

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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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 from the instructions.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: Big Spring Veterans Administration HospitalOther names/site number: Big Spring VA Medical Center; George H. O'Brien VA Medical Center

Name of related multiple property listing:

United States Third Generation Veterans Hospitals, 1946-1958

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

2. LocationStreet & number: 300 Veterans BoulevardCity or town: Big Spring State: TX County: HowardNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___A ___B ___C ___D

Signature of certifying official/Title:_____
Date_____
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

HEALTHCARE / hospital

HEALTH CARE / clinic

HEALTH CARE / medical office

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MID CENTURY MODERN NONRESIDENTIAL / Modern

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK; STUCCO; METAL

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital, currently known as the George H. O'Brien, Jr. VA Medical Center, occupies a 31-acre site in southern Big Spring, part of Howard County, Texas. The district consists of 39 total resources; 7 contributing buildings, 1 contributing structure, 1 contributing object, 12 non-contributing buildings, 17 non-contributing structures, and 1 non-contributing object. Designed by Texas-based architect Wyatt C. Hendrick, the hospital complex is part of the nationwide construction campaign undertaken by the Veterans Administration to accommodate a burgeoning Veteran population after World War II.

The district is dominated by the nine-story main hospital building. The supporting facilities are located to the sides and rear of the campus, keeping the main hospital building as the primary focus of the campus. Tan brick is the primary building material for the original buildings of the campus; later construction features a range of building materials, but several buildings also utilize tan brick. The original buildings reflect the Modern Movement architectural style prevalent during the period of construction, but it is not a notable example of the style.

The contributing resources to the Big Spring campus include the seven buildings from the original campus, which opened in 1950. The non-contributing resources of the facility have been added since its opening and

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are mostly concentrated in the northeast and northwest portions of the campus; these non-contributing resources are of significant smaller scale and half (15 out of 30 non-contributing resources) are solar panels. Representative of new hospitals designed under the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for VA, the main hospital building and associated outbuildings reflect a modern aesthetic with little ornamentation and an emphasis on horizontality.

The hospital remains an active Veterans hospital and part of the nationwide network of hospitals operated by the successor organization to the Veterans Administration, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Narrative Description

The Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital is located in southern Big Spring at the intersection of South Gregg Street and West Marcy Drive. The primary hospital entrance for patients is located on South Gregg Street via West Veterans Boulevard, hence the address of the facility. Secondary entrances are located on Ryon Street at the northern boundary of the campus and West Marcy Drive on the south (see Figure 1).

The hospital is bounded by South Gregg Street (the major north-south axis road for Big Spring) on the east and West Marcy Drive (a multi-lane divided freeway) on the south. As South Gregg Street and West Marcy Drive are major roads for Big Spring, they are lined with small stand alone, small scale commercial developments, such as modern fast food restaurants, surrounded by surface parking lots in the sections near the Big Spring VA hospital. Modest, single-family homes border the property to the northwest and west. The commercial development all appears recent and post-dates the construction of the VA hospital complex. The residential development appears to be ca. early-1950s, suggesting the VA hospital may have encouraged development of the area. Neither the residential nor commercial areas feature significant landscaping efforts; few trees line any of the streets, leaving Resource #1 a prominent figure of the area.

The main hospital building (Resource #1), the largest building of the Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital, is centrally located on the campus and oriented towards the southeast. The nine-story building dwarfs the smaller support facilities that surround the building to the northeast, northwest, and southwest. Former residential buildings, now housing various administration and associated functions, are located to the southwest of the main hospital building. Healthcare support buildings are clustered in the northeastern corner of the property. Facilities such as the boiler plant, warehouse, and other engineering and maintenance facilities are located to the northwest of the main hospital building. New construction is interspersed with the original buildings of the campus and not clustered together in one particular section of the facility. The northwestern portion of the campus has remained fairly undeveloped until recently, notably with the construction of the domiciliary (Resource #18) in 2011.

The campus does not feature elaborate or notable landscape features. Interior roadways loop around the campus buildings to connect the various portions of the campus, but are purely functional in purpose and

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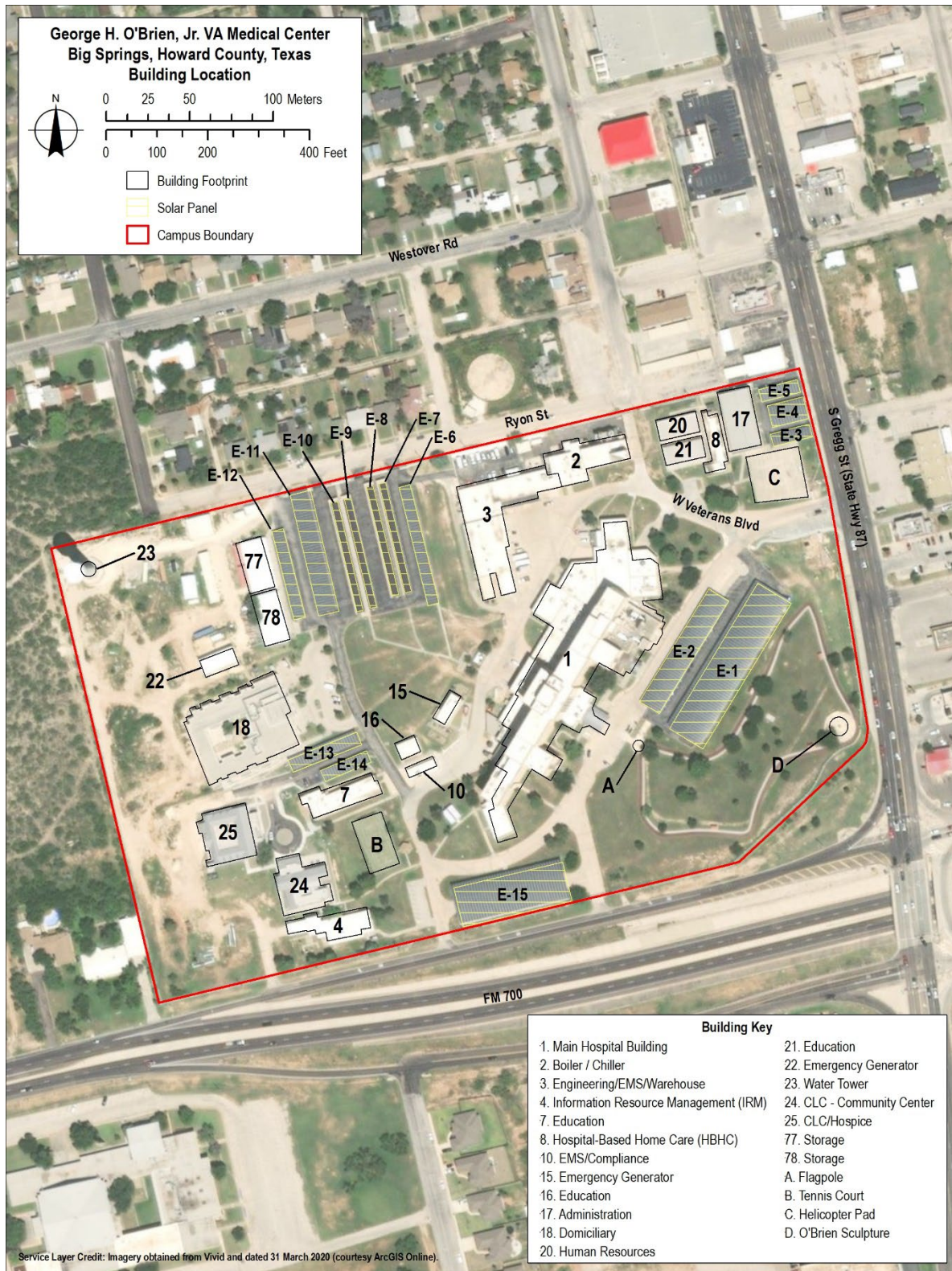


Figure 1: Configuration of the Big Springs VA Hospital, Big Springs, Texas.

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do not provide scenic view of the campus or Big Spring. Landscaping efforts are limited largely to planting adjacent to many of the buildings; there are no formal gardens or landscape features. Some surface parking lots have been added or expanded as parking needs increased since the facility opened in 1950.

The dates of construction, current use, square footage, and details regarding the former use of the following buildings are from VA's internal inventories, including the Capital Asset Inventory, and from information provided by the hospital's engineering department. The building numbers below reflect the number assigned by VA. Smaller components of the hospital site, such as benches or prefabricated storage sheds, are not included in the following inventory.

