

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

NR LISTED
JUN 19 1999
AHPP

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Southwestern Proving Ground Airport Historic District

Other Name/Site Number: HE0783

2. Location

Street & Number: Hope Municipal Airport, Airport Road

Not for Publication: N/A

City/Town: Hope

Vicinity: N/A

State: AR County: Hempstead Code: 057 Zip Code: 71801

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private-Public-Local

Category of Property: District

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing

Noncontributing

4

2

Buildings

5

Sites

9

2

Structures

Objects

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Southwestern Proving Ground
Airport Historic District
Name of Property

Hempstead Co., Arkansas
County and State

State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Cathryn A. Slater
Signature of certifying official

Date

1-8-99

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

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 _____

_____ determined eligible for the
National Register _____

_____ determined not eligible for the
National Register _____

_____ removed from the National Register _____

_____ other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date
Of action

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6. Function or Use

Historic: Defense Sub: Military facility
Current : Transportation Sub: Air-related

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Art Deco

Minimalist

Materials: foundation Brick roof Built up tar
walls Brick other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance:

The Southwestern Proving Ground Airport Historic District is located at the Hope Municipal Airport on United States Highway 278 in Hempstead County. The proving ground was constructed in 1941 to serve as a munitions testing ground for artillery shell and air bomb testing during World War II. The district includes six buildings and one structure among which two buildings are considered non-contributing. The original proving ground encompassed 50,780.27 acres and included 108 buildings, the bulk of which were destroyed by the 1960s. Remaining buildings and structures included in the Southwestern Proving Ground Airport Historic District are the hangar, night lighting plant, heating plant, storage building, garage, bomb assembly, high explosives magazine and concrete runways and hangar apron. The magazine and bomb assembly building are located on adjacent land under private ownership. The assembly building is in use as part of a business complex but the magazine is not in use at this time. The last five buildings are located on 750 acres owned by the Hope municipal airport. The garage and storage building are considered non-contributing to the district because of the application of vinyl siding and replacement of original doors and windows with modern fenestration. The hangar and night lighting plant are used for storage and repair of airplanes and equipment storage while the heating plant is vacant and in a state of disrepair, however future plans call for the installation of a museum in the heating plant. The buildings and magazine were constructed in 1941. The district is bounded on the east by U.S. Highway 278 and on the north, west and south by agricultural land.

Architectural Survey

The buildings at the Southwestern Proving Ground Airport Historic District were constructed for various purposes related to munitions testing during World War II. The hangar, night lighting plant, and heating plant are constructed of brick and served utilitarian purposes so are very restrained in their style. The Art Deco style is most recognizable in the hangar's corner towers with shallow window wells and stepped concrete parapets. The bomb assembly building is Minimalist construction with a side-gable roof and brick sheathing. The magazine is an earthen structure with a triangular concrete retaining wall and door. The garage and storage building were weatherboard side-gable Minimalist structures but metal storm windows and doors and vinyl siding was recently applied which makes these buildings non-contributing to the district. The apron, which surrounds the hangar and runways to the east of the hangar are constructed of concrete.

The hangar is located to the west of U.S. Highway 278 and is surrounded by a concrete apron on all sides. The building is constructed of brick in a restrained Art Deco style on a continuous concrete foundation with a barrel vaulted roof and four corner towers. Low, flat-roofed wings flank the central barrel roofed hangar. Large metal hopper windows light the workroom and office areas of the hangar. The western facade could be considered the front elevation as this is where the entrance to the waiting room and offices is situated. The corrugated metal end wall of a flat-roofed addition to the northern facade is visible at the northwestern corner of the building. The wall is set back from the main hangar about twelve feet and is blank except for a metal single-leaf door. The modern metal wing joins a short brick side wing to the hangar which is original to the building. A single fifteen-light metal hopper window is set in a shallow window well on this section. A two-story corner tower extends west about twelve feet from the brick and metal side wings. Two tall thin ten-light hopper windows are vertically set into shallow domed wells in the center of the tower wall. The tower is topped with a stepped concrete parapet and ringed with a metal handrail. The central section of the hangar which is used for storage of airplanes, is accessed by a bi-fold corrugated metal door centered between two spans of stationary corrugated metal. These metal doors replaced original metal bi-fold doors in the early 1980s when they were raised too high and were broken. A ribbon of metal multi-paned stationary windows line the wall above the metal doors. The domed pediment above the windows is stucco and is painted with "HOPE ARK ELEVATION 350 FEET."

