Christi, Texas (demolished). The design is typical of hangars built by the Navy in the 1930s and 1940s: it has a large footprint (approximately 200' x 200'), is architecturally unembellished, was built with a wood frame to conserve steel during the war years, and features side lean-tos and overhead sliding track doors.

This building was listed individually on the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 1997 with significance in criteria A and C; in 2004 the level was raised to national significance.

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Integrity:

Hangar No. 1 retains a high degree of integrity. Post-WWII alterations have been minimal and are largely reversible; since 1997, the building has received numerous grants for its on-going restoration. The attached three-story, gable-roof office area at the exterior northeast corner was added around 1944 and the third story expanded and given bay windows in the 1960s. Additional plywood-walled, single-story rooms were added in the mid-20th century to the interior of the hangar and are located along the center supports and alongside the rooms on the north wall. Interior finishes have been altered in some of the offices, including the application of adhesive paneling.

Building #60—Hangar No. 2 (contributing building) [photo 1,4,12,13,14, fig. 3]

With a footprint of approximately 165' wide by 200' deep, Hangar No. 2 is about one-half the size of Hangar No.1 and is considered to be, appropriately, a half-hanger. It is constructed in the same manner and with the same wood materials as Hangar No.1, but has original transite panels covering the telescoping doors on the north and south elevations, in contrast to the multi-light wood doors of Hangar No.1. Its massing is somewhat different from Hangar No. 1 and features a vaulted roof rather than a flat roof. Like Hangar No.1, it also has two floors of offices along the east and west (side) elevations. [fig. 3] Most of the building is now covered with modern vinyl siding, leaving only the clerestory windows on the side elevations exposed.

Integrity:

Historic photographs [fig. 3, 4] show that the offices on the east and west side elevations originally had multi-light windows on both stories like Hangar No. 1. These have now been covered over on both side elevations with modern vinyl siding, with the exception of a few exposed on the east elevation. The clerestory windows are exposed and intact on both side elevations [see fig. 5] and the hangar's transite-covered telescoping doors appear to be original.

Pen Turbo Aviation (non-Contributing Building) [photo 15]

Built about 1970, this one-story building has a rectangular footprint and a flat roof. The eaves are angled and are covered with wood shingles. The exterior is covered with standing-seam metal panels and stucco. Windows are modern vinyl or metal, some single pane, others horizontally-sliding sash. The building stands on a concrete block foundation and is sited about 30 feet north of Hangar No. 2.

WWII Buildings Located Outside of the Historic District and Not Included Within the District Because of a Loss of Integrity

Building #5—armament repair shop

This one-story building has a rectangular footprint more wide than deep. It is 10-bays wide, is made of terra-cotta blocks (original) and ca. 1970 concrete blocks, and has a gable roof that runs parallel with the façade (west elevation). All but one of the original windows on the façade has been in-filled with concrete block, but their original sills remain *in situ*. The one original window opening, infilled with modern 1/1 metal sash protected by horizontal metal bars, is near the center of the facade where it is adjacent to a small entry (covered with aluminum siding) that shelters the doorway. Adjacent to it, to the north, is a paneled wood door that may be original. The east end of the south side of the building contains a large modern

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overhead garage door fronted by a below-grade driveway. The north side elevation has no window or door openings, while the rear (east) elevation is partially fronted by a vinyl fence and has two modern metal doors to the north. The gable ends are covered with aluminum siding, while the eaves and boxed cornice are covered with ribbed aluminum. A ca. 1970 addition nearly doubled the size of the original building.

Building # 7—firehouse and garage

This one-story building has a modest, L-shaped footprint: the northernmost section (built in the late 20th century) is of wood frame, while the southernmost section is built of original hollow, terra-cotta blocks that have been parged, or stuccoed over. On the façade (west elevation), the southernmost two-thirds consists of 8 bays with modern, overhead garage doors. One of the garage bays near the south end is raised about 6' taller than the main block and the ell extends to the rear at the southernmost end of the main block. The northernmost one-third of the building consists of offices with modern metal windows (on the north and east elevations) and metal doors; most of this section is covered with aluminum or vinyl siding. The rear (east) elevation has several garage bays with modern overhead doors. There is a small modern addition to the rear of the main block at the northernmost end. The flat roof, covered with tar and rolled asphalt, has extended eaves wrapped with aluminum or vinyl. Original clerestory windows on the taller section have been removed or covered over, the original footprint has been expanded by about one-third with the north addition, and the fenestration has been altered.

Building #8—storehouse

A thick coat of stucco over this one-story building obscures the original exterior walls, which appear in historic photographs to have been terra-cotta blocks. The façade (east elevation) is comprised of 3 sections, each represented by a flat roof that is stepped down from the one adjacent to it. The tallest roof is on the northernmost third of the building and it represents a later, non-historic full-depth addition to the original building. The middle section appears to be the original storehouse, and it is fronted by a modern, metal shed-roofed porch supported by square concrete columns. The shortest stepped roof at the southernmost one-third of the building represents a modern later addition that is one-half the depth of the original building. Doors, including some metal overhead doors in the southernmost addition, and windows are of modern materials, and the flat roof on all three sections is covered with rolled asphalt and tar. While the footprint of the original building appears to be intact, it has been highly altered with additions to the north and south that have more than doubled the building's original size, and a total re-working of the façade.

Building #9—station maintenance shop

This building is comprised of two distinct, 1-story sections, both original: one of wood frame (to the east) and one of terra-cotta blocks (to the west). That to the east has a flat roof, a rectangular footprint, 3-4' tall concrete block foundation walls, and is covered with T-111 (textured 111) vertical board panels on all elevations. The façade (south elevation) of this section has a modern metal overhead door in the center with a modern man door to the east. Most of the nearly-square original window openings on the taller west section have been infilled or given smaller, modern windows of 2- or 3-light replacement metal sash.

Attached to the west wall of the wood frame section is a taller, one-story section with an L-shaped footprint. This section is made of terra cotta blocks that appear to be identical to those used in several other buildings at the air station. Here, they are also parged with modern stucco. Brick piers (original), 2 bricks deep, are

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found on all elevations of this section. Most of the nearly-square original window openings have been either entirely infilled with concrete block, or in-filled partially with concrete block and given modern 9-light metal sash windows. The exceptions to this are three very tall windows on this section's west wall which are of wood, appear to be original, and are comprised of seven lights (1/1/1/1/1/1/1).

Building #12—mess hall

The mess hall is the third largest of the buildings still standing at the former naval air station and is a sprawling structure with an irregular footprint. It was heavily modernized in the 1960s/70s when it was used as an industrial building for etching glass bottles and has had numerous additions over the years.

In the southeast corner of the building is a 2-story section, the upper part of which has a ca. 1970 mansard roof into which modern windows have been inserted to provide light onto the second floor. This section was originally 1-story tall. The building's original asbestos (transite) board exterior (most of which appears to be extant) is covered with vertical wood boards placed in 6' wide panels between which are approximately 3' wide, pebble-dashed cement panels that appear to serve no other function than to decorate the building. The original main entrance to the building is on the east side of the 2-story section and is marked by a modern wood deck, steps, and railing in front of the boarded-over door.

To the rear (west) and north side of the 2-story section are 1-story wings, many of them modern additions, covered on the exterior with the same vertical board and cement panels. The wings also have a cement panel that runs along the top of the roof line. Along the rear and the westernmost part of the north side of the building are numerous shipping/receiving bays.

The interior retains its original exposed structural framework comprised of braced, wood king posts that support a triple wood beam that supports 2" x 10" floor joists. Some of the tiling for the original kitchen area appears to be intact, as do some of the original window openings, now covered over on the exterior. The flooring is of concrete and also appears to be original.

#22 Paint and Oil Storage

The paint and oil storage building has a square footprint that is approximately 100' wide by 100' deep; this represents a near doubling of its original size with a large, modern addition to the rear. The building is covered with corrugated aluminum panels that appear to date to a ca. 1980-90 remodeling, and has a flat roof. The entrance, located at the north end of the facade (east elevation), consists of a modern glass door and window sheltered by a portico of textured aggregate blocks with a shed roof that is also covered with corrugated panels, all modern. The eaves across the facade also feature a cornice of corrugated panels. Windows on the facade and north side elevations are modern, 1-light metal casement windows, while those on the south side elevation are 1/1 vinyl replacement sash.

Building #57—open storage shed

This one-story, wood frame building has a long, rectangular-shaped footprint and a flat roof; it stands on a cinder block foundation. The westernmost three-quarters of the building represent the original building and is covered with asbestos shingles, some of which may be original, while the easternmost quarter (built in the late-20th century) is covered with modern T-1-11 siding. The building has 8 triangular-shaped wood panels, evenly spaced below the roof line of the facade (south elevation) and rear (north) elevation, which appear to

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correspond to the framing of the original building. The façade has seven modern overhead garage-type doors, most of which are flanked by modern, metal man doors. There are two modern 1/1 double-hung wood windows on the west (side) elevation and a single, metal garage door on the east side elevation. The rear (north) elevation has 2 modern metal man doors, two louvered fan outlets, and 2 modern windows.

Building #58—reservoir and pump house

This structure consists of a 1-story tall circular reservoir that is approximately 20' high (200,000 gallon capacity) to which is attached on the south side a 1-story pump house of the same height. Both have a modern stucco exterior finish over original terra-cotta blocks. The entrance to the pump house is on the south elevation and consists of a double wood door, possibly original, topped with an original 5-light wood sash window transom. On each side of the entrance is a modern, 2-light rectangular-shaped metal window that appears to date to ca. 2000. The building is topped with a flat roof and has a modest projection over the door to shelter it when it rains. There are no windows on the east or west sides of the pump house. A stucco-covered flue is located in the building's southwest corner.

