

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:
Mississippi
COUNTY:
Claiborne
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE
DEC 27 1974

1. NAME

COMMON:
Buena Vista Cotton Gin
AND/OR HISTORIC:
Watson Steam Gin

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: <i>NE 1/4 Sec 55</i>			
Township 12 N, Range 3 E, Section 55 (irregular)			
CITY OR TOWN:		CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:	
near Port Gibson		Fourth	
STATE	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
Mississippi	39150	Claiborne	021

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>Abandoned</u> <input type="checkbox"/> Comments

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

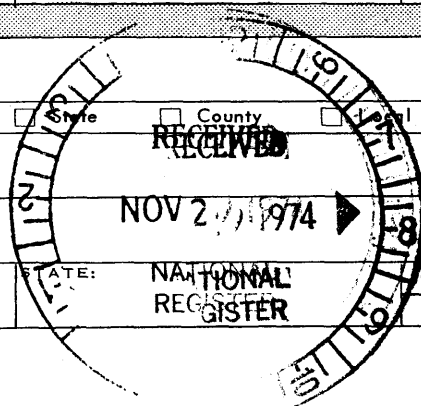
OWNER'S NAME:		
Charles E. Barland and Harold Barland		
STREET AND NUMBER:		
CITY OR TOWN:		
Port Gibson		STATE:
		Mississippi
		CODE
		28

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:		
Claiborne County Courthouse		
STREET AND NUMBER:		
Market Street at Orange		
CITY OR TOWN:		STATE
Port Gibson		Mississippi
		CODE
		28

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:			
DATE OF SURVEY:			
<input type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local			
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:			
STREET AND NUMBER:			
CITY OR TOWN:			
STATE:			
NATIONAL REGISTER			



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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The ruins of the Buena Vista Cotton Gin are located in a lush stand of second growth hardwood timber approximately 1,700 feet south of the centerline of the Natchez Trace Parkway in Township 12 N, Range 3 E, Section 55 (irregular), Claiborne County, Mississippi. Only the impressive fifty-foot brick smokestack remains. It forms a perfect eight-foot cube at the base, but at the eight-foot level the stack begins to taper gently inward toward the corbelled top which is four feet square.

The stack has only three openings, the largest of which is the square, two-foot opening at the top. The stack's western face is broken just above ground level by an arched opening seventeen inches wide and twenty-two inches high. It was through this opening that the smoke from the wood burning steam boilers was once introduced into the stack. The remnants of brick walls which once enclosed these boilers are still visible flanking this opening. The southern face boasts a circular six-inch hole at the thirty-five-foot level.

The gin building, now destroyed, was a typical two-and-one-half-story wooden structure approximately forty by sixty feet. The ground floor contained the steam engine and the vertical cotton press, which extended downward from the second level. The second story accommodated the gin stands, and it also provided a large storage area. The half-story was open storage.



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- ☐ Pre-Columbian | ☐ 16th Century | ☐ 18th Century | ☐ 20th Century
☐ 15th Century | ☐ 17th Century | ☒ 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The early settlers of what became the state of Mississippi did not discover a dependable staple crop until the last decade of the eighteenth century. Tobacco and indigo both held considerable promise in the colonial period, but they became economically unfeasible in the turbulent and highly competitive agricultural marketing system that developed in the wake of the American Revolution. Although cotton had been raised as a garden curiosity at Natchez as early as 1722, it could not then develop into a staple crop because of the prohibitive cost of preparing it for market. Eli Whitney's invention of a simple and practical cotton gin in the mid-1790s, however, removed this obstacle and caused an agricultural revolution that saved the troubled economy of the Old Natchez District. By 1800 fine cotton was the predominant crop in all the settled portions of Mississippi.

The Mississippians who began pirating Whitney's potential gin design in 1795 were by no means satisfied with his machines. By 1796 most Mississippi gins sported metal saws known as "rags" in place of Whitney's wires, an innovation that resulted in the production of undamaged fibers. Mississippians also replaced Whitney's wooden grates and other critical parts with cast metal ones, and they were the first to envision the substitution of steam for human and animal power.