A second corner tower frames the central barrel roofed area. Two windows like those on the northwestern tower light this southwestern tower as well. A square metal air traffic control tower raised on four metal stilts sits atop the corner tower's roof. An open metal staircase reaches from the roof of the corner tower to the floor of the control tower which contains ribbons of one-light windows above a corrugated metal half-wall. An open metal catwalk which surrounds the tower is reached by a metal one-light door on the east facade. The air traffic control tower is no longer used in the day to day operations of the airport but during the tenure of the proving ground it was used to marshall airplane landings and takeoffs. The office and waiting room areas are situated at the southwestern corner of the hangar. A large beveled bay contains a single metal and glass door, four large multi-pane metal double-hung windows topped with a short standing seam metal shed roof and a second

metal and glass door. The extreme southwest corner of the building holds a wide ten-light hopper window.

The southern facade of the hangar reveals a lower, flat-roofed wing that extends the length of the building adjacent to the central hangar area. Two ribbons of three large multi-pane hopper windows extend the span of wall at the southwest corner, which is stepped forward from the side wing about twenty feet. From west to east, the wall of the recessed side wing holds two large ribbons of multi-pane windows, two single twenty-light windows and two more ribbons of three. Each set of windows is separated by a shallow brick buttress.

The upper level of the southwest corner tower is visible above the flat roof of the side wing. A single thin ten-light window set in a shallow domed well lights the interior of the tower. The hangar wall is lit west to east by a continuous bank of sixteen metal multi-pane windows with central hoppers.

The eastern elevation is very simple. The eastern wall of the office/waiting room wing contains a ribbon of three multi-pane windows and a single-leaf door with a six-light transom flanked by two twenty-light hopper windows. The end wall of the side wing holds a single fifteen-light window. Two corner towers fenestrated by two ten-light windows each to the south and north flank the center barrel roofed hangar. The original hangar doors are still present on this facade. The nine doors are composed of metal topped with one-hundred-eight-light windows. Each door slides behind the adjacent one on a metal rail to be stored in the southern corner tower. A short brick wing extends from the northern tower. The blank wall of the metal addition at the northeastern corner is set back from the eastern wall of the hangar about thirty feet.

The original northern facade is largely obscured by a corrugated metal wing with three large bi-fold doors. A section of the original facade is still visible beginning at the northeastern corner. A low square wing extends from the corner tower. This windowless wing is accessed by a heavy metal door with a single light. A taller wing similar to the one on the southern facade can be seen between the shorter, northeastern wing and the metal addition. There is a metal double-leaf door with four lights topped with a twelve-light transom at the corner of the taller wing and a large multi-pane window centered between the doors and the modern addition. The upper level of the northeastern tower contains a thin window like those on the other towers. The upper level of the hangar is fenestrated in the same manner as the south facade. The northwestern corner tower resembles the northeastern tower.

The interior of the hangar covers a total footage of 25,000 square feet. The barrel roof above the concrete floor of the central area is supported by open metal trusswork. A small waiting room, pilots lounge and administration offices are located in the southwest side of the building. The southwest corner tower contains a metal staircase leading to the control tower. The southern side wing holds eight rooms of various sizes that were used as training rooms and administrative offices in the 1940s. They are now used for storage, maintenance and welding equipment. The northern wing that is original to the building is composed of two large rooms. The metal addition on the north is one large room used for storage of small planes.

Three concrete runways constructed in 1941 extend from the apron to the west of the hangar. Each runway is a little over one mile long with shorter approaches and fifty-foot radius at their confluence so planes could turn around there rather than make the entire run. The runways were situated in such a way that planes landed with southwest or northeast winds at their back. The aprons and runways were constructed with drainage on each side and laid with six-inch perforated, galvanized steel pipe in coarse chat for sifting particles from the rainwater. The drainage lines emptied into twenty-four inch solid galvanized, corrugated steel pipes, then flowed into larger drain lines to the south and southwest of the airport. This system ensured that the runways would be dry for the landing of P-38 fighter planes and B-24 bombers. Prior to the arrival of the Detachment the runways were used to train B-17 bomber crews from Barksdale Air Force base in Shreveport. These crews from the Air Force Base were in training for bombardment of Germany in England. From February until about the first of June 1942 the training crews used the runways for "touch and go" landings.