Resource No.	Resource Type	Current Use	Year Constructed	Status
1	Building	Main Hospital Building	1950	Contributing
2	Building	Boiler House / Chiller	1950	Contributing
3	Building	Engineering / EMS / Warehouse	1950	Contributing
4	Building	IRM	1950	Contributing
7	Building	Education	1950	Contributing
8	Building	HBHC	1950	Contributing
10	Building	EMS / Compliance	1950	Contributing
15	Building	Emergency Generator	1985	Non-contributing
16	Building	Education	2003	Non-contributing
17	Building	Administration	2010	Non-contributing
18	Building	Domiciliary	2011	Non-contributing
20	Building	Human Resources	2012	Non-contributing
21	Building	Education	2012	Non-contributing
22	Building	Emergency Generator	2017	Non-contributing
23	Structure	Water Tower	2016	Non-contributing
24	Building	CLC Community Center	2019	Non-contributing
25	Building	CLC/Hospice	2019	Non-contributing
77	Building	Storage	1995	Non-contributing
78	Building	Storage	2009	Non-contributing

The following resources do not have VA numbers assigned to them; for the purposes of this nomination, the following resource designations have been applied:

Resource No.	Resource Type	Current Use	Year Constructed	Status
A	Object	Flagpole	1950	Contributing
B	Structure	Tennis Court	1950	Contributing
C	Structure	Helicopter Pad	2001	Non-contributing
D	Object	Commemorative Sculpture	2008	Non-contributing
E1-15	Structure	Solar Panels	2015	Non-contributing (15 total resources)

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Resource #1

Historic / Current Use: Main Hospital Building

Year Built: 1950

Status: Contributing

Built in 1950, the main hospital building, Resource #1, of the Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital is located at the southeastern portion of the campus and consists of a total of nine floors and a partial basement (photos 1-6). Oriented in a southeasterly direction, Resource #1 dominates the campus, and contains over 280,000 gross square feet. The reinforced concrete frame building incorporates five individual buildings, each constructed so that the separate buildings merge into one massive hospital block.¹ The main hospital building consists of a central block with two four-story wings flanking the primary façade of the southeast elevation. One-story wings also extend out from the northeast and southwest corners of the main hospital building. The principal wings at the façade give the building an overall stepped appearance.

The exterior of the main hospital building is clad in a light buff brick laid in Flemish bond, which sets the standard for the architecture of the other original buildings on the campus. Resource #1 features stone coping which caps the three uppermost hospital floors. The central portion of the main hospital façade provides a break in the continuous rows of windows that parallel the first six hospital floors.

The building exhibits characteristics of the Modern Movement, as evident in the severe lines and lack of elaborate architectural ornamentation. Cast aluminum spandrels with stone pilasters project above the main entrance, providing a contrasting vertical emphasis to the main hospital façade and offset the broad horizontal stretch of the southeast elevation. The hospital lacks the elaborate Classical and Colonial Revival features of previous VA hospitals that featured cupolas, arched entrances, and cast stone flower garlands; as represented at Big Spring, sleek lines and an emphasis on current architecture styles is favored.

Rows of windows uniformly puncture the southeast and northwest elevations, a design template that emphasizes the horizontality of the main hospital building. Stone molding also borders the repeated rows of windows. The fixed metal-frame windows themselves appear to be replacements, a typical modification for VA hospitals.

Generally, the main hospital building retains the characteristics designed by the architect Wyatt C. Hedrick. The main entrance of Resource #1 is on axis with the flagpole, which survives in its original location. Despite the new metal canopy (added ca. 2011) that obscures the original stone entrance, the Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital retains the primary entrance on the southeast elevation. A one-story projecting wing marks the main entrance; this portion of the building is clad in ashlar to differentiate it from the remaining sections of the building. The original lobby elevators and marble granite walls remain (photo 27), although the original information desk area has been enclosed and original lobby floors and paneling have been replaced. The chapel also remains in its original location, and features the original oak finish and its original pews.² A small addition to the main hospital building is located on the northeast side, while the original rear concrete patio, which faces Resources #2 and #3, has been enclosed. The original double-hung aluminum windows of the original hospital building have been replaced, a common alteration in many Third Generation hospitals; however, the window openings retain contributing architectural features, such as their original size, fenestration pattern, and distinctive banding around the sets of windows.

¹ "Main Building In Reality Is Five Distinct Units," *Big Spring Herald*, 10 September 1950. Microfilm, Collections of the Howard County Library.

² Due to COVID-19 restrictions at the time of the site visit, the chapel could not be photographed.

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In 1994, the West Texas Veterans Health Care System Outpatient Clinic was added onto the southeast side of Resource #1. This addition is only several stories in height, and is clad in matching, sympathetic brick; thus, this addition does not obscure or detract from the primary façade of the main hospital building. With the exception of the Outpatient Clinic, there have been only minimal changes to the primary façade of the main hospital building since its opening in 1950.

The rear (northwest) elevation of Resource #1 has the same projecting brick bands framing the windows on the upper stories, but lacks any of the aluminum detailing or emphasis on verticality found on the main (southeastern) façade. Several small additions have been added to the northwest elevation of Resource #1, but they are clad in the same buff-colored brick and feature the same fenestration pattern as the original portions of the building.

Resource #2

Historic Use: Boiler House
Current Use: Boiler / Chiller
Year Built: 1950
Status: Contributing

The Boiler / Chiller building retains its historic use (photos 7-8). The utilitarian building is located in the northeastern portion of campus. Originally featuring a rectangular footprint, Resource #2 is now connected to Resource #3 via a brick hyphen (linked ca. 1990); however, the two buildings do not share a common roof. The original portion of Resource #2 is a three-story, flat roof, brick building with original stone coping, stone sills and brick soldier course; the bricks are laid in Flemish bond. The building has an irregular footprint. Tall steel fixed-pane windows puncture the exterior, a typical feature for VA boiler houses in the Third Generation. The windows on the south elevation have been replaced, while the original steel windows on the north side remain. A/C condensers now obscure the majority of the north side of the building. The original 110-foot brick chimney has been removed. The northeastern section of the building is three stories, but the building drops in height to two stories for three bays, before a one-story section; the resulting configuration gives the building a stepped appearance. A small, one-story metal addition was added to the north elevation in ca. 2005. Resource #2 retains its distinctive banding around the windows at the east corner that link it visually to Resource #1.

Resource #3

Historic Use: Garage & Shops
Current Use: Engineering/EMS/Warehouse
Year Built: 1950
Status: Contributing

Resource #3 is located in the northeastern portion of campus (photo 9-10). The one-story utilitarian building originally featured a roughly L-shaped footprint; however, it now is connected to Resource #2 via a brick-clad hyphen (added ca. 1990). The building features the original stone coping and stone sills. The building has a flat roof and an exterior clad in the same buff brick laid in Flemish bond as the other original buildings on the campus. The building is functional in appearance, with multiple access points for people and vehicles; there is no single main entrance. Many of the original wood- and glass-paneled overhead doors have either been filled in with brick and replaced with a metal doors or windows, or replaced entirely with

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metal rolling doors. The steel windows have also been replaced. A one-story, metal clad addition (added ca. 2000) projects to the south from the southwest corner of the building.

Resource #4

Historic Use: Manager's Quarters

Current Use: Information Resource Management (IRM)

Year Built: 1950

Status: Contributing

The former manager's residence is located at the southwestern portion of campus, near a secondary entrance from West Marcy Drive (photos 11-12). Oriented towards the northwest, the two-story brick building features an irregular footprint, asymmetrical exterior and brick-surfaced built-up roof. As with the other original buildings on campus, the bricks are laid in Flemish bond. A two-bay portion of the second floor on the northwest elevation has been clad in asbestos shingles. A brick chimney is located on the northwest elevation. The building was part of the original construction campaign; however, its function has been converted into the Information Resource Management building, resulting in the replacement of doors with metal leaf doors and possibly the addition of an exterior staircase on the southeast elevation. A one-story addition clad in similar brick is located at the east end elevation. On the west end elevation, the original glass- and wood-paneled garage doors have been filled in with brick and metal, single leaf doors have been added for access. The building features the original stone sills and buff brick exterior. The building retains the stone sills and tan bricks that link the building to Resource #1, but it is not a high-style example of the Modern Movement.

Resource #7

Historic Use: Nurses' Quarters

Current Use: Education

Year Built: 1950

Status: Contributing

Located at the southwestern portion of campus with the collection of buildings that once served as residences for hospital staff, Resource #7 was the former nurses' quarters (photo 13). The buff brick exterior, laid in Flemish bond, and brick-surfaced built-up roof render the building similar in appearance to other buildings of the original campus. A narrow overhang and stone sills emphasize the bands of windows and give the building a horizontal emphasis; however, the original windows have been replaced. The doors have also been replaced with metal leaf doors on all elevations. A brick chimney above the roofline on the west end of the northwest elevation. Resource #7 has an irregular footprint and is accessed on the north, west, and east sides. While certain alterations have been made to accommodate changes in use, such as the installation of handicap access ramps, the one-story building retains its overall residential character. The distinctive overhang, stone stills, and brick exterior reflect the original architecture of the campus and link the building visually to Resource #1.