Station Flagpole

This tapered wood flagpole mounted to a rectangular wood base is not shown on the 1946 site plan, but is seen in a photograph taken when the flag was raised at the commissioning of the air station on April 1, 1943. It retains its historic appearance.

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Summary Statement of Significance

In response to the enormous need for stateside air combat training facilities, Naval Air Station Wildwood (NASW) in Lower Township, Cape May County, New Jersey was erected between 1942 and 1945 as one of 250 air stations constructed during World War II. It was one of five WWII naval air stations in New Jersey, the others being located in Atlantic City, Cape May, Lakehurst, and Trenton. Although the Navy built a few bases in the United States for operational use, aircraft testing, and experimentation, the vast majority—like Naval Air Station Wildwood—was established to train 30,000 new aviators per year during the war. The airfield construction program of WWII undertaken by the Navy, along with the Army and the Civil Aviation Administration (CAA), is described as “one of the largest construction projects the U.S. ever undertook.” At the height of hostilities in 1944, NASW was staffed by 363 officers, 2190 enlisted men/women, and 138 civilians who were responsible for over 200 aircraft. The station’s mission was first to train dive bombers, then later to train fighter-bomber squadrons. Set on a 940+ acre site, the air station comprised a total of 126 buildings and structures that included two hangars, an administration building, a mess hall, instruction buildings, barracks, and a variety of other support buildings. Of the original 126 buildings, only 12 remain. Of the 12, only four (4) retain sufficient integrity to form a historic district. Because of their association with two important World War II developments—the military’s rapid build-up of facilities during WWII and the Navy’s dive bomber program which played a decisive role in the war’s outcome—this group of four buildings comprises an historic district that is nationally significant under Criterion A in the area of military.

Historical Background and Significance

In 1938, the United States naval aviation establishment consisted of seven air stations, four fleet air bases, ten Naval Reserve Aviation Bases, three Marine Corps air stations, eight miscellaneous facilities, 2,050 aircraft, one rigid airship, and five blimps.¹

At first, the Second World War that began with the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 had little impact on the American people since the United States remained neutral. Public and congressional isolationist views limited the ability of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration to prepare for war. Sentiments of Cape May County residents mirrored those of most Americans: the *Cape May County Gazette* observed that “the people of Cape May County, with the people of the rest of the nation, want no part of a European war.”² Quietly, however, Roosevelt took steps to prepare the nation for war by using New Deal funds and agencies to build civilian airports under the Civil Aeronautics Authority.

The Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938 set in motion a nationwide movement to develop United States’ airports for national defense purposes, selecting sites for military airfields with regard to future civilian aviation potential, cost, and efficiency. By building on land offered by local governments or augmenting extant civil airports, the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) also aided in the wartime economy of communities positioned near the bases. With the growing threat of the United States’ involvement in the war, Congress granted an eighty percent increase in funding for construction of naval air combat structures in June 1940.³

¹ M.L. Shettle, Jr., *United States Naval Air Stations of World War II, Vol I: Eastern States* (Bowersville, GA: Schaertel Publishing Inc., 1995), p. 7.

² *Cape May County Gazette*, editorial, 10-6-1939.

³ Shettle, p. 89.

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This coincided with the country's undeclared Atlantic war to protect the Atlantic coastline against German submarines that tried to stop U.S. ships from carrying war goods to Britain. That same year, the U.S. Coast Guard transferred its small station in Cape May City to the Navy. Built in 1917 as a naval base during WWI and most recently used as a Coast Guard station, Naval Air Station Cape May began to train observation and scout squadrons particularly for use as anti-submarine patrols to guard the mouth of the nearby Delaware Bay. Here, ships filled with war goods and refined oil produced in Philadelphia and West Chester, Pennsylvania and Wilmington, Delaware, sped into the Atlantic Ocean on their way to bolster Britain's fight against Nazi Germany.⁴

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 brought the United States into the war and demonstrated that the use of air power had become decisive, it became apparent that Naval Air Station Cape May was too small for the expanded training mission needed to defend the vulnerable mouth of the Delaware Bay and Atlantic Ocean coast against U-Boat attacks. The Navy and War departments scouted out several sites in southern New Jersey and nearby Delaware, seeking a place to build a military airfield for use by either the army or the navy, and eventually settled on a site in Lower Township, Cape May County, outside of Rio Grande that had been earmarked for the construction of a county airport.⁵

Of the 86 naval air facilities built in the eastern states during WWII, 43 were constructed at existing municipal or civilian airfields. Such was the case with the land appropriated for NASW, which had been purchased by Cape May County in 1939 with a \$25,000 bond issue raised for the establishment of a county airport in Rio Grande, a small community located four miles outside Wildwood, a popular, barrier island resort. The land, which had been obtained through condemnation by the Cape May County Board of Freeholders but was not yet built upon, was leased to the CAA in 1942 for a nominal sum with the proviso that the acreage would revert to county ownership if abandoned by the federal government. There was local opposition within the county to "giving" the government a huge tract of undeveloped forest and wetlands, but several powerful locals—among them Percy H. Jackson, director of the Cape May County Board of Chosen Freeholders, and Henry Lapidus, editor of a Wildwood newspaper—argued successfully that the project would fund road improvements, develop new housing, and stimulate the area's economy. They also believed that after the war, the airport project would boost tourism.⁶

The government put out construction bids in March 1942. Ehret-Day & Brisco, general contractors from Asbury Park, New Jersey, secured the contract and began hiring local contractors and laborers. Over 1,200 workers under the direction of the Army Corps of Engineers cleared trees, blew up stumps with dynamite and filled the swampy areas. Three 5000' runways and one 4,000' runway were constructed by the CAA for use by the Army or Navy early in the summer of 1942. The four runways intersect and were arranged to provide for aircraft operations at intervals of every 45 degrees of the compass; known as an "all-way" landing field, it made it possible for inexperienced flight students to always land more safely directly into the wind.⁷

⁴ Milo F. Draemel, comp., *The War History of the Fourth Naval District, 1941-1945*, (no date, no publisher), section II, p. 2.

⁵ *Cape May Star and Wave*, 2-12-1942.

⁶ *Star and Wave*, February 12 and 19, 1942; Jeffrey Dorwart, *Cape May County, New Jersey: The Making of An American Resort Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 229.

⁷ *Star and Wave*, 4-2-1942; 9-17-1942; Shettle, p. 8.

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Meanwhile, the Army decided to develop an air field and base in Millville, Cumberland County, a few miles up the bay, abandoning their interest in the Rio Grande property. Agreements were then finalized with the Navy to use the site for an auxiliary airfield. The plans were timely, since US Navy aircraft carrier pilots stopped the Japanese offensive in the Pacific theater at the battles of Coral Sea in May and Midway in June 1942. Fought mainly by naval aviation, these sea battles stressed the importance of naval airpower and carrier warfare in winning the war, and precipitated the need to train over 30,000 pilots who would be stationed on aircraft carriers.⁸

The Rio Grande site seemed an ideal place to develop and practice carrier air warfare tactics. The Jersey Cape's geography replicated that of a huge carrier with open water of both sides of the peninsula, flat terrain, and almost-ideal flying conditions year round. An additional 38 acres on which to build a base was acquired, resulting in a facility located on 942.751 acres of land situated in the center of the lower third of the Cape May peninsula, in Lower Township.⁹

Construction of the base began in October 1942 under Contract NOYy-5814, as part of a project to support the facility's initial group of 108 officers, 1200 men, and 72 planes. Funds appropriated for the station totaled just over \$2 million and plans called for the construction of the bachelor officer quarters, barracks, mess hall, dispensary, operation building and tower, hangar (Hangar No. 1), supply store house, and other support structures, as well as water and sewer systems, roads, and electric and steam heating.¹⁰ Most contracted buildings were completed by late January 1943. Newspaper editor, Henry Lapidus of *The [Wildwood] Leader*, called the air facility "one of the greatest engineering feats in Cape May County" history. "Where once giant trees overlooked Breakwater Road, where swamps and debris were known to hunters, the eye today views the splendid runways for the planes which will guard our coast," he marveled.¹¹

In March 1943, the Navy designated the former Cape May Airport as a Navy auxiliary air facility (NAAF), but soon after—on April 1, 1943—it was commissioned as the United States Naval Air Station Rio Grande, so-named for the closest post office located in the unincorporated village of Rio Grande. Due to difficulty in obtaining adequate mail, telegram, and telephone service resulting from confusion with Rio Grande, Texas, the station was re-designated two months later as USNAS Wildwood—named for the Borough of Wildwood located 4 miles to the east.¹²

At the time of commissioning, the station was directly under the authority of the Commandant, Fourth Naval District, and was assigned the mission of providing facilities and services for the operation of Fleet Units under Commander, Fleet Air, Quonset Point. CDR Francis Ballantyne Connell (ca. 1898-?), a retired aircraft carrier pilot recalled for wartime service, became the station's first commanding officer. A Philadelphia native who once summered in Cape May and was most recently a civilian airline executive, Connell quickly assured the Greater Wildwood Chamber of Commerce that the naval air station would

⁸ Jeffrey Dorwart, *Naval Air Station Wildwood at War 1943-1945* (privately printed, 2005), p. 4.

⁹ Shettle, p. 227.

¹⁰ Shettle, p. 227; Draemel, section II, p. 2; *Hangar No. 1*, Nomination to the State and National Registers of Historic Places, supplemental information dated 9-2003; "Navy Assumes Control of New Air Station at Rio Grande," *Star and Wave* (Cape May, NJ), 4-8-1943, p. 1.