The night lighting plant is adjacent to the hangar and is about forty feet from its southeastern corner. The plant is a very simple one-story rectangular brick structure with a flat roof. The north facade contains an entry at the northeastern corner. Two large three-light hopper windows covered with security bars fenestrate this elevation. The western elevation contains a single window. The southern facade has no fenestration. The eastern elevation is lit by a single window. This building contained equipment that operated the landing lights for the Proving Ground, a function it still serves today for the Hope Municipal Airport.

The steam heating plant is located east of the hangar, across Airport Road. During the operation of SWPG this building generated steam heat to warm the buildings in the entire complex. The plant is currently empty and has been extensively vandalized, but the city hopes to install a small museum dedicated to the history of the Proving Ground in the building at a future date. The plant is another example of extremely restrained architecture with a rectangular floor plan and flat roof. A single row of soldier bricks traverses the building just below the roofline and along the tops of the window and door sills. The western, or front facade includes a opening that once contained double-leaf doors at the northwestern corner. The opening is topped with a twenty-four light transom. Two twenty-eight light metal hopper windows complete fenestration on this elevation. The southern facade contains a single window and a single-leaf metal door. The eastern elevation contains a centered double-leaf opening with transom flanked by two windows. The northern facade consists of a centered single-leaf door between two windows. The interior is a large room with a tall ceiling bolstered by metal trusses. At the northern end of the room is a small office space with a restroom. The office is entered through a paneled wooden door. Three openings that once contained windows are to the east of the door.

The storage building to the south of the steam heating plant is a rectangular Minimalist structure with a gable roof. This building was used as a supply building for the Proving Ground but is currently used by the city of Hope to store Christmas ornaments and equipment. The storage building was once sheathed in weatherboard but it is now covered in vinyl siding and the windows and doors have been replaced with modern metal openings, thus the

building is not considered contributing to this district.

A second non-contributing building is the garage which is situated south of the storage building. The garage was used by the Proving Ground to store and repair vehicles used in daily operations. Currently it is leased from the city by International Paper. The building is similar to the storage building in its Minimalist style and rectangular plan. It has also been covered in vinyl siding and has had modern fenestration installed.

The bomb assembly building is southeast of the hangar and is located on private property within a chain link fence. As its name implies, bombs were assembled in this structure then hauled by truck to Lake Charles, Louisiana for testing. The day after a truckload of bombs arrived in Lake Charles the Proving Ground would send a loaded B-25 to drop bombs in the Gulf of Mexico in order to observe them for tumbling and proper ballistics after they were dropped. Today the owner of the property that the building is located on utilizes the space in the operation of a private industry. The brick bomb assembly building is constructed in the Minimalist style with a gable roof. A wide frieze band encircles the building. Metal lightening rods line the roof ridge line and are spaced evenly across the slope of the roof. The north gable end from left to right contains two large openings infilled with glass blocks. Two thin fifteen-light metal hopper windows with concrete sills complete fenestration. The western elevation contains a single-leaf four-light metal door at the northwest corner. Two windows are centered in this facade beside an entryway consisting of two sets of bi-fold metal doors. Each door contains two sets of four-lights horizontally stacked. Two more windows complete fenestration. The southern gable end holds two eighteen-light metal garage doors. A brick exterior chimney rises from the southeast corner of the eastern elevation. This facade is fenestrated left to right with three evenly spaced windows, a set of bi-fold doors like those on the west, and two windows with a third spaced slightly farther from the others on the northeast corner.

The high explosives magazine is located on private property as well and is south of the bomb assembly building, outside of the fenced in area. The magazine is a triangular structure of concrete. The only section of the structure that is visible is the metal entry with metal strap hinges set within a triangular concrete wall. The roof and north, south and east sides of the magazine are covered by an earthen mound that is heavily overgrown with brush and small trees. Once used to store sensitive explosive materials, the magazine is currently not in use.

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8. Statement of Significance

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: A

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: Military

Period(s) of Significance: 1941-1945

Significant Dates: 1941

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: W.E. Callahan Construction Co.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and period of significance noted above:

The Southwestern Proving Ground Airport Historic District in Hope covered 50,780.27 acres of former farmland and was utilized as an air field for bombers and a testing ground for artillery shells and air bombs. The proving ground was in operation from 1941 to 1945 and was a major employer of Hempstead, Howard, Nevada, Clark and Lafayette counties. The bulk of the 108 buildings on the reservation were located to the east of the airport complex across U.S. Highway 278. Several buildings associated with the proving ground were destroyed by the 1960s and the few remaining structures east of the highway have been adapted for private use by local landowners. The SPGA Historic District encompasses nine structures that were integral to the operation of the reservation during its tenure in Hempstead County.