As early as 1805, William Dunbar of Forest Plantation near Natchez in Adams County dabbled unsuccessfully with a steam-powered gin. The first successful coupling of steam power to a cotton gin and press was accomplished by Dr. Rush Nutt of Laurel Hill Plantation near Rodney in Jefferson County. Despite the tremendous increase in efficiency and productivity resulting from steam power, only the wealthiest of Mississippi's cotton planters attempted a conversion because of the tremendous expense of the necessary machinery, and even these planters usually had to process their neighbors' cotton on toll in order to realize a profit from their investment. The high cost factor had a predictable result in that even as late as 1860 most Mississippi gins were still powered by mules, horses, or oxen.

One of Mississippi's planters who did convert his horse-powered gin to steam was James W. Watson, the prosperous proprietor of Buena Vista Plantation near Port Gibson in Claiborne County. Watson was born in Port Gibson in 1824, the son of a leading merchant. By the time he was two weeks old both of his parents were dead, and his aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. William Young, raised him. Young was a highly successful Port Gibson merchant and planter.

James W. Watson was educated in county schools in Claiborne County, at Oakland College of Mississippi, and at Princeton College of New Jersey,

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi, Embracing an Authentic and Comprehensive Account of the Chief Events in the History of the State, and a Record of the Lives of Many of the Most Worthy and Illustrious Families and Individuals. 2 vols. Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1891, 2:994-96.

Claiborne County, Mississippi. Tax rolls, 1849, 1859, 1860, 1862, 1867. State of Mississippi, Department of Archives and History, Jackson (microfilm).

(continued)

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES				
CORNER	LATITUDE		LONGITUDE		LATITUDE		LONGITUDE		
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"	31 °	59 '	23 "
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"	90 °	54 '	35 "
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"			
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **Five**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

NO UTM
HL

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
James H. Stone, Assistant Administrator

ORGANIZATION
Mississippi Department of Archives and History

DATE
August 30, 1974

STREET AND NUMBER:
P. O. Box 571

CITY OR TOWN:
Jackson

STATE
Mississippi 39205

CODE
28

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☒ Local ☒

Name **Elmer R. Hilliard**
State Historic Preservation
Title **Officer**

Date **November, 1974**

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Al R. Martensen
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date **12/27/74**

ATTEST:
Wm. H. H. H. H.
Keeper of The National Register

Date **DEC 26 1974**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE Mississippi	
COUNTY Claiborne	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE DEC 24 1974

(Number all entries)

8. Statement of Significance

graduating from the latter institution in 1844. Returning to Claiborne County, Watson immediately embarked on a career as a cotton planter, a field in which he exhibited exemplary management technique and untiring industry. In addition, he expended considerable time and energy on local business, education, and political affairs. He served as a trustee of Chamberlain Hunt Academy, as a director of the Grand Gulf & Port Gibson Railroad, and as a delegate to the Mississippi Secession Convention.

Watson's enviable success as a planter is readily apparent from an examination of the extant manuscript tax and census rolls for Claiborne County. By 1849 he owned 1,000 acres of land, a holding that increased to 1,700 acres in 1859. In the latter year he also owned sixteen horses, thirty mules, twenty milk cows, sixteen work oxen, sixty other cattle, one hundred sheep, and one hundred hogs. His plantation produced a wide variety of agricultural products, but cotton was by far the most important. His slave force harvested 420 bales in 1859, a figure exceeded by only two other Claiborne County planters. The expanding nature of Watson's agricultural operation is best illustrated by the size of his slave force. In 1849 he owned only thirty-five "taxable slaves" (meaning those under age sixty), but he expanded his force to 100 in 1859, to 105 in 1860, and to 110 in 1862.