Resource #8

Historic Use: Attendants' Quarters

Current Use: Hospital-Based Home Care (HBHC)

Year Built: 1950

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Status: Contributing

Located in between Resources #17, #20, and #21, the former attendants' quarters building has been converted into VA hospital-based team home care (HBHC). As typical with other Third Generation facilities, the former attendants' quarters building is removed from the other quarters buildings on campus. The building has an L-shaped footprint and is accessed from the south elevation (photo 14). The one-story building is topped with a flat roof and is clad in the same exterior buff brick laid in Flemish bond as the other original buildings on the hospital campus. The former attendants' quarters building features the original stone coping and sills to delineate the windows and emphasize the horizontal quality of the building; the windows are large, plate glass windows along the south elevation. A concrete ramp and metal overhang have been added to the south elevation. The entrance on the north elevation has also been modified with a concrete ramp covered with a metal roof. The building's flat roof, stone sills, narrow concrete overhang, and restrained exterior link the building to the overall architecture of the original campus design.

Resource #10

Historic Use: Six-Car Garage

Current Use: Emergency Management Services (EMS) / Compliance

Year Built: 1950

Status: Contributing

The former six-car garage is located to the rear of the main hospital building, near Resource #7 (photo 15). The utilitarian building is oriented towards the southeast. Resource #10 originally featured six glass-paneled overhead doors on the southeast elevation; however, these openings have been enclosed and a stucco exterior covers the entire southeast elevation. All other elevations feature the original buff-colored brick exterior laid in Flemish bond. The building has a rectangular footprint and slab foundation. A flat roof tops the structure. The windows on the northwest elevation appear to be replacements; these windows do not have the decorative bands around the windows as seen on several of the other buildings on campus. The one-story building does not have any architectural ornamentation or excessive detailing; the building does not reflect a particular architectural style.

Resource #15

Current Use: Emergency Generator

Year Built: 1985

Status: Non-contributing

The Emergency Generator building is located near Resources #10 and #16, just behind the main hospital building. The utilitarian building has two metal-leaf doors, one located on the northeast elevation and the other on the southeast elevation (photo 16). The Emergency Generator building features a rectangular footprint, slab foundation, and equipment housed on the flat roof. Louvered openings are located on the northwest elevation, but the building does not have any windows. The one-story building is pragmatic in design, with no ornamentation, although the buff brick exterior blends in with the main hospital building. However, on this building, the brick is laid in running bond. The building does not reflect a particular architectural style.

Resource #16

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Current Use: Education
Year Built: 2003
Status: Non-contributing

Located adjacent to Resource #10, the Education building features a rectangular footprint on a slab foundation. The exterior of the one-story building is clad mostly in tan brick laid in Flemish bond, but the upper portion of the exterior walls is clad in a buff-colored stucco. The shallow gable roof is clad in metal. Access to the building is provided via a doorway on the southeast elevation accessed via a sloped concrete ramp; the door is metal with two leaves and no windows. A metal door also is located on the northwest elevation. The building does not have any architectural ornament or elaborate detailing. The building does not reflect a particular architectural style.

Resource #17
Current Use: Administration
Year Built: 2010
Status: Non-contributing

Resource #17 is located at the northern corner of campus and adjacent to Resource #8. The Administration building has a rectangular footprint, slab foundation, and a flat roof behind a parapet wall (photo 17). The exterior is clad in brick, sympathetic to the original campus buildings; the brick is laid in Flemish bond with the exception of a row of soldier brick in the upper portion of the façade. Rectangular windows are regularly spaced along the exterior walls on the southwest elevation and northeast elevations, but the side walls do not have any openings. The one-story building has a symmetrical, plain façade with no ornamentation. The building does not reflect a particular architectural style.

Resource #18
Current Use: Domiciliary
Year Built: 2011
Status: Non-contributing

The 24,000 square foot Veteran Healing Center is located west of the main hospital building (photo 18). The one-story domiciliary building breaks from the buff-colored bricks of the original campus building and is clad in white brick laid in running bond interspersed with bands of darker gray bricks. Portions of the building are also clad in stucco and metal panels. The building has an irregular footprint, flat roof, and is oriented towards the northeast and the greenspace to the rear of Resource #1. The masonry building has an irregular footprint. Resource #18 is accessed from a semi-circular drive on the east side. The building has multiple entrances on the northeast elevation; the entrances consist of modern metal and glass doors. The building does not reflect a particular architectural style.

Resources #20 and #21
Current Use: Human Resources / Education
Year Built: 2012
Status: Non-contributing

The Human Resource (Resource #20) and Education (Resource #21) buildings are located at the northern corner of campus and west of Resource #8. The simple identical one-story buildings are clad in standing

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seam metal panels, have a parapets on the northeast and southwest ends, and have limited fenestration. Metal doors provide access to the interior. The foundation for these two buildings consists of a large, shared concrete pad. The buildings do not have any architectural ornament or elaborate detailing. The building does not reflect a particular architectural style.

Resource #22

Current Use: Emergency Generator
Year Built: 2017
Status: Non-contributing

This one-story utilitarian building is located in the northwest portion of the campus and to the west of Resources #77 and #78. The building is clad tan brick similar to the other buildings on campus; the brick is laid in Flemish bond with a single course of soldier bricks serving as a decorative feature (photo 19). The building has a flat roof, plain exterior, and slab foundation. The building is oriented towards the southeast. The main entrance is a pair of metal leaf doors. The southeast elevation does not have windows, but there are louvered openings at the west end. The building does not reflect a particular architectural style.

Resource #23

Current Use: Water Tower
Year Built: 2016
Status: Non-contributing

The replacement water tower is located in the northwestern portion of the campus (photo 20). The water tower consists of a concrete base supporting a steel cylindrical water tank.

Resource F: Community Living Center

Current Use: Community Living Center (CLC) / Community Center
Year Built: 2019
Status: Non-contributing

Located adjacent to Resource #4 in the southwestern portion of the campus, this building was under construction at the time of the site visit. The one-story building is oriented towards the southwest. The exterior is clad in tan brick laid in Flemish bond, but a section at the northwest corner has a stucco-like finish. The main entrance is a two-leaf, partially glazed doors framed by large glass panels. The building has multiple roofs; portions are sheathed in metal panels while others could not be determined at the time of the site visit. The building has a slab foundation, irregular footprint, and plain exterior. The building does not reflect a particular architectural style.

Resource #25

Current Use: CLC/Hospice
Year Built: 2019
Status: Non-contributing

This one-story building is sited in the southwestern portion of the campus and to the north of Resource #4 (photo 21) in the portion of the campus that once primarily held residential buildings. The building has an irregular footprint, concrete slab foundation, and is oriented towards the southeast. Portions of the exterior is clad in buff brick laid in Flemish bond, referencing the architecture of the original buildings on the campus, but sections are also clad in random ashlar. The building has multiple rooflines, but all are clad in

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standing seam metal. The main portion of the building has a shallow side gable roof, but front gables mark the entrance on the southeast elevation as well as another entrance on the northeast elevation. Shed roofs cover projecting bays on the northeast elevation as well as provide coverings for open spaces on the southeast, southwest, and northeast elevation. The entrances have large, plate glass windows. The rear of the building is plain and functional in appearance, with multiple metal-leaf doors and a loading bay; this elevation is clad in concrete stucco. The building does not reflect a particular architectural style.

Resources #77 and #78

Current Use: Storage

Year Built: 1995 / 2009

Status: Non-contributing

Resources #77 (constructed 1995) and #78 (constructed in 2009) are located near the Water Tower at the northwest portion of the campus (photo 22). Both metal storage buildings have side gable roofs and rectangular footprints on concrete slab foundations. The one-story utilitarian buildings are accessed from the east side. The bays on the northeast elevation consist of garage doors paired with metal-leaf pedestrian doors. The buildings do not reflect a particular architectural style.

Resource A: Flagpole

Historic/Current Use: Flagpole

Year Built: 1950

Status: Contributing

The flagpole is located across from the main entrance to Resource #1 on the southeast elevation (photo 23). The metal flagpole is surrounded by paving; the configuration of a circle of paving with the flagpole at the center appears consistent with the historic appearance of the flagpole.

Resource B: Tennis Court

Historic/Current Use: Tennis Court

Year Built: 1950

Status: Contributing

The tennis court is located in the southwestern portion of campus, adjacent to the buildings that once served as quarters for hospital staff. The clay court is surrounded by a chain link fence; the chain link fence is taller on the southeastern section to accommodate the addition of a basketball backboard (photo 24). The tennis court features the typical configuration of a net subdividing the court.

Resource C: Helicopter Pad

Current Use: Helicopter Pad

Year Built: 2001

Status: Non-Contributing

The helicopter pad is a concrete slab located in the northeastern portion of the campus and just to the south of Resource #17. Evenly spaced lights are located along the perimeter.