Historical Background

By the late 1930s it became apparent that the United States would be at war with one or more of the Axis powers. Even though the United States was not actually at war it was providing war materials to its Allies. In preparation

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for such an event the U.S. Government instituted the National Defense Program which provided factories for the manufacture of munitions, airplanes and tanks. This led to the construction of the Southwestern Proving Ground in Hope as it was used to test those products for the war effort. By the time war was declared after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, SWPG and the Jefferson Proving Ground at Madison, Indiana, completed in May of 1941 were ready to do their part.

The news of construction on a proving ground in Hope became official in June of 1941. When a map of the proposed testing ground was published it was projected to cover 37,650 acres which would encompass private landholdings of 244 individuals and firms and 937 acres of state held property. The reservation was bounded on the south by a line four and a half miles north of Hope which ran about three and a half miles east and west. The area widened at its northern extension by about 15 miles, brushing the towns of Washington and Ozan. The northern boundary line from east to west was about five-and-one-half miles wide, leaving Belton a half mile north of the northern boundary line, McCaskill one-and-one-half miles east from the line and DeAnn two-and-one-half miles east of the line.

The Real Estate Department of the War Department was in charge of acquiring land by filing condemnation proceedings against the tract and then taking possession of those sections they required to begin immediate work. After appraisal negotiations would begin with each landowner over amount of compensation for land, improvement and growing crops. Evacuations began in July, 1941. After the initial evacuation order the War Department decided that there was not a proper site for an airport so they surveyed 4,000 more acres southwest of the reservation. After the addition of the airport complex several more acres were seized bringing the total to 50,780.27.

In the end 404 families were relocated by a deadline of July 24th. With not enough time to erect temporary housing for those unable to find quarters, the National Guard had to provide 45 tents and running water on 20 acres of land in Washington. In August a half-dozen families were living in the 1874 courthouse at Washington. Inhabitants of seven area cemeteries were also relocated at the expense of the government. Licensed undertakers bid on removal and reintering of bodies to sites approved by the Constructing Quartermaster and the State Board of Health. Original markers were to be reinstalled in concrete as they were on the old grave on a site that was to be equal or better than the former, and graves would be placed in their original alignment. June 1, 1942 was the deadline for removal, dead or alive, as firing in the area was scheduled to begin on that date. The project was first met with great enthusiasm but criticism of the construction understandably arose from residents amid the confusion and mass upheaval. Rumors also began to fly that Senator Lloyd Spencer, who owned a farm on the reservation, had pushed for placement of the proving ground to encompass his land. Alex Washburn, editor of the *Hope Star* pointed out the need for such an undertaking in the name of National Defense while at the same time empathizing with the displaced farmers. Washburn wrote that "... anybody can see things about the Proving Ground to break your heart - but it is admittedly the biggest thing in South Arkansas since the El Dorado oil boom in 1921 ..."

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Allahan Construction Company was awarded the job of erecting the proving ground by the War Department and hiring of 4,000 construction workers began July 15th. Senator Spencer and the project director, W.K. Mellyor agreed upon a guarantee of preferential treatment of local citizens in consideration for jobs. Workers began on the airport with the pouring of concrete for the runways in October. The Army released a report that upon its completion, it would be one of the largest and best equipped military airports in the United States. It would be reached by three runways with more landing space than any currently used by the average municipal field. The number of mile long runways allowed Army planes of any size to land and launch in any wind direction. They were extended with 50 foot radii at the intersection of the two runways so airplanes could turn around there instead of making the entire run. When the airport was completed it had the third longest runway in the United States. Total footage of the hangar was 25,000 square feet and it was serviced by eight buildings in the airport complex.

Opening day festivities were postponed because of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, December 7th but Hempstead County residents were finally allowed within the gates of the proving ground in April, 1942. Editor Washburn recorded that,

"Sunday's visitors who, celebrating Army Day, were permitted to go through the completed SPG saw there a graphic example of American efficiency and speed - for what was rolling prairie and timberland only last August is today a functioning war plant....Like our Anglo brothers over in England, we Americans languish slow in the arms of peace - rise slowly to the act of war. But brother when we get going!"