¹¹ *The Leader*, Wildwood, 1-28-1943.

¹² Dorwart, *Naval Air Station Wildwood*, p. 4-5; "Navy Assumes Control of New Air Station at Rio Grande," *Star and Wave* (Cape May, NJ), 4-8-1943, p. 1.

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bring a half-million dollar payroll and new business to the Jersey Cape. Indeed, the station advertised jobs in local newspapers for civilian stenographers, clerical help, storekeepers, and bookkeepers with a pay scale of between \$1,250 and \$1,620 a year.¹³

NASW Buildings and Structures

A site plan dated February 28, 1946 [fig. 6 in the *Historic Photographs and Supplemental Images* section] shows that a total of 126 buildings were erected during the war, the largest being the wood-framed hangars No.1 and No. 2 (both extant), the mess hall (extant, highly altered), a store house (extant, highly altered), and the ship's service/post office.

It is not known to what degree standardized plans were used for the air station's buildings, and it is estimated that the Navy built most of its wartime buildings to temporary specifications, intended to last for five years. Full and half-hangars similar in design to those at NASW are seen regularly in historic photographs taken of naval air stations in the eastern part of the United States and they were a "Standard Wood Hangar" designed by the Department of the Navy. The architect, Albert Kahn, a consultant to the military services since World War I, produced many of the designs for naval installations – especially those for air hangars – and it is possible that he designed the Standard Wood Hangar.¹⁴

Designs for operations centers and control towers seem to have varied much more. Control towers, with the distinctive observation "cab" on top, are typically part of the operations building or (in seemingly equal numbers) are placed on top of a hangar, usually in a corner facing the runways. There may have been some standardization of design for operation buildings, since that at NAS Memphis bears a striking resemblance to that at NASW. [fig. 12] Other buildings, like NASW's ready rooms [seen in fig. 4], were simple rectangular boxes with little or no ornamentation. The use of hollow terra-cotta blocks for the construction of the firehouse/garage, the armament repair building, the sewage pump house, and the station maintenance building at NASW cannot be explained beyond the fact that the blocks were lightweight yet strong, inexpensive, and fireproof. Their use in these buildings brought an interesting variation from the dozens of wood frame buildings erected elsewhere on the site.

Air Combat Training at NASW

Naval air stations served a variety of purposes; however, only seven of them on the east coast were utilized for training dive bombers: NAS Wildwood in New Jersey; NAAS (Naval Auxiliary Air Station) Manteo in North Carolina, NAS Quonset Point in Rhode Island, NAAS Cecil Field, NAS Miami and NAS Vero Beach in Florida, and NAAS Oceana in Virginia.

NASW went through several phases of wartime operation; of New Jersey's five naval air stations, NASW was the third largest in terms of manpower support and with NAS Atlantic City was responsible for fighter training. Upon its commissioning on April 1, 1943, NASW was intended to serve as the training ground for the formation of complete air groups to operate from aircraft carriers. However, by June 1943, NASW was being used only for the training of dive bombing squadrons, with the other common air carrier group

¹³ Dorwart, *Naval Air Station Wildwood*, p. 5.

¹⁴ Hangar No. 1 National Register nomination.

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constituents (fighting, bombing, and torpedo training) relegated to other stations. With an expansion in late 1943, the number of aircraft assigned to the station rose to over 200.¹⁵

The Navy commissioned its first squadron at the new station in April 1943. Carrier Aircraft Service Unit 23 (CASU-23), based at NASW, trained the squadron's 443 officers and 2,497 enlisted men. LCDR Joseph P. Black, a veteran dive bomber pilot with service on aircraft carriers Lexington and Saratoga, took command of squadron instruction at NASW. Except for the inclusion of a single fighter squadron from September to November 1944, NASW trained only dive bombing squadrons until January 1945. At that time, training of dive bombing squadrons relocated to NAS Manteo, with only fighter-bomber (VBF) squadrons based at NASW. The training of fighter-bomber squadrons was improved at NASW with the installation of two rocket targets on the southwestern shore of the Delaware Bay located about 20 miles to the southwest.¹⁶

Within four months, the dive bombing squadrons had returned to NASW as the facilities at NAS Manteo proved insufficient for training. From June to August 1945, "a perfected and concentrated program of training had been developed and was in full operation" for both dive bomber and fighter bomber squadrons at NASW. In July 1945, facilities at the station were further improved and a 20MM School and CV Navigation Program were developed.¹⁷

Two "outlying fields," one in Delaware (Georgetown) and the other in Woodbine, Cape May County, provided additional runways and fields for carrier landing practice for both NASW and Naval Air Station Atlantic City.¹⁸

Prior to arrival at NASW, pilots spent three months in basic training and several other months in ground school, squadron training, and pre-flight training. Routine training at NASW included individual bombing practice, division and squadron diving, glide bombing, anti-submarine warfare strafing, navigation, fixed and free gunnery, night flying, and instrument instruction. Practice targets that included scrapped boats and an abandoned lighthouse were located in uninhabited marshes and inlets along the Delaware Bay. Field carrier landing practice was conducted on the station's three 5,000' runways and later at the outlying fields. Intensive training led to many accidents and resulted in the deaths of at least 42 known airmen at NASW. The noise and fires caused by these accidents, combined with the nearly-incessant roar of aircraft engines shattered Cape May County's usually quiet seashore resorts, particularly during the crowded summer months. Local residents complained often in the newspapers about Navy aircraft buzzing beaches and rooftops.¹⁹

The summer and fall of 1944 were particularly busy. During this interval, aircraft stationed there averaged 200, officers 500, enlisted personnel 2500, and civilian employees 350. Fourteen squadrons were commissioned during this period and were deployed to aircraft carriers after having completed their training.²⁰

¹⁵ Shettle, p. 227.

¹⁶ Dorwart, *Naval Air Station Wildwood*, p. 5-6.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Dorwart, p. 7; Draemel, Section II, p. 3.

¹⁹ Dorwart, p. 6-7; bombing target scrapbook in Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum archives

²⁰ Dorwart, p. 8-9.

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Between June 1, 1945 and August 14, 1945, NASW operated at its highest level since commissioning and on one day during this period, landings and take-offs totaled an astounding 1,156. The highest monthly total occurred in October 1944, with 16,994 takeoffs and landings accommodating as many as 200 planes.²¹

Successful aerial combat by Navy pilots operating from carrier ships in the Pacific became crucial in securing victory over Japan and its highly-trained air fighters. Thus, NASW's mission to train fighter-bomber squadrons was a critical component in the war effort. US Navy Commodore Gordon Rowe (1915-1995), writing on April 21, 1945 to the Commandant of the Fourth Naval District, specifically praised NASW's training efforts:

[I have] recently been in receipt of complimentary expressions as regards the training received by CV Air Groups that have been sent to the Pacific. The heart of the CV training program on the East Coast might very well be said to exist at three (3) type fields: namely, Wildwood, Atlantic City, and Quonset. The first two are in the FOURTH Naval District, and [I] desire to state that these two fields have been exemplary in taking care of the Fleet Units based thereon.²²

By war's end, Navy statistics show that a total of 28 bombing squadrons trained at NASW; of the 28, 18 went on to serve in the important Pacific arena. Similarly, the Navy's meager seven air stations in 1938 had grown to 257 by the end of the war seven years later, illustrating that the Navy's airfield construction program was one of the largest construction projects the U.S. ever undertook.²³

Station Personnel

The station's enlisted personnel complement grew from 122 at its commissioning to 362 by the time the station closed in 1946. The enlisted crewmen, with the exception of the African-American members of the Stewards branch, were 100% Caucasian when the station was commissioned. The first WAVES arrived in March 1944 and they eventually operated the control tower, flight control, communications, dispensary, link trainer (flight simulator) instruction, and gunnery training along with clerical duties.²⁴

By May 1, 1945, enlisted men were 61.7% Caucasian and 21.8% African-American; 58 WAVES provided the balance of enlisted personnel (16.5%). Civilians were used for secretarial, janitorial, guard, and fire-fighting positions, bringing important payroll dollars and new business to the county. Their numbers increased from 10 in April 1943 to 76 in June 1943, and peaked in June 1945 at 362 with fully one-half from Wildwood and Cape May City. The station also employed ten civilians from Whitesboro, a nearby African American community. In June 1945, 125 German prisoners-of-war were brought in to maintain roads and help control the mosquito population by digging drainage ditches in the swampy areas near the air station.²⁵

As the numbers of planes being flown and the numbers of men manning them increased, additional living facilities were needed. Hotel Dennis in Wildwood was leased and occupied by 150 men; similarly, 250

²¹ Draemel, Section II, p. 2.

²² as quoted in Draemel, section II, 9-10.

²³ Shettle, p. 7.

²⁴ Dorwart, p. 5; Draemel, section (b)1-2.

²⁵ Dorwart, p. 5; Draemel, section (b)1-2; WAVE activities cited in *The Osprey*, bi-monthly station magazine, August 1945.