Resource D: George O'Brien Commemorative Sculpture

Current Use: Commemorative Sculpture

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Year Built: 2008

Status: Non-contributing

Located at the southeastern corner and primary entrance to the hospital campus, this commemorative sculpture depicts George O'Brien, a Medal of Honor winner and namesake of the hospital (photo 25). The sculpture consists of a bronze figure of a Marine in combat fatigues holding a rifle atop a stone base. Plaques on the base identify the figure and describe his accomplishments. For short stone pillars surrounding the sculpture hold lights to keep the figure illuminated at night. The area surrounding the sculpture is paved with similar stone.

Resource E1-15: Solar Panels/Canopies

Current Use: Solar Panels

Year Built: 2015

Status: Non-contributing

Fifteen solar panel structures are located across the campus at surface parking lots. The solar panels are elevated via framing to accommodate parking underneath. The steel framing consists of steel I-beams supported by a steel truss system.

Assessment of Integrity

VA has continued to make upgrades to the campus as medical requirements have changed. During the 1980s, the Big Spring campus underwent several renovations. In May 1981, the boilers were replaced, clinical space was updated and expanded, and the hospital admission area was renovated.³ A wheelchair ramp and electrical doors also were added at the hospital entrance. In January 1982, the hospital announced an intensive interior decorative plan. The plan included "getting away from the old gray and green" interior and into a more "contemporary look."⁴ The admitting and outpatient area was scheduled to be remodeled during this proposal. In addition, the old dental clinic was renovated while a new dental clinic was in progress.⁵

Since 2000, eight buildings, one water tower, the O'Brien sculpture, and the solar panels have been added to the campus. The attendants' quarters and manager's quarters remain extant; however, they have been converted for office use. The boiler house smokestack, original water tower, and both duplex apartments, as well as their associated four-car garages, have been demolished. Solar canopies over surface parking lots have been added to the campus.

Registration Requirements

According to the *United States Third Generation Veterans Hospitals, 1946-1958* National Register historic context (2018), the registration requirements for a New Hospitals Designed under the U.S. Army Corps of

³ "VAMC is renovated," *Big Spring Herald*, 11 May 1981. Collections of Community Relations, Big Spring Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Big Spring, Texas.

⁴ "VA Center plans remodeling," *Big Spring Herald*, 24 January 1982. Collections of Community Relations, Big Spring Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Big Spring, Texas.

⁵ Ibid.

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Engineers under the *United States Third Generation of Veterans Hospitals, 1946-1958* historic context include⁶:

- Located on their original site
- Representation of modern healthcare via a skyscraper hospital for general medical & surgical facilities
- Retention of original materials and workmanship, but alterations are to be expected to maintain modern healthcare standards as many of these facilities continue to operate as VA hospitals
- Original lobby of the main hospital building and the chapel
- Cohesive campus plan that retains sightlines to the entrance and open space
- Extant main hospital building and representative number of support facilities
- Elements of the midcentury modern style and hospital's architectural character

Assessment of Integrity

The Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital retains its original site and original function as a hospital for Veterans operated by the successor of the Veterans Administration, thus retaining integrity of location and association.

The hospital complex remains at a major intersection in Big Spring. While commercial development increased slightly to the south since the facility's opening, the hospital, particularly Resource #1, remains the dominant figure in the landscape. The surrounding development has continued to be largely single family homes and one-story, low slung commercial buildings; the Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital retains integrity of setting.

Veterans continue to access the facility in much the same manner as when the hospital opened. The primary access for patients remains from South Gregg Street. The roadway pattern leads the patient to the primary entrance of Resource #1, the main hospital building for the complex. Veterans continue enter the building via the one-story main entrance on the southeast elevation. While a canopy has been extended from that main entrance, the point of access has not relocated. Patient care remains largely concentrated in Resource #1, much as it did when the hospital first opened. Support functions for the hospital continue to be located in smaller scale buildings located to the sides and rear of Resource #1, even if the specific functions for the buildings have changed. Resource #1 remains the linchpin element for the district as it continues to be the dominate feature of the facility. While new construction on the campus has interrupted some of the former greenspaces and relationship between individual buildings, the overall campus configuration remains consistent with the intended goals of the Third Generation of Veterans hospitals; the facility retains integrity of design.

The original buildings of the Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital have experienced some modifications. Windows and doors have been replaced, a common alteration at many VA hospitals to accommodate changes in use or shifts in medical care requirements. But the brick exteriors in their original bond patterns remain extant, as do the aluminum spandrels on the southeast elevation of Resource #1 and the architecture features used at many of the original buildings to delineate the bands of windows on the façades. The buildings retains the visual link of historic fabric on the original buildings; the Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital retains integrity of materials and workmanship.

⁶ Lindsay Hannah and Susan Barrett Smith, *United States Third Generation Veterans Hospitals, 1946-1958*, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 2018, Section F, p. 105-107.

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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.)

- ☐ 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

HEALTH/MEDICINE

Period of Significance

1950-1971

Significant Dates

1950

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

USACE

Wyatt Hedrick

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital was constructed as part of a nationwide building campaign initiated by VA to meet the pressing need for modern healthcare facilities for Veterans returning from World War II. The Big Spring hospital represents a facility that was designed by a private architectural firm under the supervision of the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The Veteran hospital meets the registration requirements found in Section F of the U.S. Third Generation Veterans Hospitals Multiple Property Documentation Form. Big Spring is one of two Third Generation hospitals in Texas eligible for listing in the National Register; the other hospital is the Bonham VA Hospital (now named the Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center) in Bonham. The Big Spring campus is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A at the state and local level as not only a representative example of the flat-roofed skyscraper type of Third Generation Veterans Hospital designed under USACE, but the federal government's commitment to providing medical care to Veterans residing in a predominately rural section of Texas. Even though siting the hospital complex in Big Spring did not achieve many of the goals of the Third Generation program, such as colocation with a medical school, the location ensured modern medical care was accessible to Veterans in the area.⁷

The period of significance for the complex is 1950 to 1971, encompassing the year the construction of the original Third Generation hospital complex was completed and opened to patients through fifty years ago, as the complex has continued to provide medical care to Veterans in West Texas.

The district is nominated to the National Register under the multiple property submission *United States Third Generation Veterans Hospitals, 1946-1958*. It meets the registration requirements and is nominated under Criterion A in the area of HEALTH/MEDICINE at the state level of significance as a representative example of the flat-roofed skyscraper type designed by architect Wyatt Hedrick under the supervision of the USACE, and as a reflection of the federal government's commitment to providing medical care to veterans residing in a predominately rural section of West Texas.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Big Spring VA Hospital campus was designed by a private architect Wyatt C. Hedrick under the supervision of the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

In early October 1944, the Chamber of Commerce, together with the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the City of Big Spring, and Howard County, submitted an application for a Veterans hospital to be constructed in Big Spring, Texas. VA sought to construct a hospital in West Texas within 100 miles of

⁷ Due to COVID-19 and the associated temporary closure of archives, notably the National Archives and Records Administration, certain research topics and themes associated with the Third Generation, such as racial segregation and women Veterans, could not be fully addressed for Big Spring. These themes would be worthy of further exploration in a future, amended nomination.

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Sweetwater, Texas; locations such as Abilene, Lubbock, San Angelo, and Midland were considered.⁸ A representative from the Veterans Hospital Committee was sent to Washington, D.C. to discuss the application with General Frank T. Hines, Veterans Administrator. While the Chamber of Commerce created a steering and site committee, the city and county agreed to provide a site for the Veterans hospital, if selected. Big Spring vigorously pursued the hospital, including enlisting the assistance of Congressman George Mahon, Representative of Texas's 19th District that includes Big Spring, who worked to ensure the hospital ended up in his district. The Chamber of Commerce touted the number of hotels, access to major airlines at the municipal airport, and city amenities, such as golf courses, a state park, city auditorium, and "modern business district."⁹ The advocacy paid off; President Truman approved the location of a 250-bed Veterans' general medical and surgical hospital for West Texas in Big Spring on July 9, 1945.¹⁰

This period was an era of transition for VA's hospital construction, moving away from the sprawling, rural Second Generation facilities to modern healthcare in a single, massive building in urban centers. Big Spring was one of five hospitals announced in 1946 that were slated for construction in Texas (hospitals in Big Spring, Bonham, Dallas, El Paso, and Houston). One (El Paso) was never built due to a lack of funding and another (Dallas) was a new massive hospital building constructed at an existing complex. At that time, VA already had six hospitals in Texas; four were General Medical & Surgical facilities (hospitals in Amarillo, Dallas, McKinney, and Temple), one Neuropsychiatric facility (Waco), and one Tuberculosis facility (Legion/Kerrville).¹¹ The selection of Big Spring allowed for VA to provide healthcare to Veterans in a part of Texas previously underserved by the existing hospital network.

