



Historic Context for Evaluating Mid-Century Modern Military Buildings

Project # 11-448

Background:

The DoD owns thousands of buildings constructed from the 1950s through the mid-1970s that have reached the fifty-year mark or that will reach the fifty-year mark in the next few years. Many of these buildings are associated with architectural Modernism, but there is not a large amount of guidance for surveying Modernist military properties in terms of eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. Many of these properties need to be examined for architectural significance under National Register Criterion C in the coming years in connection with Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.

Objective:

The project objective was to create a guide that would provide several resources useful for those responsible for evaluating or managing military buildings constructed from 1950-1975. These resources included a historic context for Modernism in the DoD, National Register eligibility guidance on evaluating military buildings associated with architectural Modernism, and lists of resources helpful for obtaining information on military buildings dating to the 1950-1975 years.

Summary of Approach:

HDC planned to research and write an overall context on architectural Modernism with an emphasis on Modernism in the DoD. We also planned to focus on several major architectural movements of the 1950 to 1975 years, especially Brutalism, Miesian, New Formalism, and Expressionism. The approach included studying the important visual characteristics of these movements and to analyze how National Register eligibility guidance applies to these movements. Finally, HDC planned to survey a series of sample buildings from the 1950-1975 years at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, to demonstrate the principles and techniques covered in the guide.

Benefit:

The guide will provide ready information on architectural movements and characteristics of buildings dating to 1950-1975. This should save time and money, since cultural resource managers and contractors completing building surveys can find a large amount of information on these properties in one place, instead of having to research several different sources. The information contained in the study will also improve the quality of inventory and evaluation reports that cover buildings dating to the years 1950-1975. The result should be cost and time savings and also a smoother functioning of the historic building inventory and evaluation process.

Accomplishments:

The final product serves as a model context to evaluate military buildings constructed from 1950 to 1970 for architectural significance under National Register Criterion C, as examples of mid-century architecture. Future DoD personnel and contractors will have a ready source of information on evaluation criteria for properties of this type. The availability of this information will help eliminate some of the contextual research that would be needed to properly evaluate these buildings, resulting in cost savings for the DoD.



(Wright-Patterson Area B, 2011, Photo by Hardlines Design Company)

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