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officers were quartered in the Admiral Hotel in Cape May City. Eight “huts” were also erected in the western part of the base to house 190 men.²⁶

The great influx of trainees brought a corresponding growth in local off-duty entertainment clubs. New places opened every week in both Wildwood and Cape May City, including Hunt’s Starlight Ballroom in Wildwood which featured “the best boogie-woogie performers.” Dinner dances, beach parties, golf outings (with reduced greens fees for officers and enlisted men), turkey buffets, and motion pictures were also popular entertainment and relaxation venues, as were baseball, softball, and basketball leagues organized at the station. The WAVEs had their own bowling league. African-American enlisted personnel had no sports outlet at the station and frequented either a segregated USO club in Cape May City or several old Negro night clubs in Wildwood.²⁷

NASW After the War

The Navy continued to train pilots for a few months after the end of WWII in August 1945, and seemed anxious to keep the station after the war, presenting a huge Navy Day celebration at NASW in November 1945 with 93 of the war’s most popular fighter planes—Avengers, Hellcats, Corsairs, and Helldivers—putting on an air show for the public.²⁸

However, the Navy pulled its training program out of the station by the end of the year. Several Cape May County politicians tried to prevent the air station from closing, hoping to boost the economic life of the region in the post-war period, but the Navy was not swayed. In April of 1946, the Navy turned the station over to the War Assets Administration (WAA) for disposition. At that time, at least 79 of the 126 buildings were sold and moved off-site, among them store houses (40’ x 60’), “huts” ranging in size from 16’ x 16’ to 20’ x 48’, a line shack (25’ x 25’), a training building (35’ x 260’), and the WAVE barracks (35’ x 136’).²⁹ On December 1, 1947, the station property was returned to the County of Cape May for use as the Cape May County Airport, a use that continues today.³⁰

By 1949, the former base had been transformed into an industrial park with 5 companies signing leases for buildings at the county airport that year. Industrialization was slowed, however, by a reversionary clause in the deed of transfer that permitted the federal government to reclaim the airport in an emergency simply by serving notice of repossession with no obligation to pay damages. This clause was removed in December 1965. Seasonal passenger airline service began in 1948, and year-round service in 1970.³¹

A site plan drawn for the Cape May County Airport in 1951 and updated to 1957 [fig. 9] shows that only 21 substantially-sized buildings remained from the World War II era on the site at that time:

²⁶ Draemel., section II, p. 5-6.

²⁷ Dorwart, *Naval Air Station Wildwood*, p. 9-12; *The Osprey* (2-26-1944) [NASW bi-monthly newsletter]

²⁸ Margaret Reget Scrapbook at Naval Air Station Wildwood Museum.

²⁹ “Notice of Availability for Sale, 79 Surplus Government Buildings and Fixtures,” (undated newspaper ad, ca. 1946), NASW Museum archives; *Star and Wave*, 9-13-1945, 10-11-1945; *Wildwood Leader*, 11-22-1945.

³⁰ “Notice of Availability?”; Dorwart, *Naval Air Station Wildwood*, p. 14.

³¹ Cape May County Airport and Industrial Park, 1977 Annual Report.

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Hangar No.1	Hangar No. 2	Ready room #1	Engine school	Ready room #2
Air command office	Aviation utility shop "D"	Heating plant "B"	Photographic Laboratory	Aviation utility shop "A"
Reservoir & pump house	Sewage pump house	Armament repair shop	Storehouse	Station maintenance shop
Open storage shed	Firehouse & garage	Administration building	Operations bldg. & control tower	Mess hall
Paint and oil storage building				

*Those marked in bold are extant.

The site plan also shows that those buildings not sold off were being actively used for other purposes in the 1950s as part of the industrial park. Allegheny Airlines, the NJ Department of Defense, and the Civil Air Patrol had offices in the operations building, as did the County of Cape May. Hangar No.1 was home to United States Overseas Airlines, while Hangar No. 2 was used by Young's Flying Service which gave flying lessons and performed maintenance on airplanes. [fig. 10] The mess hall was used as a canning house by F.H. Snow Canning Company, which also used the administration building and the station maintenance shop for storage. The County of Cape May used the firehouse and garage building to house the airport fire and maintenance departments, as well as the county road department. The large storehouse at the corner of Yorktown and North Roads was used by A.C. Anderson as a manufacturing facility. The NJ Department of Defense was using the armament repair shop as an armory. One new building was constructed by 1951--a 9-bay garage south of Hangar No. 2 being used by the NJ Department of Defense.

Hangar No. 1 housed various tenants over the years, most of them operating as profitable independent airlines. The longest tenant was United Overseas Airlines which occupied the hangar from 1949 to 1964. A privately owned airline, it was started by Dr. Ralph Cox, a dentist who served as a U.S. Navy flyer during the war and who began his airline with war surplus airplanes he refurbished.³²

By the mid-1990s, Hangar No. 1 had been abandoned for several years and was seemingly destined for demolition by neglect. Dr. Joseph Salvatore, a retired orthopedic surgeon from nearby Cold Spring, rescued the building in 1997, establishing an aviation museum in the building dedicated to the memory of the Navy airmen killed while training at the air station, and successfully listing the building in the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Many grants over the years have aided the immense hangar's restoration.

Of the 19 WWII-era buildings and structures shown on the 1951 site plan, 12 are extant today (2012) in a cluster at the south end of the site. Of these, only four retain sufficient integrity to form a cohesive historic district: hangar No.1 (listed individually in the State and National Registers of Historic Places), hangar No. 2, operations building/terminal, and the sewage pump house located immediately behind the operations building. Because of their association with two important World War II developments—the military's rapid

³² Joseph Salvatore, MD and Joan Berkey, *Naval Air Station Wildwood* (Arcadia, 2010), p. 119.

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Section number 8 Page 9

Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District

Cape May County, New Jersey

build-up of facilities during WWII and the Navy's dive bomber program which played a decisive role in the war's outcome—this group of four buildings comprises an historic district that is nationally significant under Criterion A in the area of military.

United States Department of the Interior
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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**
Section number 9 Page 1

Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District
Cape May County, NJ

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Hangar No. 1 National Register nomination.

Margaret Reget Scrapbook [NASW Aviation Museum archives]

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 10 Page 1**Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District**
Cape May County, New Jersey**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property comprises 11.31 acres of block 410.01, lot 36 in Lower Township, Cape May County, New Jersey. The boundary points, shown on an annotated aerial photograph of the historic district, are described as follows:

ALL that portion of land, concrete apron, adjoining Hangar No. 1, the Cape May County Airport Terminal Building and Hangar No. 60 at the Cape May County Airport as shown in the plan entitled "Cape May County Airport, Proposed Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District," as prepared by the Office of the Cape May County Engineer on September 20, 2012 and revised to April 12, 2013 and being more particularly bounded and described as follows:

BEGINNING at a point in the northerly line of Forrestal Road (40' wide) and 78.70 feet west of the extended centerline of Langley Road as shown on the above referenced plan and proceeding from said point of beginning;

1) Due North, at right angles to the aforesaid northerly line of Forrestal Road, four-hundred and thirteen (413) feet more or less to the southerly line of a 100 feet wide taxiway, thence;

2) Due East, at right angles to the previous course and along the southerly line of the said 100 feet wide taxiway, seven-hundred and three and twenty one-hundredths (703.20) feet more or less to a point in a line that runs parallel with and along the southwest wall of the modern airport operations office that stands northeast of the original operations building, thence;

3) Southeasterly, along a line parallel with and along the aforesaid southwest wall of the modern airport operations building, fifty-two and ninety-three one-hundredths (52.93) feet more or less, to a point in the northwesterly line of the existing parking lot as shown on the aforementioned plan, thence;

4) Northeasterly, along the said northwesterly line of the aforesaid existing parking lot, seventy-five and sixty-one one-hundredths (75.61) feet more or less to a point of intersection with the northerly line of the aforementioned existing parking lot, thence;

5) Due East, along the said northerly line of the existing parking lot, sixty-three and seventy-four one-hundredths (63.74) feet more or less, to a point of intersection with the easterly line of said existing parking lot, thence;

6) Due south, at right angles to the previous course and along the said easterly line of the existing parking lot, eighty-seven and seven one-hundredths (87.07) feet more or less, to a point of intersection with the southeasterly line of said existing parking lot as shown on the aforementioned plan, thence;

7) Southwesterly, along the said southeasterly line of the existing parking lot, two-hundred and eighty-eight and twenty-eight one-hundredths (288.28) feet, more or less, to the northerly line of the tarmac in front of Hanger No. 2 (a.k.a. Hanger no. 60) as shown on said plan, thence;

8) Due East, along the northerly line of said tarmac one-hundred and sixty-six and fifteen one-hundredths (166.15) feet, more or less, to a point in the easterly line of lands now or formerly leased to NEW CAL AVIATION, (Hangar No. 60, a.k.a. Hangar No. 2) said point being 95 feet west of the westerly line of the North-South Runway (a.k.a. Runway 1-19) thence;

9) Due South, at right angles to the previous course, parallel with and 95 feet west of the said westerly line of the North-South Runway (a.k.a. Runway 1-19) and along the easterly line of the aforementioned lands now or formerly leased to NEW CAL AVIATION, six-hundred and thirty and twenty-four one-hundredths (630.24) feet more or less, to a point in the southerly line of the said lands now or formerly leased to NEW CAL AVIATION, thence;

10) Due West, at right angles to the previous course and along the said southerly line of the said lands now or formerly leased to NEW CAL AVIATION, three-hundred and sixteen and eighty-four one-hundredths (316.84) feet more or less to a point in the easterly line of East Road (a.k.a. Monterey Road), thence;

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Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 1

Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District

Cape May County, New Jersey

11) Due North, at right angles to the previous course and along the said easterly line of East Road (a.k.a. Monterey Road), five-hundred and fourteen and two one-hundredths (514.02) feet, more or less, to a point in the extended northerly line of Forrestal Road, thence;

12) Due West, at right angles to the previous course and along the said northerly line of Forrestal Road, five-hundred and twenty-six and twenty-three one-hundredths (526.23) feet to the point and place of beginning, CONTAINING within the above described premises, 11.31 acres of land more or less.