These new facilities reflected the VA's new goals for the Third Generation program. VA's promise of modern healthcare was reflected in the resulting designs for its new hospitals. Medical services were no longer spread across multiple buildings, but stacked in a skyscraper-type hospital to facilitate ease of patient and staff movement, permit freedom in hospital configuration, and allow construction on smaller parcel. As part of the post-World War II changes to its hospital system, VA implemented formal efforts to conduct research at its hospitals. Previously, research efforts were largely small-scale studies conducted by staff at one facility without dedicated full-time research laboratories and limited collaboration with researchers and doctors outside VA.¹²

This isolation combined with medical staff who traditionally did not participate in professional organizations and associated activities fueled charges VA was providing substandard medical care to Veterans as staff was not aware of current medical theories and research. To address these concerns, VA created a Department of Medicine and Surgery to oversee VA doctors and medical staff, sought to forge relationships with medical schools across the country via residence training programs, and funded large-scale, collaborate research efforts.¹³ At Big Spring, these Third Generation goals were accomplished via

⁸ "Big Spring Gets Veteran Hospital," *Abilene Reporter News* (Abilene, Texas), 10 July 1945. Accessed via newspapers.com (8 July 2021).

⁹ Frank Reeves, "Nine is Big Spring's Big Number After Winning of Vets' Hospital," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Fort Worth, Texas), 29 July 1945. Accessed via newspapers.com (8 July 2021).

¹⁰ "Hospital Site Approved," *Seattle Daily Times*, 9 July 1945, accessed 15 January 2014, www.genealogybank.com.

¹¹ *Annual Report for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 1946* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946): 97, 1976.

¹² Marguerite T. Hays, M.D. *A Historical Look at the Department of Veterans Affairs Research and Development Program*. VA Office of Research & Development, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C., 2010, p. 41.

¹³ Hannah, et al., "United States Third Generation Veterans Hospitals, 1946-1958", Section E, p. 22-23, 29-30.

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affiliations with Howard College (also located in Big Spring) and Texas Tech University's School of Medicine.¹⁴

Under the supervision of the USACE, Wyatt C. Hedrick was selected as the architectural firm to design the hospital; the commission for the VA hospital in Big Spring fit within his portfolio of skyscrapers, courthouses, theaters, and churches completed across the state of Texas. Born in Chatham, Virginia, on December 17, 1888, Wyatt Cephas Hedrick received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Roanoke College and an Engineering degree from Washington and Lee University within a year of each other.¹⁵ Hedrick first came to Texas when he was hired by the Boston firm, Stone and Webster Engineering Corporation, as a construction engineer for their Dallas office.¹⁶ By 1914, Hedrick owned his own construction company in Fort Worth, Texas. In 1922, Hedrick bought a partial interest in Sanguinet and Staats, one of the first Texas architectural firms to have a statewide practice. The new practice became known as Sanguinet, Staats, and Hedrick, while its Houston branch operated as Sanguinet, Staats, Hedrick, and Gottlieb.¹⁷ By 1926, Sanguinet and Staats sold their share to Hedrick, who operated his own architectural practice in Fort Worth and maintained limited partnerships in Houston and Dallas. A versatile engineer, Hedrick designed various buildings, from hotels such as the renowned Shamrock Hotel in Houston, to Texas courthouses, university campuses and even the airport layout and design for Dallas Love Field.



Figure 2: Proposed plan for Big Spring VA hospital; sketch ca. 1947.
Collections of Federal Preservation Office, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴ "Historical Summary, Veterans Administration Medical Center, Big Spring, Texas," 9 February 1979. Collections of Federal Preservation Office, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵ Christopher Long, "Hedrick, Wyatt Cephas," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed 14 August 2014, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fhe51>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Christopher Long, "Sanguinet and Staats," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed 14 August 2014, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/cms01>.

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VA and USACE supplied guidelines to the architectural firms; these guidelines were based on the type of hospital, i.e. general medical and surgical, and the total number of beds. The exact requirements for the Big Spring facility were not located during the course of research, but general requirements proffered by VA in 1946 for a 300-bed hospital gave a sense of VA's priorities. The guidelines did not include recommendations as to the hospital building's appearance, recommended construction materials, or floor configurations. These guidelines focused on what is required for "good hospital practice," expressly stating it was "not the intent of the program to standardize on any particular type of architectural design or prototype building." The goal was to ensure the components of the hospital, such as the surgical units, dental clinics, and laundry, were consisted across VA hospital of this period. For example, the requirements for the isolation unit listed the need for ten private rooms, an enclosed solarium, a nurse's station, attendants toilet, and various support spaces (such as closets for clean linens and supplies); the requirements did not proscribe the floorplan, relationship between these spaces, or preferred building materials.¹⁸ The design decisions were the purview of the architect selected to complete the design.

The resulting design represented a typical flat-roofed skyscraper type of Third Generation VA hospital. The main hospital building dominates the campus. The largest and tallest building on the campus, Resource #1 held all the healthcare-related services while support facilities were relegated to smaller buildings surrounding Resource #1. This subtype of Third Generation hospital does not feature elaborate architectural styles or details; at Big Spring, architectural ornamentation is limited to features such as the aluminum spandrels and brick detailing on the main façade of Resource #1. The arches, stonework, and pilasters of the earlier, Second Generation of VA hospitals, such as seen at the VA facility in Waco, Texas, has been rejected in favor of modern design. The other buildings on campus continue the rejection of previous architectural styles in favor of modern design.

In February 1946, VA accepted the City of Big Spring's selected site; no information was revealed publicly, save it consisted of 31 acres and was located in the southern part of town.¹⁹ By March, all but six of the parcels had been obtained by the city; Big Spring submitted title transfer to VA in early April 1946. The City also undertook the formal closing of the sections of Big Spring streets contained within the VA parcel: 23rd and 24th Streets from Gregg Street and Lancaster Road below 23rd Street.²⁰ A scant month later, the *Big Spring Daily Herald* reported on May 6, 1946, that soil tests were underway on the parcel, plus notes that the existing buildings were in the process of being cleared and at least three houses "in the area" were relocated, with several more to follow.²¹

In November 1947, VA advertised construction bids, and received proposals two months later. The construction contract was awarded to the Robert E. McKee Construction Company, a general contractor in Dallas and El Paso, Texas. At a bid of almost \$5,710,000, the contract included construction of the main

¹⁸ U.S. Veterans Administration, *Requirements for 300-bed General Hospital (revised)*, 12 June 1946. Washington, D.C.

¹⁹ "Vet Administration Accepts City Offer for Hospital Site," *Big Spring Daily Herald*, 5 February 1946, accessed 11 April 2022, www.newspapers.com.

²⁰ "Six Lots Not Yet Purchased By City for Vet Hospital," *Big Spring Daily Herald*, 13 March 1946, accessed 11 April 2022, www.newspapers.com; "Papers for Site to Be Submitted," *Big Spring Daily Herald*, 3 April 1946, accessed 11 April 2022, www.newspapers.com.

²¹ "Drilling Being Done on Veteran Hospital," *Big Spring Daily Herald*, 6 May 1946, accessed 11 April 2022, www.newspapers.com.

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hospital building, attendants' quarters, manager's residence, staff quarters, nurses' quarters, a garage and shop building, a heating plant and all outside utilities.²²



CONSTRUCTION OF VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL, BIG SPRING, TEXAS, COMPLETE
VIEW TOWARD FRONT OF MAIN BUILDING LAUNDRY WING ON RIGHT
CONTR: ROBERT E. McKEE, EL PASO, TEXAS CONTR. NO. W-29-005 ENG-501 CONTR. DATE: 12 JANUARY 1948
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO APPROPRIATION 21-36X0108(01).002
2 December 1948 AD-50-L69

*Figure 3: View of front of Resource #1 during construction, 2 December 1948.
Collections of Federal Preservation Office, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.*

The Big Spring VA hospital groundbreaking ceremony was held on January 30, 1948. The Big Spring High School band opened the program before over 150 spectators. Howard County Judge Wallon Morrison served as master of ceremonies while Cecil C. Collings, Judge of the 70th Judicial District of Texas, was principal speaker. A “decorated shovel” was used to turn the dirt.²³ Construction commenced one day later

²² “Construction to Begin Soon On Big Spring Vet Hospital,” *Dallas Morning News*, 9 January 1948, accessed 13 January 2014, www.genealogybank.com.

²³ “Weather Won’t Halt Hospital Ceremonies,” *Big Spring Weekly Herald* (Big Spring, Texas), 30 January 1949, accessed 19 August 2014, www.newspapers.com/image/15471968.

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and was completed on June 3, 1950. Two weeks later, the first patient, former U.S. Marine James A. Waters, was admitted.²⁴



Figure 4: General view of the Big Spring facility, 28 July 1949.
Collections of Federal Preservation Office, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.

One hundred thirty-five beds were in use by the official dedication ceremony, which occurred on September 10, 1950. Wearing a double-breasted blue suit and standing “under a broiling sun,” Major General Carl R. Gray, Jr. “perspired freely in the July-like heat” during his brief dedicatory address.²⁵ In front of a crowd of 6,000, the Administrator of VA reminded the hospital chiefs that the Veterans hospital was built for one purpose “and that is to help the sick and disabled veterans get well as rapidly as possible.”²⁶ The hospital manager, Dr. Lloyd B. Andrew, also was introduced during the ceremony. An inspection tour of the main hospital building and auxiliary structures occurred after the dedication ceremony.