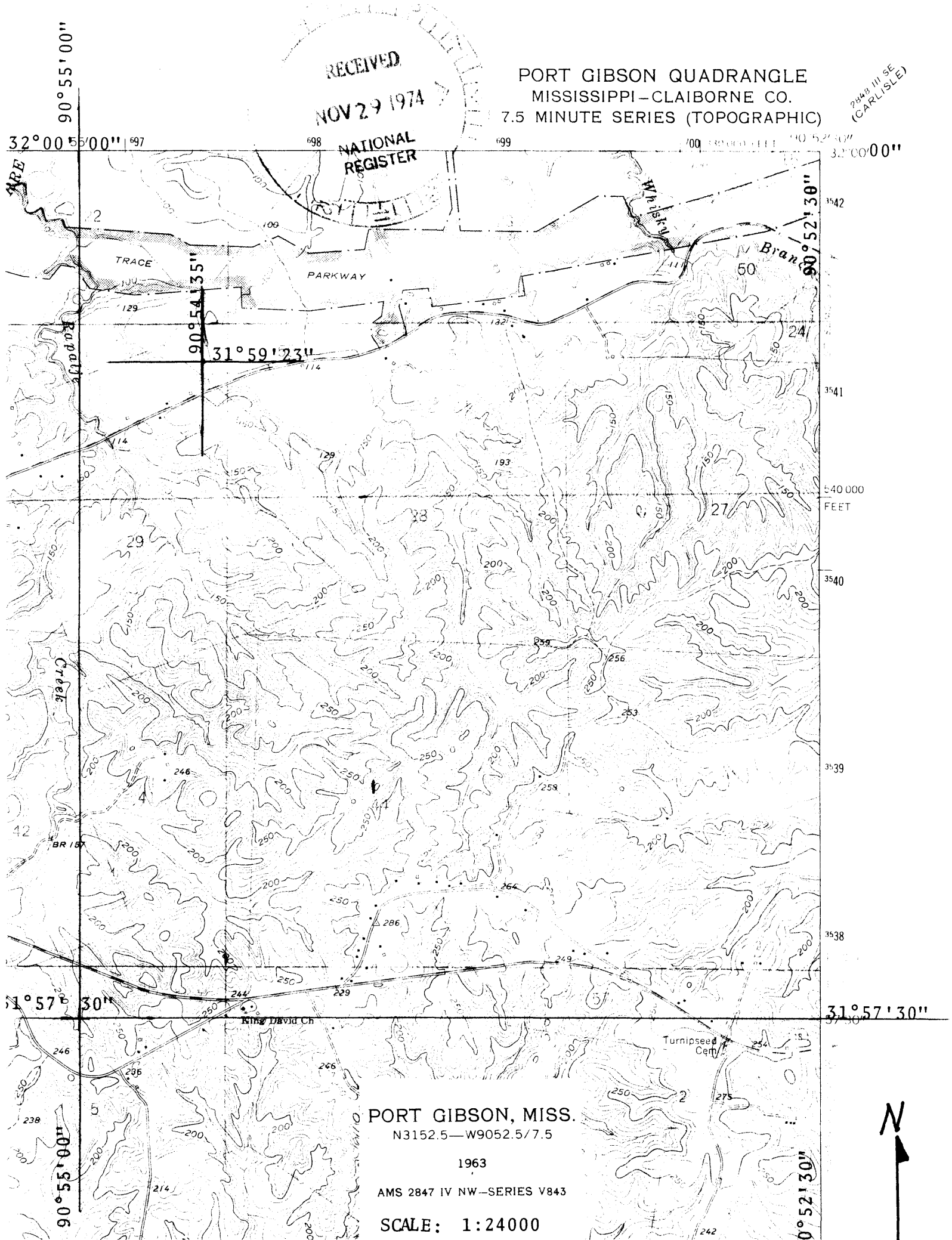
It is impossible to date precisely the Buena Vista Cotton Gin, but the scanty available evidence indicates that it was first constructed as a horse-powered gin about 1848 and that Watson converted it to steam power between 1857 and 1861. The paucity of information about the gin does little to diminish its importance. It is the only known steam cotton gin site with above-ground remains in the entire state of Mississippi, and it offers an excellent laboratory for future investigations in the field of industrial site archaeology. In addition, its close proximity to the Natchez Trace Parkway and to previously developed and interpreted Parkway sites at Grindstone Ford and Mangum Mound make the Buena Vista Cotton Gin an outstanding candidate for Federal acquisition, investigation and interpretation.



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PORT GIBSON QUADRANGLE
MISSISSIPPI—CLAIBORNE CO.
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

2648 III SE
(CARLISLE)



PORT GIBSON, MISS.
N3152.5—W9052.5/7.5
1963
AMS 2847 IV NW—SERIES V843
SCALE: 1:24000