The above described premises being a portion of Lot No. 36, Block No. 410.01, Lower Township, Cape May County, N.J.

Verbal Boundary Justification:

The boundary of the nominated property encloses the four extant WWII buildings that retain integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. Although eight other WWII naval air station buildings are extant to the south and west, they have been highly altered over the years with modern additions and significant changes to fenestration, exterior cladding, and even building height. Several have been greatly enlarged and little of the original footprint remains. The flagpole does retain integrity, but its location at the junction of Langley, Lexington, and Ranger roads is more than 500 feet from the proposed district, making it difficult to include it within the proposed boundaries without incorporating several non-contributing buildings.

The inclusion of additional land around the three historic buildings reflects a 131' zone of land around Hangar No.1 that is leased to the hangar's tenant and is shown in a site plan drawn by William C. Burkett, Jr. dated 5-20-1997. This land is used for air-related and air museum-related uses associated with the historic buildings, and is visually proximate to current airport operations. The northern boundary of the district was drawn to exclude a modern building used for current air operations.

The non-contributing building just north of Hangar No.2 was included within the district because if it were to be lost to fire or was demolished, the design of any structure replacing it will be important to the district.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
photographs**

Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District

Cape May County, NJ

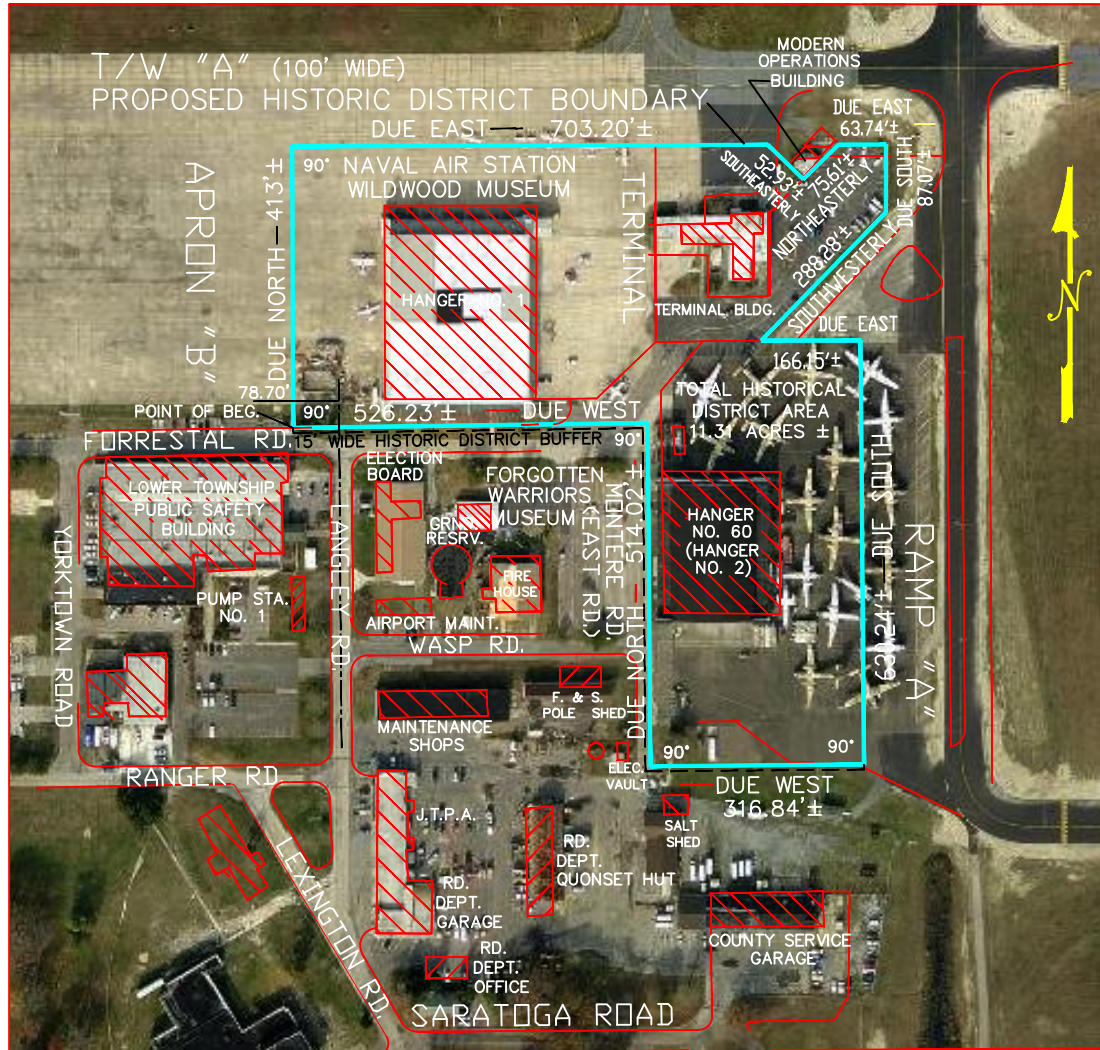
Typical Information for All Photographs

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Name of Property | Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District |
| 2. County and State | Cape May County, New Jersey |
| 3. Photographer | Joan Berkey/Henry Buchy |
| 4. Date of Photograph | Spring 2010, except where noted |
| 6. Location of Digital Copies | Joan Berkey
NJ State Historic Preservation Office |

Photo # and Description of View

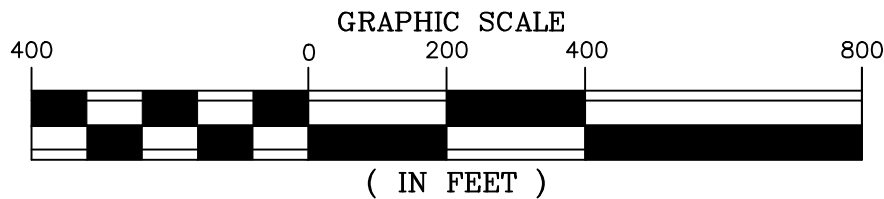
- 1 of 15: Setting: standing in the taxiway, looking southwest; building #60 (Hangar No. 2) is to the left and building #1 (operations building/control tower) is to the right. November 2007
- 2 of 15: Setting: view almost west down Forrestal Road; building #2 (Hangar No. 1) is to the right, and from left to right: modern building outside of district, building #5 (armament repair shop, outside of district), and building #8 (storehouse, outside of district). March 2010
- 3 of 15: Setting: view northeast down Forrestal Road; building #2 (Hangar No. 1) is in the center and building #22 (paint and oil storage, outside of district) is seen to the right. March 2010
- 4 of 15: Setting: view south from the tarmac, showing Hangar No. 1 on the right and Hangar No. 2 in the distance to the left. March 2010
- 5 of 15: Building #1 (operations building and control tower), view southwest showing façade (east elevation) and north side elevation. March 2010
- 6 of 15: Building #1 (operations building and control tower), view northeast showing rear (west) elevation and south side elevation; also showing building #34 (sewage pump house, now known as #94 boiler room), rear (west) and south side elevations. March 2010
- 7 of 15: Setting: view east down apron between Hangar No. 1 and the operations building/control tower. The small modern building in the distance is the airport office which is not in the historic district. March 2010
- 8 of 15: Aerial view of setting, looking east toward the operations building and sewage pump house (#34, now known as #94 boiler room) from the roof of Hangar No. 1. November 2007
- 9 of 15: Sewage pump house (building #34, now known as #94 boiler room), view southwest showing façade (east elevation) and north side elevation. May 2010
- 10 of 15: Building #2 (Hangar No. 1), view southwest showing façade (east elevation) and north side elevation. March 2010
- 11 of 15: Building #2 (Hangar No. 1), view northeast showing south side elevation and rear (west) elevation. March 2010
- 12 of 15: Building #60 (Hangar No. 2), view southeast showing façade (north elevation) and west side elevation. March 2010
- 13 of 15: Building #60 (Hangar No. 2), view northeast showing rear (south elevation) and west side elevation. March 2010
- 14 of 15: Hangar No. 2, view southwest showing the façade (north elevation) and the east side elevation. November 2007
- 15 of 15: Pen Turbo building (non-contributing building), view southeast showing façade (west elevation) and north side elevation. March 2010