²⁴ “Marine Vet 1st VA Hospital Patient Here,” *Big Spring Herald* (Big Spring, Texas), 17 July 1950. Collections of Community Relations, Big Spring Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Big Spring, Texas.

²⁵ George B. Dolan, “General Gray Dedicates Big Spring VA Hospital,” *Star-Telegram*, n.d. Collections of Community Relations, Big Spring Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Big Spring, Texas.

²⁶ “3,000 at Big Spring See New VA Hospital Dedicated,” *Big Spring Herald*, 11 September 1950. Collections of Community Relations, Big Spring Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Big Spring, Texas.

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CONSTRUCTION OF VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL, BIG SPRING, TEXAS, COMPLETE
GENERAL VIEW TOWARD REAR OF MAIN BUILDING
CONTR: ROBERT E. MCKEE, EL PASO, TEXAS CONTR. NO. W-29-005 ENG-501 CONTR. DATE: 12 JANUARY 1948
CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO APPROPRIATION 21-36X01(01).002
28 July 1949 AD-50-L143

*Figure 5: View of rear of campus, 28 July 1949. Former water tower (demolished) at left.
Collections of Federal Preservation Office, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.*

At the time of its opening, the reinforced concrete-framed main hospital building consisted of six stories plus a partial basement and penthouse. Despite its irregular floor plan, the main hospital building still followed many of the basic design tenets of the Third Generation VA hospitals. The original lobby, located at the main entrance, was ornamented extensively in granite. Aluminum accentuated the glass entrance. The first floor housed offices for departments, such as finance, personnel, the hospital manager, and chief of nurses, in addition to the pharmacy, canteen, attendants' cafeteria and staff dining room. Finished in blonde oak and with seating for approximately 50 people, the chapel also was "unobtrusively" located on the first floor.²⁷ This "quiet retreat" featured an interchangeable altar for Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths.²⁸ The second floor included the recreation, radio control and broadcasting rooms; medical and patient

²⁷ "Small Chapel At Hospital Can Accommodate 50," *Big Spring Herald*, 10 September 1950. Microfilm, Collections of the Howard County Library.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

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libraries; and a patients' cafeteria.²⁹ The third and fourth floors each contained nursing units; housed two-, four-, and 14-bed wards, all containing single beds; two solariums, a common doctor and nursing station; and a kitchen. The third floor also contained an isolation ward. The fifth floor, which was the only air-conditioned portion of the hospital, included operating suites and associated reception rooms. Psychiatric patients were treated on the sixth floor, while air conditioning compressors and machinery for ventilation fans occupied the seventh floor.³⁰ Motors for service and passenger elevators were housed on the eighth floor. Access to the ninth floor level, which was on the roof, was through the ceiling of the eighth floor. The hospital morgue and autopsy room were located in the basement.



Figure 6: Resource #1, ca. 1951.
Collections of Federal Preservation Office, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.

Along with the typical chapel and canteen, the Big Spring VA hospital offered a post office, recreation room, music studio, and medical and patient libraries.

Accessory buildings on the campus included attendants' quarters, nurses' quarters, manager's residence, two duplexes and accompanying garages for high ranking officials, and garage and shop buildings with a boiler house. The small, one-story attendants' quarters were for attendants who "were subject to constant call."³¹ The two-story resident nurses' residence was located west of the main hospital; the structure contained 10 private bedrooms with individual bathrooms, a living room for the chief nurse, a main living

²⁹ "Guide to various units of Hospital listed by floors," *Big Spring Herald*, 10 September 1950. Microfilm, Collections of the Howard County Library.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ "Guide to various units of Hospital listed by floors," *Big Spring Herald*, 10 September 1950. Microfilm, Collections of the Howard County Library.

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room and lounge, a kitchen, a laundry and a trunk and storage room.³² The nurses' quarters also included a six-car garage. The "imposing, yet not ostentatious, and roomy, yet well arranged" manager's residence featured a utility room, kitchen, breakfast room, dining room, and living room on the first floor.³³ Four bedrooms and two baths were located on the second floor. In addition, the manager's room included quarters with a bath for the maid and a two-car garage. The two-story duplexes, located at the western edge of campus, were reserved for "certain key personnel."³⁴ Each duplex contained two apartments with a living room, dining room, kitchen, utility room, two bedrooms, and a bath. Additionally, the duplexes shared a four-car garage.

The construction of the Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital was an important development for Big Spring. Started as a settlement for buffalo hunters and established as the county seat in 1882, Big Spring grew in the early twentieth century as a shipping hub for livestock and crops until the discovery of oil in the area in 1926 led to a population boom. The Big Spring Army Air Corps Bombardier School opened in 1942 during World War II.³⁵ With the closure of the school in 1945, the selection of Big Spring as the site for the VA hospital for West Texas as likely viewed as a stroke of luck by civic leaders. The hospital would be a significant feather in the city's cap, both in terms of the boost to the local economy but also the cache of defeating its neighbors for the facility. In 1948, construction projects in Big Spring hit a peak of over \$7 million dollars, aided by the \$5.6 million cost of the new facility.³⁶ By 1965, VA was spending almost \$2 million in annual payroll at Big Spring and the *Big Spring Daily Herald* noted that the VA employees who moved to the area to work at the new hospital "like it so well, they stay and make their homes."³⁷

In the early years, the hospital was open to the general public of Big Spring. Open houses were held in the spring for "National Hospital Day," allowing visitors to participate in guided tours of the main hospital building.³⁸ The U.S. Navy band performed a concert on the greenspace at the front of the facility and the public was invited to attend.³⁹ Local chapters of Veterans groups or benevolent societies in the area were also involved with the facility, such as the Elks lodge taking patients to a baseball game or the Navy Mothers Club supplying gifts and hosting a Christmas party at the hospital.⁴⁰

³² "Two Bedrooms In VA Nurses' Home," *Big Spring Herald*, 10 September 1950. Microfilm, Collections of the Howard County Library.

³³ "Manager's Residence One Of Outstanding Hospital Buildings," *Big Spring Herald*, 10 September 1950. Microfilm, Collections of the Howard County Library.

³⁴ "Four Apartments Provided In Duplex Units At Hospital," *Big Spring Herald*, 10 September 1950. Microfilm, Collections of the Howard County Library.

³⁵ Claudia Hazlewood and Mark Odintz, "Big Spring, TX," Handbook of Texas Online, Published by the Texas State Historical Association. Available online at: <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/big-spring-tx> (accessed 9 July 2021).

³⁶ "Building Total Second Highest," *Big Spring Weekly Herald*, 2 January 1953. Available online via newspapers.com (accessed 9 July 2021).

³⁷ "Big Impact On Economy," *Big Spring Daily Herald*, 18 July 1965. Supplied via newspaperarchive.com

³⁸ "Open House at Local Hospitals Set For Friday," *Big Spring Weekly Herald*, 12 May 1950. Available online via newspapers.com (accessed 9 July 2021).

³⁹ "Navy Band to Perform Here May 3," *Big Spring Weekly Herald*, 6 April 1951. Available online via newspapers.com (accessed 9 July 2021).

⁴⁰ "Elks Postpone Meet Friday; Plan to Take Vets to Ball Game," *Big Spring Weekly Herald*, 20 April 1951. Available online via newspapers.com (accessed 9 July 2021); "Club Donates to Hospitals," *Lubbock Evening Journal*, 29 October 1952. Available online via newspapers.com (accessed 9 July 2021).

