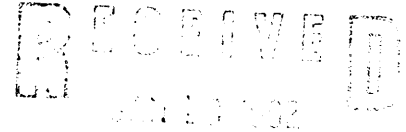


United States Department of the Interior National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name DeRidder USO Building
other names/site number War Memorial Civic Center

2. Location

street & number Pine and 7th Streets
city, town DeRidder
state Louisiana code LA county Beauregard code 011 zip code 70634

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: public-local (checked)
Category of Property: building(s) (checked)
Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 1, Noncontributing 0 buildings, 0 sites, 0 structures, 0 objects, Total 1

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official Leslie Tassin, LA SHPO, Dept of Culture, Recreation and Tourism
Date January 9, 1992

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official
Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
entered in the National Register. (checked)
determined eligible for the National Register.
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper (handwritten signature)
Date of Action 2/25/92

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/civic

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/meeting hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

no style

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls aluminum

roof asphalt

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Completed in November 1941, the DeRidder USO Building is a large sprawling facility located on a corner lot in a small town in west-central Louisiana. Despite various changes, the building retains enough of its original character to be recognizable to someone from the World War II era.

The building has a distinctive shape, consisting of a one story, flat roof front section with a prominent chimney and a large two story gabled auditorium at the rear. A photograph taken during the war reveals that the present stepped parapet is not original. The photograph shows a flat roof with no parapet. Also, the porch, with its round steel posts, was originally screened in. The building was originally sheathed in medium width drop siding, but within the last ten or fifteen years has been covered in a wider gauge aluminum siding. (The original siding can be seen in a narrow uncovered section on the front.)

The principal interior feature of the front section is a large lobby with a fireplace on an interior wall. (The firebox has been covered.) Various smaller rooms are located to each side. To the rear is a large auditorium space with a simple unadorned stage. Some of the spaces have their original bagasse board wall and ceiling surfaces.

Alterations Since Construction:

- (1) the previously mentioned stepped parapet
- (2) the previously mentioned removal of screening on the front porch
- (3) the previously mentioned aluminum siding
- (4) the removal of the USO sign and the installation of a War Memorial Civic Center sign illustrative of the building's use after World War II
- (5) the removal of windows on the side of the auditorium (as shown in the historic photograph)
- (6) the modernization of the interior, including a dropped acoustical tile ceiling and wallpaper and carpeting in the lobby, an acoustical tile ceiling in the auditorium, a dropped acoustical tile ceiling and

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plywood paneling in one of the meeting rooms, and the removal of the showers in the shower room (the drains survive). Also, as previously noted, the firebox in the lobby has been covered.

Assessment of Integrity:

The changes that have had the most impact upon the building's exterior appearance are obviously the stepped parapet and aluminum siding. However, it would still be recognized as the DeRidder USO by someone who had known the building during the war, which is the litmus test for National Register eligibility for historically significant properties. This is largely due to the distinctive three-quarter profile of the building, with a low flat section in front and a much higher gabled auditorium to the rear.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Military history

Period of Significance

1941-45

Significant Dates

1941-45

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Contractor: LeBlanc Brothers (Baton Rouge)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The DeRidder USO Building is locally significant in the area of military history because of its close association with the massive military buildup that occurred in west-central Louisiana during World War II. While sections of Fort Polk survive to best represent a World War II era military base, USO buildings at nearby DeRidder and Leesville remain to remind us of that organization's contribution to the war effort. They, in effect, served as a "home away from home" for the thousands upon thousands of soldiers in the area. The period of significance for the DeRidder USO spans from 1941, the year it opened, through the end of World War II. Justification for "exceptional significance" (i.e., an exception to the fifty year cutoff) is provided below.

When war erupted in Europe, no one in rural, sparsely populated west-central Louisiana could have imagined that the region would soon have no less than five military installations and that tens of thousands of soldiers would be all over the countryside engaged in mock warfare. Military maneuvers were first held in the region in 1940. The largest peacetime maneuvers in American military history were held there in September 1941. Involving about a half million troops, these maneuvers proved to be a significant testing ground for equipment and tactics that would be used successfully in the war. Famous World War II generals such as Eisenhower and Bradley "cut their teeth" so-to-speak on the battlegrounds of west-central Louisiana. Construction on a large military base, then called Camp Polk, began in January 1941. South Camp Polk was finished in about six months, with North Camp Polk being completed by mid-1942. During the war there were seven divisions at one time or another at Camp Polk. Training maneuvers from Polk involving from 61,000 to 106,000 troops were held in the surrounding countryside in 1942 and '43. Other large military installations established in the region during World War II were Camps Livingston and Claiborne near Alexandria, each with about seven hundred buildings. Camp Beauregard, also near Alexandria, was established during World War I, later used by the National Guard and the Civilian Conservation Corps, and reactivated upon America's entry into World War II. The number of buildings at this facility during the period is not known. A fifth military installation in the area was the DeRidder Army Air Base, which apparently had about sixty buildings.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

- Bingham, Dave. Base Historian, Fort Polk. Phone interview.
- Sanson, Jerry. Dept. of History, LSU, Alexandria. Phone interview. Louisiana during World War II is one of Dr. Sanson's research fields.
- Dorian, Alan. Archaeologist, Kisatchie National Forest. (The Camps Livingston and Claiborne sites are in the Kisatchie National Forest.)
- Smith, Velmer. "A History of DeRidder USO." Brief typescript overview based on research in primary sources.
- Casey, Powell A. Encyclopedia of Forts, Posts, Named Camps, and Other Military Installations in Louisiana, 1700-1981. Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing Division, 1983.
- Beauregard Parish Historical Society. History of Beauregard Parish. Curtis Media Corporation, 1986.