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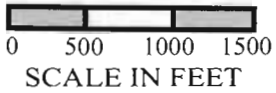
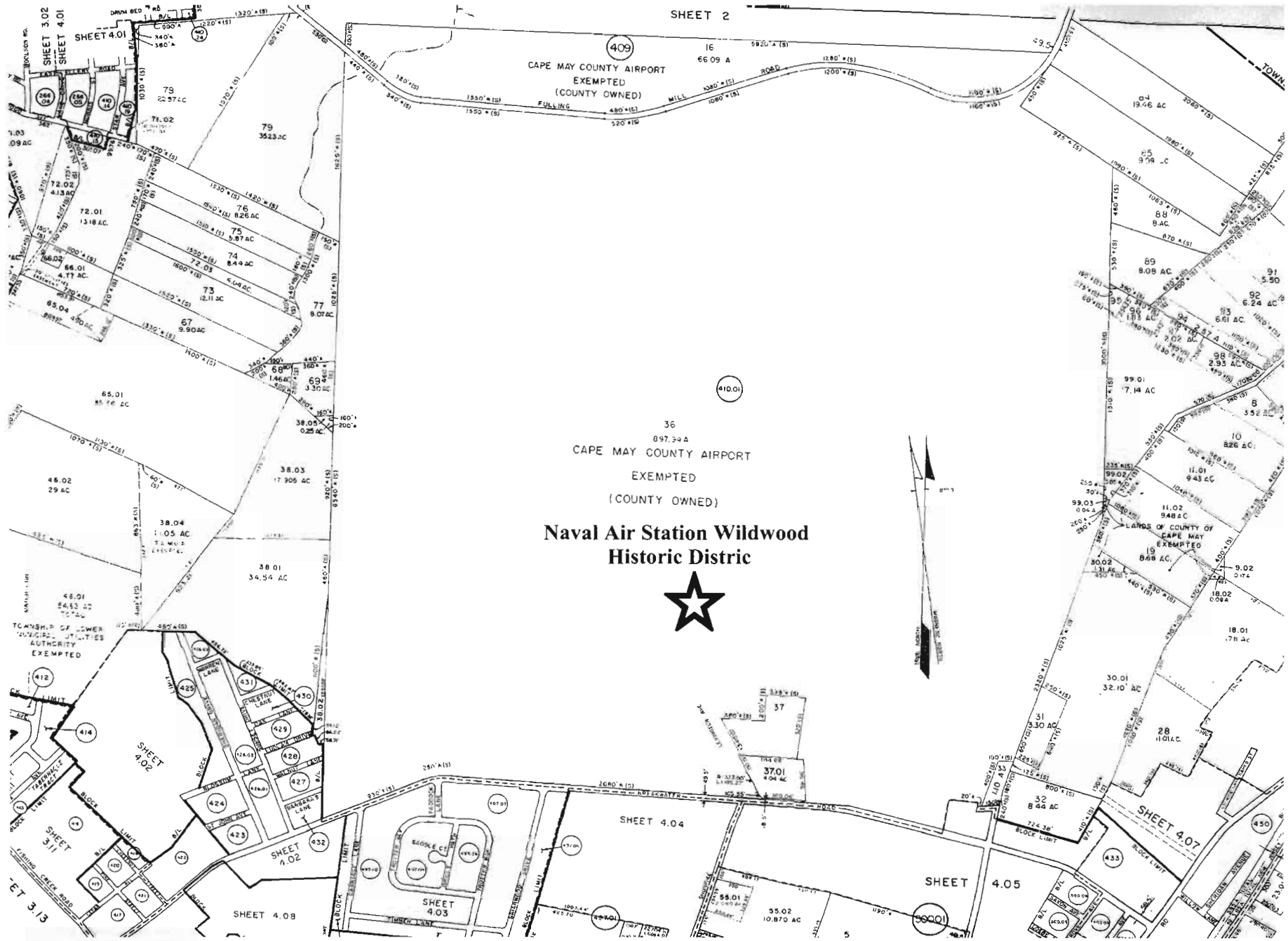


PROPOSED NAVAL AIR STATION WILDWOOD HISTORIC DISTRICT DETAIL

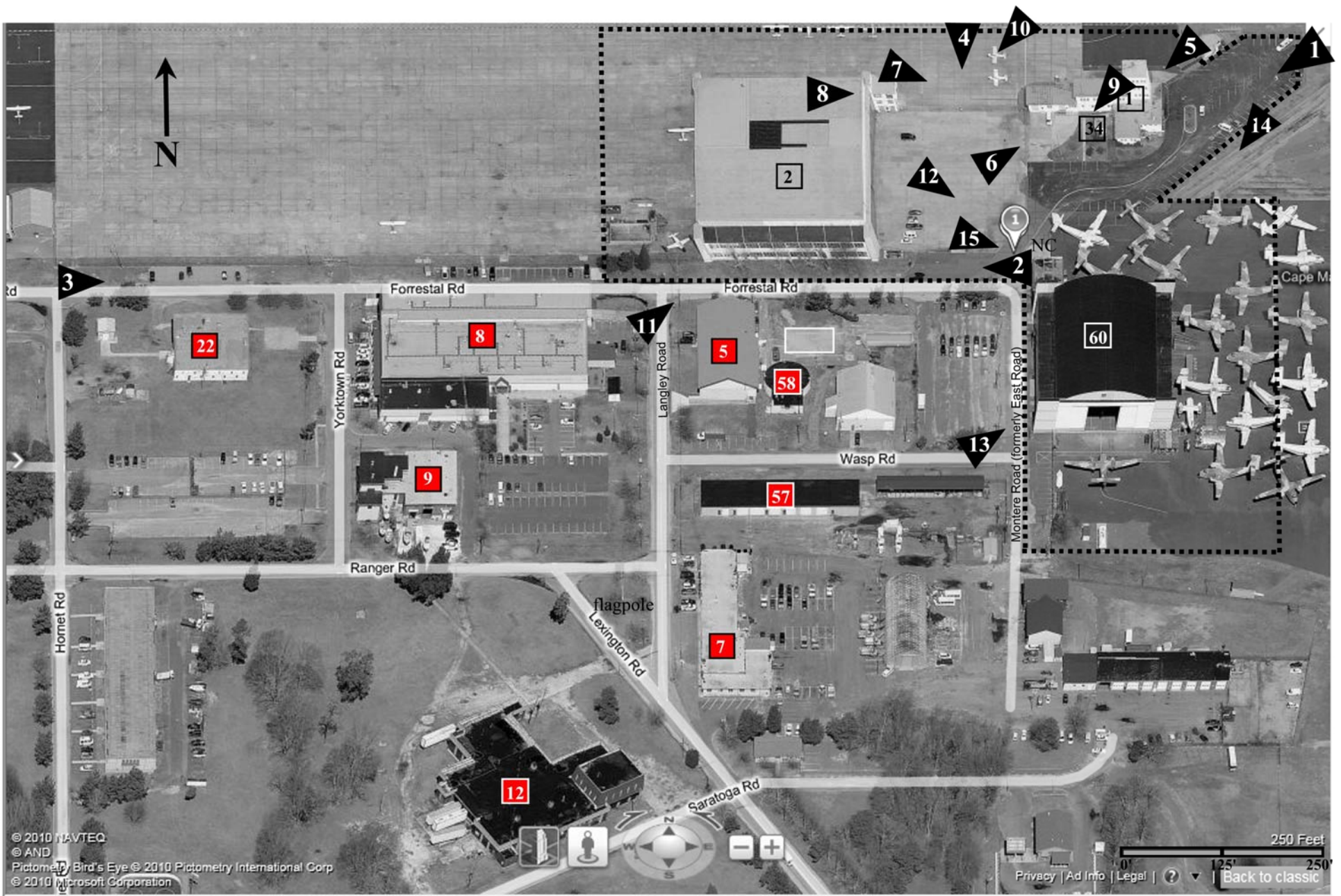
NOTE: TOTAL HISTORIC DISTRICT TRACT AREA = 11.31 ACRES ±



DIST. BUFFER/DIMENSIONS	WCB	WCB	4/12/2013
DISTRICT BOUNDARY	WCB	WCB	2/28/2013
REVISION	BY	CK'D	DATE



Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District
 Tax Map Annotated to Show Historic District Block and Lot
 block 410.01, lot 36, Lower Township, Cape May County, NJ



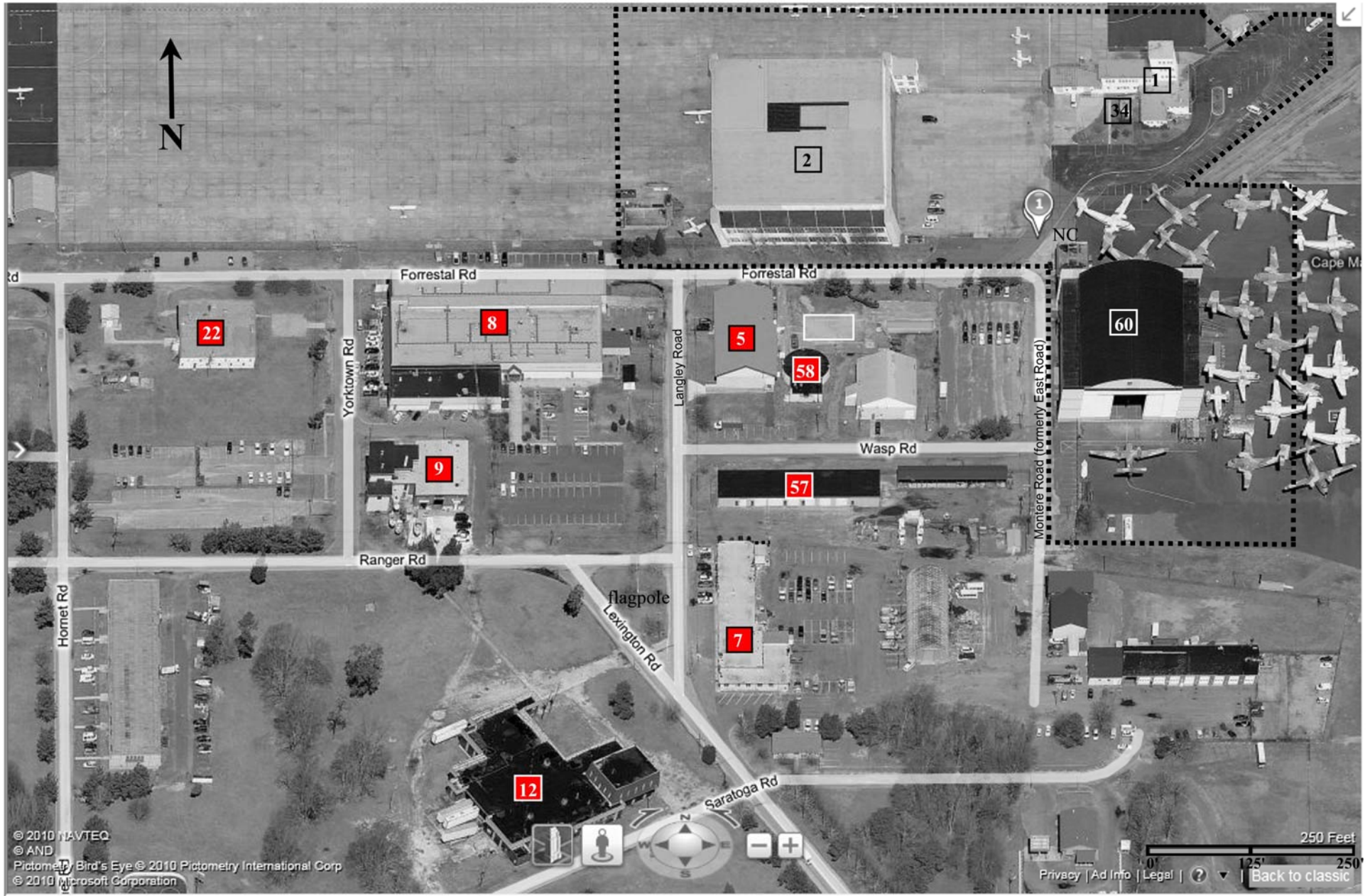
**Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District
 Aerial Photograph Annotated
 for Photographs**