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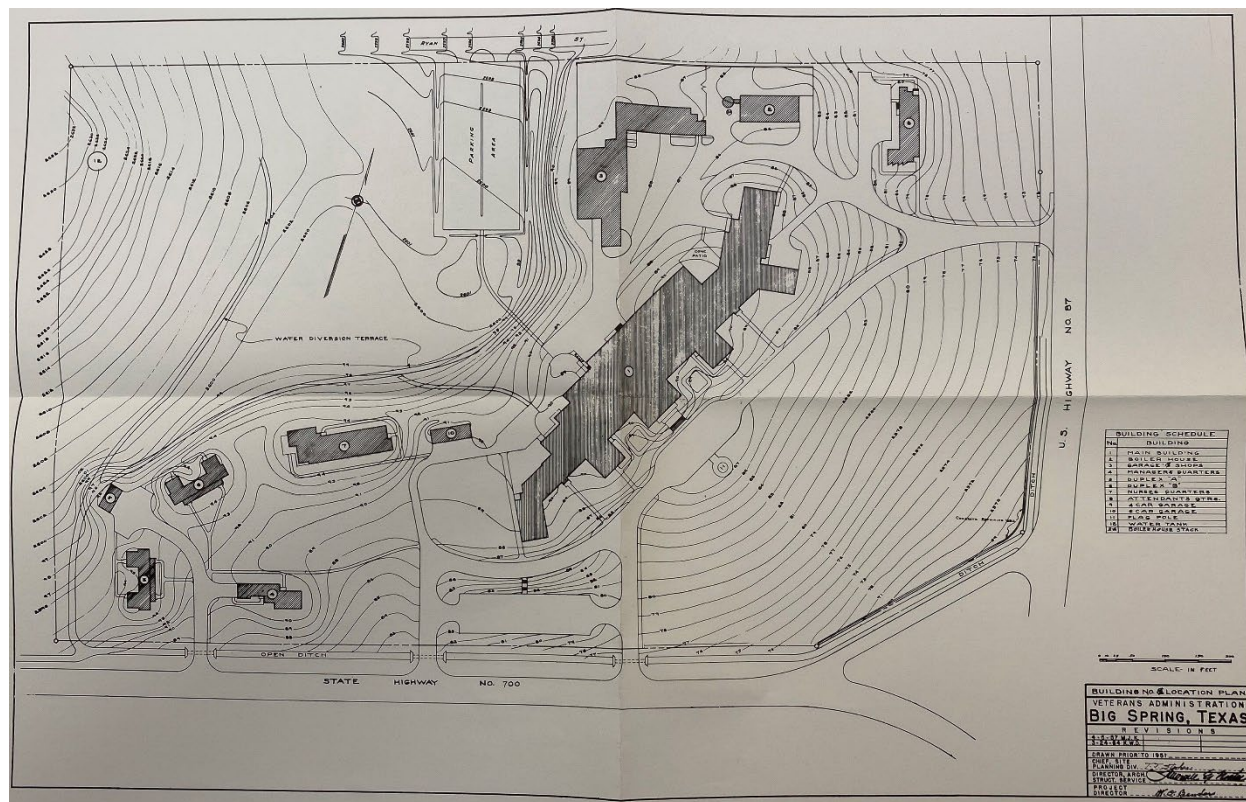


Figure 7: 1951 site plan, with revisions from 1957 and 1964.
Collections of Federal Preservation Office, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C.

Renaming the facility for George H. O'Brien, Jr.

In October 2011, President Obama signed legislation to rename the Big Spring VAMC in honor of George H. O'Brien, Jr. After graduating from Big Spring High School and Texas Technological College (now Texas Tech University), O'Brien enlisted as a private in the United States Marine Corps Reserve in 1949.⁴¹ Ordered to active duty in November 1951, O'Brien completed officer candidate school and officer training. In September 1952, O'Brien was sent to Korea where he joined the 1st Marine Division, and subsequently served as a second lieutenant with Company H of the 3rd Battalion 7th Marines. While in Korea, O'Brien received orders to retake a fishhook-shaped hill known as the Hook, which had been overrun by Chinese Communist troops.⁴² Despite being outnumbered, Rifle Platoon Commander O'Brien

“leaped from his trench when the attack signal was given and, shouting for his men to follow, raced across an exposed saddle and up the enemy-held hill through a virtual hail of deadly small-arms, artillery and mortar fire. Although shot through the arm and thrown to the ground by hostile automatic-weapons fire as he neared the well-entrenched enemy

⁴¹ Henry Franklin Tribe, “O'Brien, George Heman, Jr.,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed August 25, 2014, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fobcm>. Uploaded on November 20, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

⁴² Richard Goldstein, “George H. O'Brien Jr., 78, Marine Awarded Medal of Honor, Dies,” *New York Times*, 21 March 2005, accessed August 25, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/21/national/21obrien.html?_r=1&.

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position, he bravely regained his feet, waved his men onward and continued to spearhead the assault, pausing only long enough to go to the aid of a wounded Marine.”⁴³

Leading his men onward, O’Brien hurled hand grenades into enemy bunkers, utilized his carbine in hand-to-hand combat, and successfully killed at least three enemies. O’Brien was wounded three more times by the concussion of grenades, but refused medical evacuation and continued to lead his platoon for another four hours. On October 27, 1953, exactly one year after the capture of the enemy-held hill, President Dwight D. Eisenhower awarded O’Brien the Medal of Honor for “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity” during the Battle of Triangle Hill.⁴⁴ After his service, O’Brien returned to West Texas and was an active volunteer at the Big Spring VAMC. On March 11, 2005, O’Brien died in Midland, Texas, at the age of 78; he is buried in the Texas State Cemetery in Austin. A statue of George Herman O’Brien, Jr. is located near the entrance of the medical center in 2008.

Summary of Significance

In 1980, the Texas Historical Commission recommended the Big Spring facility was eligible for the National Register. In 2018, the *United States Third Generation Veterans Hospital, 1946-1958* historic context provided a framework for evaluating the property.

The Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital is eligible under Criterion A: Health / Medicine at the state level an example of one of the new hospitals constructed by the Veterans Administration to provide modern healthcare to a swelling Veteran population following World War II. As an example of the flat-roofed skyscraper type of New Hospitals Designed under USACE, Big Spring demonstrates the shifts undertaken by VA during the Third Generation nationwide construction campaign: healthcare across multiple low-rise buildings replaced with medical treatment stacked in a single main hospital building, rejection of revival-type architectural styles designed by in-house staff for sleek buildings by architects in private practice to emphasize modern healthcare, and choosing to site these new hospitals not on sprawling campuses in rural areas but in urban locations to foment ties with medical schools. While the Big Spring hospital did not have a formal relationship with an area medical school, VA recognized the need for a Veterans hospital in this portion of western Texas to ensure a growing patient population had access to healthcare.

The main hospital building (Resource #1) continues to function as the central organizing principle of the campus; it remains the largest and tallest building on the campus, serving as a visual anchor for the district. The building retains its Modern Movement architecture style. The other original buildings on campus have the same tan brick exterior, severe lines, bands of windows, and other architectural features as Resource #1, tying them together as a unit.

New construction has been added to the campus, largely to the rear of the main hospital building. Half of the non-contributing elements are solar panels that have been constructed over surface parking lots; these panels do not impede the view of Resource #1 or its role as the central feature of the campus.

⁴³ “Medal of Honor Citation: Major George Herman O’Brien, Jr., USMCR,” United States Marine Corps History Division, accessed August 25, 2014, https://www.mcu.usmc.mil/historydivision/Pages/Who's%20Who/M-O/obrien_gh.aspx.

⁴⁴ “VA renaming slated Jan. 18,” *Big Spring Herald*, 27 December 2011, a available online <http://www.bigspringherald.com/content/va-renaming-slated-jan-18> (accessed 23 December 2013).

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The Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital is one of four Third Generation Veterans hospitals constructed in Texas by VA following World War II and continues to provide healthcare to Veterans of West Texas.

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Collections of the Howard County Library, Big Spring, Texas.

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Goldstein, Richard. “George H. O’Brien Jr., 78, Marine Awarded Medal of Honor, Dies,” *The New York Times*, 21 March 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/21/national/21obrien.html?_r=1&, accessed 25 August 2014.

Hannah, Lindsay, Susan Barrett Smith, Virginia Price and Darlene Richardson, “United States Third Generation Veterans Hospitals” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 2018.

“Hospital Site Approved,” *Seattle Daily Times*, 9 July 1945, www.genealogybank.com, accessed 15 January 2014.

United States Marine Corps History Division. “Medal of Honor Citation: Major George Herman O’Brien, Jr., USMCR,” https://www.mcu.usmc.mil/historydivision/Pages/Who's%20Who/M-O/obrien_gh.aspx, accessed 25 August 2014.

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 # _____

Big Spring VA Hospital
Name of Property

Howard County, TX
County and State

_____ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
_____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

_____ State Historic Preservation Office
_____ Other State agency
☒ Federal agency
_____ Local government
_____ University
_____ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 31 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 32.231452°N Longitude: -101.476140°W
2. Latitude: 32.232510°N Longitude: -101.471419°W
3. Latitude: 32.230471°N Longitude: -101.470936°W
4. Latitude: 32.229860°N Longitude: -101.471726°W
5. Latitude: 32.229029°N Longitude: -101.475306°W

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

Big Spring VA Hospital

Name of Property

Howard County, TX

County and State

2. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
3. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
4. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Roughly bounded by South Gregg Street or Highway 87 on the east, West Marcy Drive on the south, tree lines on the west, and Ryon Street to the north. The boundary includes all property totaling approximately 31.39 acres, specifically PART SW/4 OF SC 6 BK 32 1S 1378 BLK/TRACT 32 1S (Property ID R000047892) (31 acres) and the northwest corner of 1009 T&P RR CO 32 T1S 227 6 JH Anderson (Property ID 2750) (approximately 0.39 acres of larger parcel) as recorded in the Howard Central Appraisal District. CAD data accessed June 1, 2021. See Map 2.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