See continuation sheet

- Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A
- 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 # _____

- Primary location of additional data:
- State historic preservation office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property approximately one acre

UTM References

A

1	5
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4	7	2	4	4	0
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3	4	1	1	7	8	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Legal boundary description: All that tract or parcel of land lying and being in the City of DeRidder and being part of Block 15 of the First Subdivision of the Hudson Addition to the City of DeRidder according to the official plat thereof, said tract of of land fronting Seventh Street 172 feet and fronting Pine Street 200 feet.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Boundary lines the property lines of the parcel of land upon which the building is located.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title National Register Staff

organization Division of Historic Preservation date November 1991

street & number P. O. Box 44247 telephone (504) 342-8160

city or town Baton Rouge state Louisiana zip code 70804

Owner: Beauregard Parish Police Jury
 P. O. Box 310
 DeRidder, LA 70634

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The need for off-duty recreational centers in towns such as DeRidder became abundantly clear during the massive September 1941 maneuvers. The small community of about 3500 was literally teeming with soldiers, and a small recreation center was set up at the city hall which provided much appreciated shower facilities and various entertainment opportunities. Because of the extreme need, the USO Building at DeRidder was among the very first authorized to be constructed by the government.

Chartered in February 1941, the United Services Organization (USO) actually represented the pooling of resources of six organizations: the Young Men's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, National Catholic Community Services, National Jewish Welfare Board, Salvation Army, and National Travelers Aid Association. The stated purpose of the organization was "to serve the religious, spiritual, welfare and educational needs" of soldiers stationed at bases around the country. Located in an adjacent community, they provided a much needed off-duty "home" for troops. As Eisenhower noted at the time, USOs boosted morale by convincing the armed forces that the country was behind them. Facilities ran the gamut from buildings constructed by the government specifically to be USOs (like the one in DeRidder), to a USO club located in a given building, to mobile units.

The contract for the DeRidder USO was awarded on October 16, 1941, the land expropriated on October 29, and the building was completed by November 28. The contractor had his crew working virtually around the clock to go on record as completing the first USO building in the nation. The facility was dedicated in December of 1941 and operated throughout the war, serving personnel from the DeRidder Air Base and Camp Polk. It was obviously particularly popular with the thousands of troops on maneuver in the area in 1942-43. Often in the field for weeks living in tent cities, soldiers flocked to the USO to take a shower, attend a dance, see a movie, get a home-cooked meal, and perhaps celebrate a birthday. Historic photographs show the auditorium with people wall-to-wall dancing to the Big Band sounds of the period. The building continued in service as a USO through the end of the war. On February 25, 1946 the American Legion purchased the building from the United States government and shortly thereafter donated it to the police jury with the stipulation that it be operated and maintained as a war memorial civic center. The building continues in this use through the present.

OTHER RESOURCES ASSOCIATED WITH WORLD WAR II BUILD UP IN WEST-CENTRAL LOUISIANA

As noted previously, there were five military installations in the region during World War II. Camps Livingston and Claiborne and the DeRidder Army Air Base no longer exist. Camp Beauregard is still in use by the National Guard, and there are apparently about fifty World War II vintage buildings scattered here and there about the facility. North Fort Polk survives intact from the period,

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and there is a section of World War II buildings left at South Fort Polk. Many of the buildings have been aluminum sided, but they are still easily recognizable as World War II vintage military buildings. The aforementioned sections of Fort Polk best represent the strictly military aspect of the buildup in the region. In terms of USOs, there apparently were three, as can best be determined -- located in Leesville, DeRidder and Alexandria. The Leesville building survives, but according to an area historian, the Alexandria USO does not.

JUSTIFICATION FOR EXCEPTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The DeRidder USO is exceptionally significant when one considers the number of World War II military related buildings that were once in west-central Louisiana. In comparison to what has been lost, the buildings at Fort Polk and Camp Beauregard and the DeRidder and Leesville USOs are rare survivors. As noted in Bulletin 22, "Guidelines for Evaluating and Nominating Buildings That Have Achieved Significance Within the Last Fifty Years," World War II military related buildings are by their very nature fragile, short-lived resources. Camps such as Claiborne and Livingston were considered by the Army to be temporary facilities with a limited objective. Once the war was over and the camps were de-activated, the buildings were sold at public auction and the land reverted to the U. S. Forest Service. Today the camp sites are forested areas in the Kisatchie National Forest. The once bustling military bases with some seven hundred buildings each are now historic sites. The only visible remains are some concrete foundations and piers, the ruins of perhaps a half dozen concrete buildings, and the roadway systems. There are also no World War II era buildings left at the DeRidder Army Air Base, which once had about sixty. Sections of Fort Polk, scattered buildings at Camp Beauregard, and the DeRidder and Leesville USOs survive as graphic reminders of the region's World War II military history.