..... district boundary

- 7 historic NASW building
- 7 historic NASW building with loss of integrity

- 1. operations building/control tower
- 2. Hangar No. 1 (KEY)
- 5. armament repair shop
- 7. firehouse and garage
- 8. storehouse
- 9. station maintenance shop
- 12. mess hall
- 22. paint and oil storage
- 34. sewage pump house (now #94 boiler room)
- 57. open storage shed
- 58. reservoir and pump house
- 60. Hangar No. 2

Non-contributing within district:
 NC--Pen Turbo Aviation



**Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District
Aerial Photograph Annotated
to Show Boundaries and Historic Buildings
Outside of the District**

..... district boundary

7 historic NASW building

7 historic NASW building with loss of integrity

- 1. operations building/control tower
- 2. Hangar No. 1 (KEY)
- 5. armament repair shop
- 7. firehouse and garage
- 8. storehouse
- 9. station maintenance shop

- 12. mess hall
- 22. paint and oil storage
- 34. sewage pump house (now #94 boiler room)
- 57. open storage shed
- 58. reservoir and pump house
- 60. Hangar No. 2
- Non-contributing within district:
NC--Pen Turbo Aviation



Naval Air Station Wildwood
Historic District
Aerial Photograph Annotated
for Boundary Points

Lower Township
Cape May County, NJ



**Historic Photographs and Supplemental Images
Naval Air Station Wildwood Historic District**

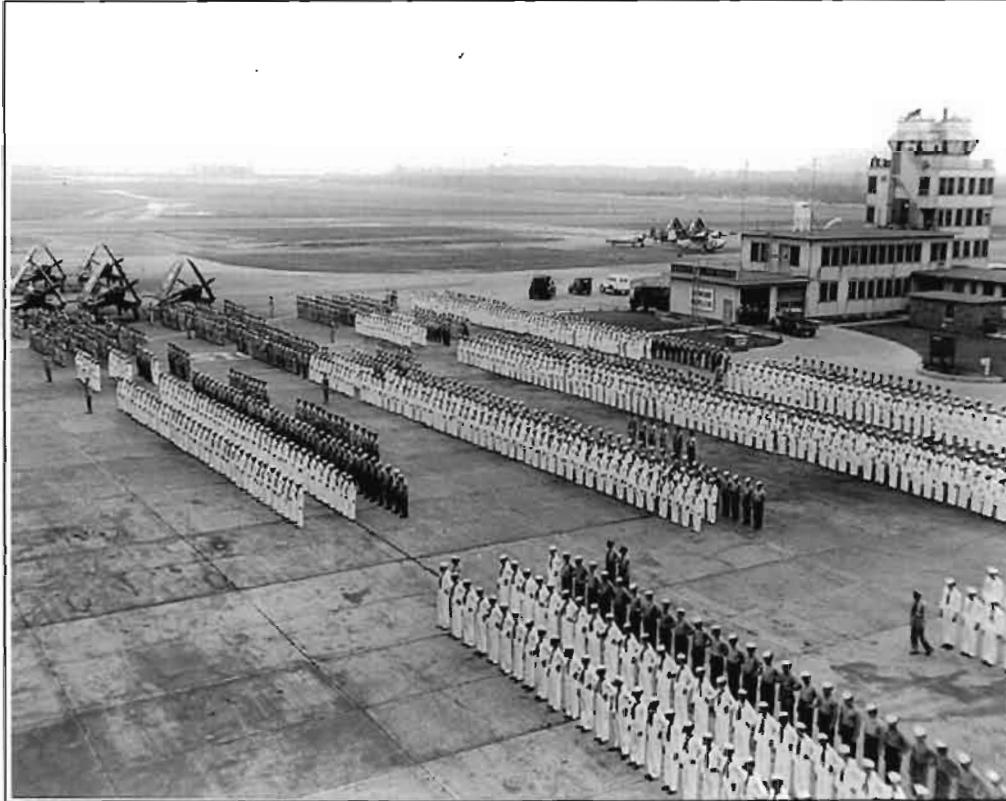


Figure 1: ca. 1944 photograph showing the operations building with control tower, the sewage pump house, the apron, and the east-west runway. View northeast.

[courtesy of Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum]



Figure 2: close-up photograph of the control tower with the sewage pump house shown in the foreground. Ca. 1946? View northeast.

[courtesy of Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum]

Figure 3 (below): ca. 1946 photograph of Hangar No. 2, looking northeast. This view shows the windows of the offices on the west side which are now covered over.

[courtesy of Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum]

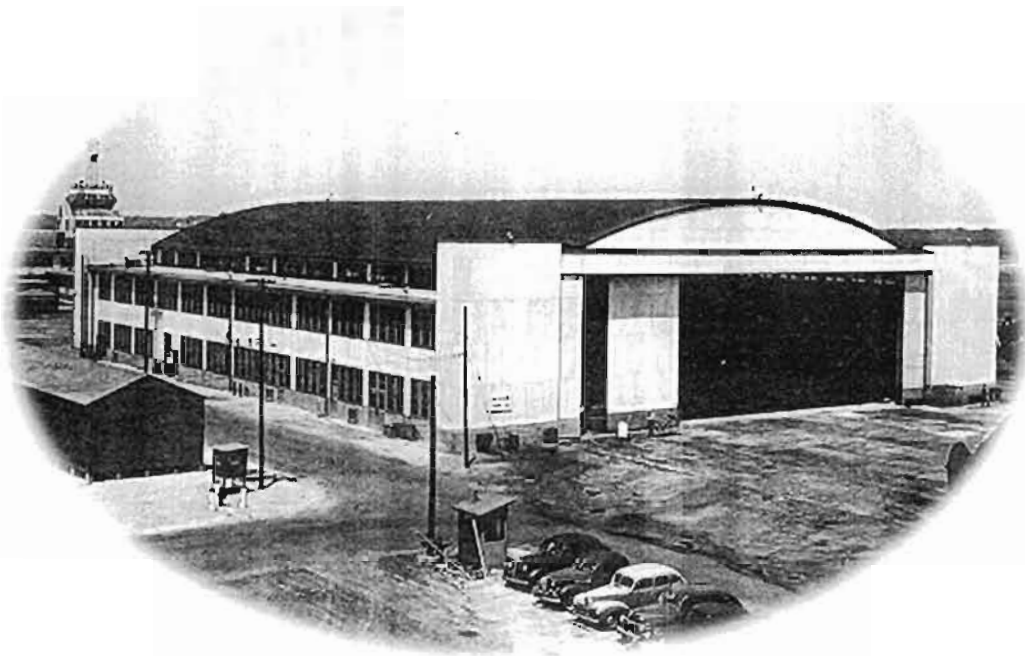


Figure 4: Hangar No. 2 as it appeared in 1945, view southeast. Note the wood frame buildings, mostly “ready rooms,” to the right of the hangar; only the hangar is extant today.

[courtesy of Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum]

Figure 5: recent (2007) view of Hangar No. 2 showing the west (side) elevation with its original clerestory windows. This photo was taken from the roof of Hangar No. 1, looking southeast.