Identified boundaries reflect the property lines (current and historic) for the Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital. The boundaries include all extant resources associated with the nominated district. The rest of 1009 T&P RR CO 32 T1S 227 6 JH Anderson (Property ID 2750) is excluded because it does not contain any historic resources.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Lindsay Hannah and Jill Enersen
organization: Row 10 Historic Preservation Solutions, LLC and R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc.
street & number: Address for Row 10: 8215 Sycamore Place
city or town: New Orleans state: LA zip code: 70118
e-mail: lindsay@row10hps.com
telephone: 504.266.2098
date: April 2022

Big Spring VA Hospital
Name of Property

Howard County, TX
County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Big Spring Veterans Administration Hospital
City or Vicinity: Big Spring
County: Howard State: Texas

Photographer: Lindsay Hannah
Date Photographed: 10 November 2020

Big Spring VA Hospital
Name of Property

Howard County, TX
County and State

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- Photo 1 of 27: Main (southeast) elevation of Resource #1. Camera pointed north.
Photo 2 of 27: Primary entrance on southeast elevation of Resource #1. Camera pointed northwest.
Photo 3 of 27: Northeast elevation of Resource #1. Camera pointed southwest.
Photo 4 of 27: Rear (northwest) elevation of Resource #1. Camera pointed southeast.
Photo 5 of 27: Southwest elevation of Resource #1. Camera pointed northeast.
Photo 6 of 27: Detail of south entrance on southeast elevation of Resource #1. Camera pointed northwest.
Photo 7 of 27: East end of Resource #2. Camera pointed northwest.
Photo 8 of 27: South elevation of Resource #2. Camera pointed north.
Photo 9 of 27: Juncture of Resource #2 and #3. Camera pointed northwest.
Photo 10 of 27: Southwest corner of Resource #3. Camera pointed northeast.
Photo 11 of 27: North elevation of Resource #4. Camera pointed southwest.
Photo 12 of 27: West end of north elevation of Resource #4. Camera pointed southwest.
Photo 13 of 27: West end of Resource #7. Camera pointed east.
Photo 14 of 27: South elevation of Resource #8. Camera pointed southeast.
Photo 15 of 27: Southeast corner of Resource #10. Camera pointed northwest.
Photo 16 of 27: South elevation of Resource #15. Camera pointed north.
Photo 17 of 27: South elevation of Resource #17. Camera pointed northwest.
Photo 18 of 27: Northeast elevation of Resource #18. Camera pointed northwest.
Photo 19 of 27: Southeast elevation of Resource #22. Camera pointed northwest.
Photo 20 of 27: View of Resource #23. Camera pointed northwest.
Photo 21 of 27: North elevation of Resource #25. Camera pointed southeast.
Photo 22 of 27: East elevation of Resource #77. Camera pointed southwest.
Photo 23 of 27: View of Resource A. Camera pointed northeast.
Photo 24 of 27: View of Resource B. Camera pointed northwest.
Photo 25 of 27: View of Resource D, sculpture of hospital namesake, George O'Brien, sited at the southeast corner of the facility. Resource #1 is in the background. Camera pointed northwest.
Photo 26 of 27: View of Resource #1 from easternmost entrance on West Marcy Drive. Camera pointed north.
Photo 27 of 27: Elevator bank on first floor of Resource #1. Camera pointed northwest.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations 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. 460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Big Spring VA Hospital

Name of Property

Howard County, TX

County and State

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours

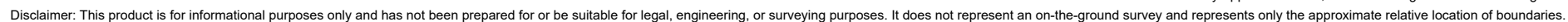
Tier 2 – 120 hours

Tier 3 – 230 hours

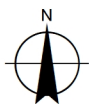
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.



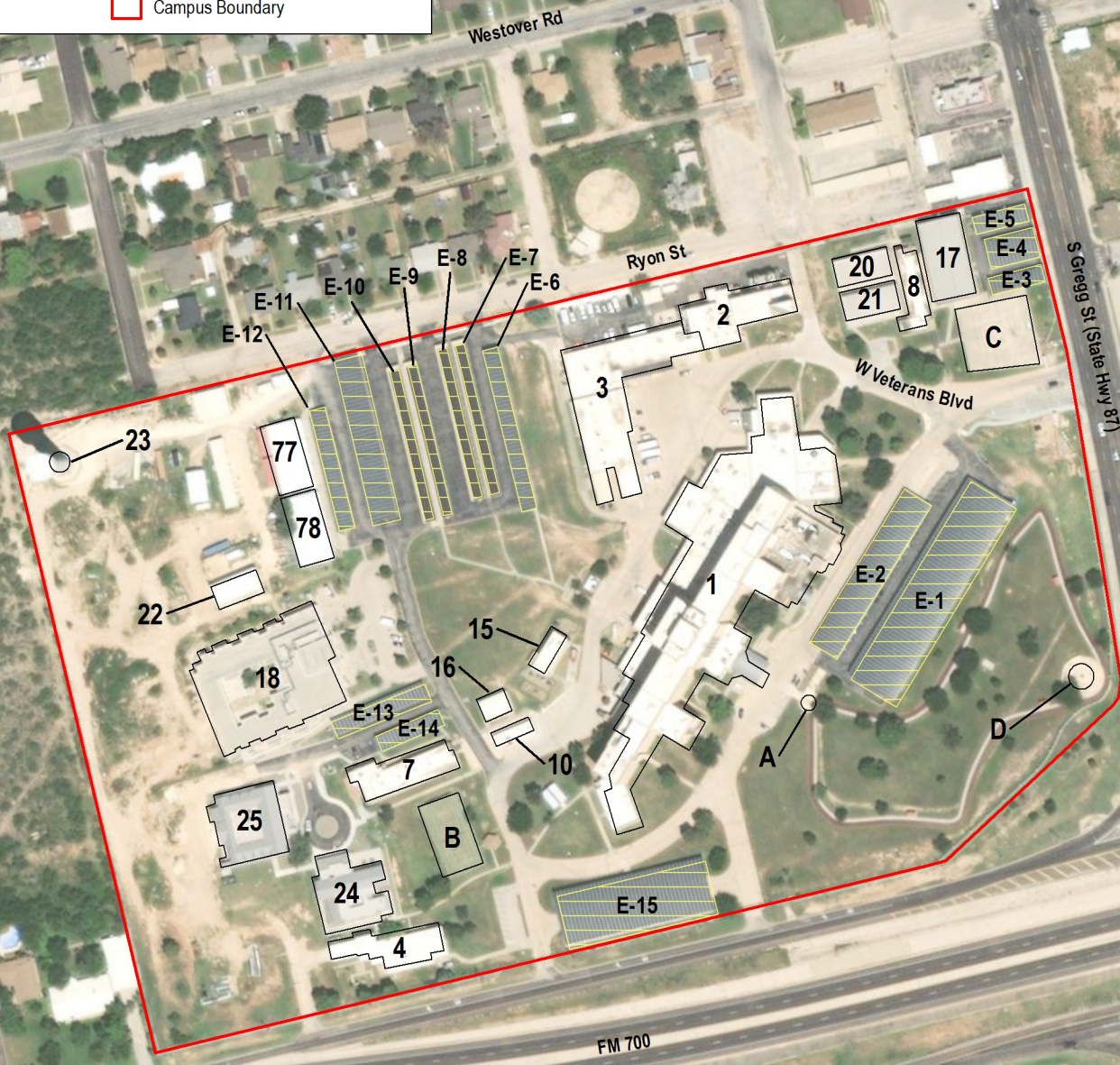


**George H. O'Brien, Jr. VA Medical Center
Big Springs, Howard County, Texas
Building Location**



0 25 50 100 Meters
0 100 200 400 Feet

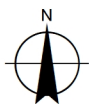
- Building Footprint
- Solar Panel
- Campus Boundary



Building Key

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1. Main Hospital Building | 21. Education |
| 2. Boiler / Chiller | 22. Emergency Generator |
| 3. Engineering/EMS/Warehouse | 23. Water Tower |
| 4. Information Resource Management (IRM) | 24. CLC - Community Center |
| 7. Education | 25. CLC/Hospice |
| 8. Hospital-Based Home Care (HBHC) | 77. Storage |
| 10. EMS/Compliance | 78. Storage |
| 15. Emergency Generator | A. Flagpole |
| 16. Education | B. Tennis Court |
| 17. Administration | C. Helicopter Pad |
| 18. Domiciliary | D. O'Brien Sculpture |
| 20. Human Resources | |

**George H. O'Brien, Jr. VA Medical Center
Big Springs, Howard County, Texas
NRHP Contributing Buildings**



0 25 50 100 Meters
0 100 200 400 Feet

Solar Panel

Contributing Building

Non-Contributing Building

Campus Boundary

Westover Rd

Ryon St

W Veterans Blvd

S Gregg St (State Hwy 87)

FM 700

Building Key

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Main Hospital Building | 21. Education |
| 2. Boiler / Chiller | 22. Emergency Generator |
| 3. Engineering/EMS/Warehouse | 23. Water Tower |
| 4. Information Resource Management | 24. CLC - Community Center |
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