Figure 6 (above): 1945 aerial view of Naval Air Station Wildwood, looking northwest. Hangar No. 2 is seen at the far right. [National Archives, as found in Shettle, *Naval Air Stations of WWII*, Vol. I, p. 226]

Figure 7 (below): another aerial view, ca. 1944, looking almost south. The operations building/control tower and Hangar No. 1 are seen to the far left in the foreground; hangar No. 2 and several other buildings have not yet been erected. [U.S. *Naval Air Station Wildwood, NJ Passes in Review*, 1945 (Cape May County Library)]



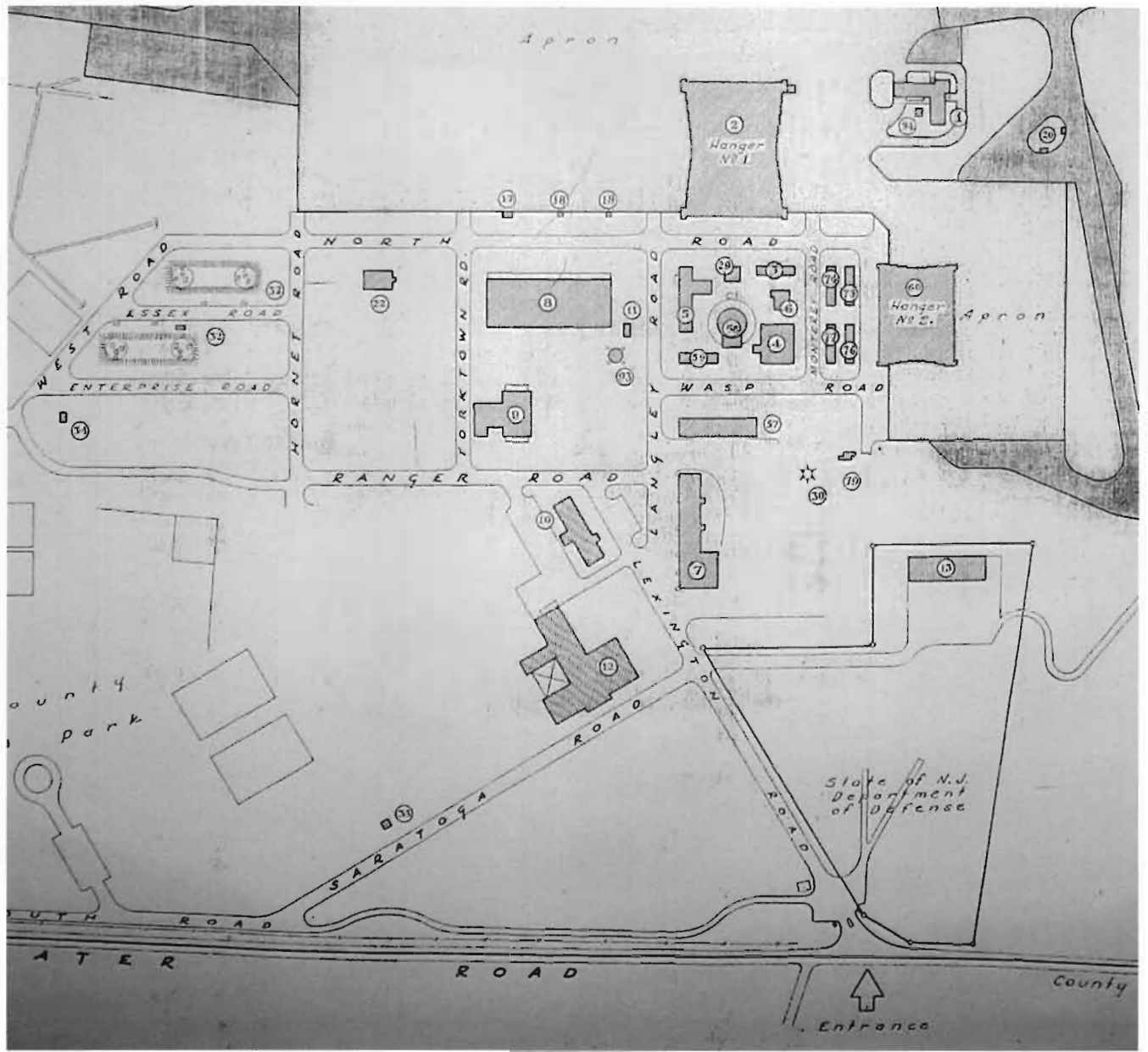


Figure 8: 1951 site plan (updated to 1957) of the Cape May County Airport

The site plan shows most of the former air station buildings extant at that time, including numerous structures like gasoline storage tanks (to the left), bunkers, and pump houses. Building #13 (a garage south of Hangar No. 2) along with several other small buildings shown here, are not found on the original site plan and were built after WWII. [courtesy of Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum]



Figure 9: ca. 1950 brochure advertising Wildwood Airport and Young's Flying Service. The photograph second from the top shows the operations building, sewage pump house, and Hangar No. 2, looking northwest.



[courtesy of Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum]



This customer airplane is receiving complete overhaul in Young's well equipped shop.

Pictured below are: Center, Maurice C. Young, owner and operator of Young's Flying Service at Wildwood and Woodbine Airports.

Young has 8 years aviation experience and served in the Army Air Force as a flight commander. Left, Robert (Bob) King, manager and chief pilot of Woodbine school. Bob is a former stunt pilot for the movies with 24 years aviation experience. Right: Mr. Paul King, manager and chief pilot of the Wildwood school. Paul has been in aviation for 12 years and holds the following ratings: Commercial Flight instructor, single and multi-engine land and instrument.

Young's Flying Service offers complete service and maintenance for transport aircraft.





Figure 10 (left): Hangar at Naval Air Station Atlantic City, ca. 1960. This structure shows the similarity in hangar design with those at USNASW.

[courtesy of Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum]



Figure 11: operations building and control tower at NAS Memphis, Tennessee, ca. 1945. Note the similarity of design between this tower and the one at NAS Wildwood.

[Shettle, p. 136]



Figure 12: operations building and control tower at NAS Wildwood, ca. 1945. View west, showing Hangar No. 1 in the background.

[courtesy of Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum]



Figure 13: ca. 1960 photograph, looking north. Hangar No. 1 is seen in the upper right and the mess hall, with a second story added to its southeast corner is at the bottom center of the photograph. [courtesy of Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum]

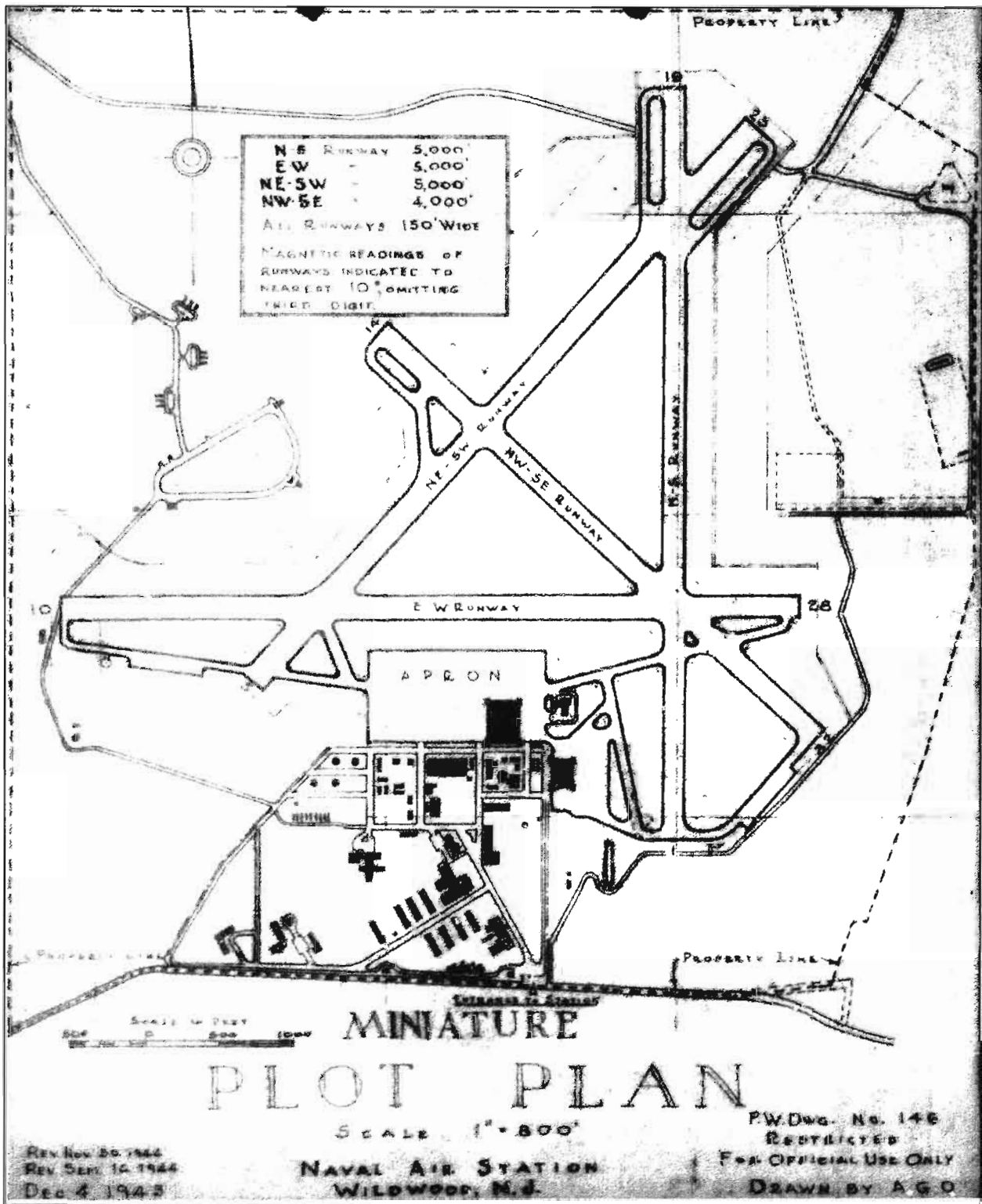


Figure 14: miniature plot plan drawn December 4, 1942, with revisions in September and November 1944. [courtesy of Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum]



Figure 15: 1944 aerial photograph of Naval Air Station Wildwood, looking northeast. When this photo was taken, Hangar No. 2 was being built and the site was reaching its full complement of 126 buildings and structures. [courtesy of Naval Air Station Wildwood Aviation Museum]



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict1



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict2



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict3



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict4



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict5



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict6



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict7



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict8



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict9



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict10



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict11



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict12



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict13



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict14



NJ_CapeMayCounty_NavalAirStationWildwoodHistoricDistrict15