Testing began in January, 1941. Troops explored the capabilities of LaBolenge chronographs and solenoid chronographs for accuracy and reliability. 105 mm shells that had fired prematurely in battle were determined by research at SWPG to have faulty rotating bands, thus saving the lives of American troops. B-25s were sent from the airport in Hope to the Gulf of Mexico with truckloads of bombs to observe them for tumbling and proper ballistics after being fired. Top secret tests were carried out on proximity fuses with radio transmitters and receivers that can withstand the acceleration of being fired from a gun. The proof division tested ammunition from 20 mm cannon to 155 mm long tom.

May 7, 1945 Germany surrendered and on August 14th, Japan surrendered, bringing a close to the war and to operations at Southwestern Proving Ground. By August 20 the proving ground was ordered closed within 30 days. By September the only staff present would be a skeleton crew to write up final reports. The Army declared the proving ground surplus but in December, 1945 the sale was stopped as the city of Hope was told it would receive the SWPG airport. The remaining acreage would fall under the policies of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the Surplus Property Corporation. Formal dedication of the Hope Municipal Airport took place on April 27, 1947. City Council passed a resolution in June 1948 accepting 750 acres of land northeast of the airport from the Government with the stipulation that any earnings from the land be used on upkeep of the airport. Currently, Southwestern Aviation Corporation operates the airport. The night lighting plant is still used in the operation of the hangar but the heating plant

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stands vacant, awaiting implementation of plans for a museum. The garage is rented by International Paper, while the storage building is used by the city of Hope for storage of Christmas ornaments. Amko Company, south of the airport utilizes the bomb assembly plant in their daily operations and the HE magazine, also under private ownership appears to be unused.

Architectural Significance

The Southwestern Proving Ground Airport Historic District is composed of six buildings and five structures. Two buildings are considered non-contributing to the district. The structures feature restrained versions of Art Deco and Minimalist architecture. These stark examples of industrial architecture used in the daily operation of the proving ground, are being nominated to the National Register with local significance under Criterion A for its role as an industrial testing ground for World War II munitions during the years 1941 to 1945. SWPG was one of two proving grounds constructed in 1941, the other in Madison, Indiana. Both were constructed by the U.S. Government under the National Defense Program to assess the efficiency and reliability of those materials produced by the United States for use in battle against the Axis powers. The proving ground was part of the larger effort by the United States to support the fighting forces and contributed to the defeat of the enemy on all fronts. The airport complex at SWPG possessed the third largest runway in the United States, the longest at LaGuardia Field in New York and the second-longest at Jefferson Proving Ground. Upon its completion the airport was one of the largest and best equipped military air fields in the United States. On the local level it provided employment during the war years for thousands of Hempstead, Nevada, Howard, Clark and Lafayette county residents.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Turner, Mary Nell. "Southwestern Proving Ground 1941-1945." Journal of the Hempstead County Historical Society X (Spring 1986)

Information provided by Paul Henley, Hope, 1998.

Information provided by Dale Medlin, Hope, 1998.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data: _____

- ☒ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other state agency

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☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other -- Specify Repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: Approximately 865 acres.

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>15</u>	<u>437660</u>	<u>3732100</u>	B	<u>15</u>	<u>439880</u>	<u>3730840</u>
C	<u>15</u>	<u>439530</u>	<u>3730280</u>	D	<u>15</u>	<u>437680</u>	<u>3730340</u>
E	<u>15</u>	<u>437700</u>	<u>3731620</u>	F	<u>15</u>	<u>438600</u>	<u>3731620</u>
G	<u>15</u>	<u>438600</u>	<u>3731900</u>				

Verbal Boundary Description:

Beginning at a point on the west side of U.S. Highway 278, proceed south 2,000 feet to the intersection of State Route 32 and Airport Road to the southern curbline of State Route 32. Then proceed west 80 feet to the fenceline of Amko Inc.'s property. Then proceed southeast 1,000 feet through Amko Inc.'s property to the deadend of Airport Road. Turn southwest 2,000 feet to the end of the north-south runway. Turn west for 6,000 feet to the intersection of the northeast-southwest runway and the turning radii. Then proceed north for 4,000 feet to the Hope Municipal Airport property line. Turn east for 2,500 feet along the airport property line to the northwestern property line of the airport. Proceed north 500 feet along the western property line of the airport then turn northeast for 2,700 feet to the point of origin.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes those buildings and runways west of U.S. Highway 278 that were integral to the operation of the Southwestern Proving Ground during the years 1941-1945.

11. Form Prepared By

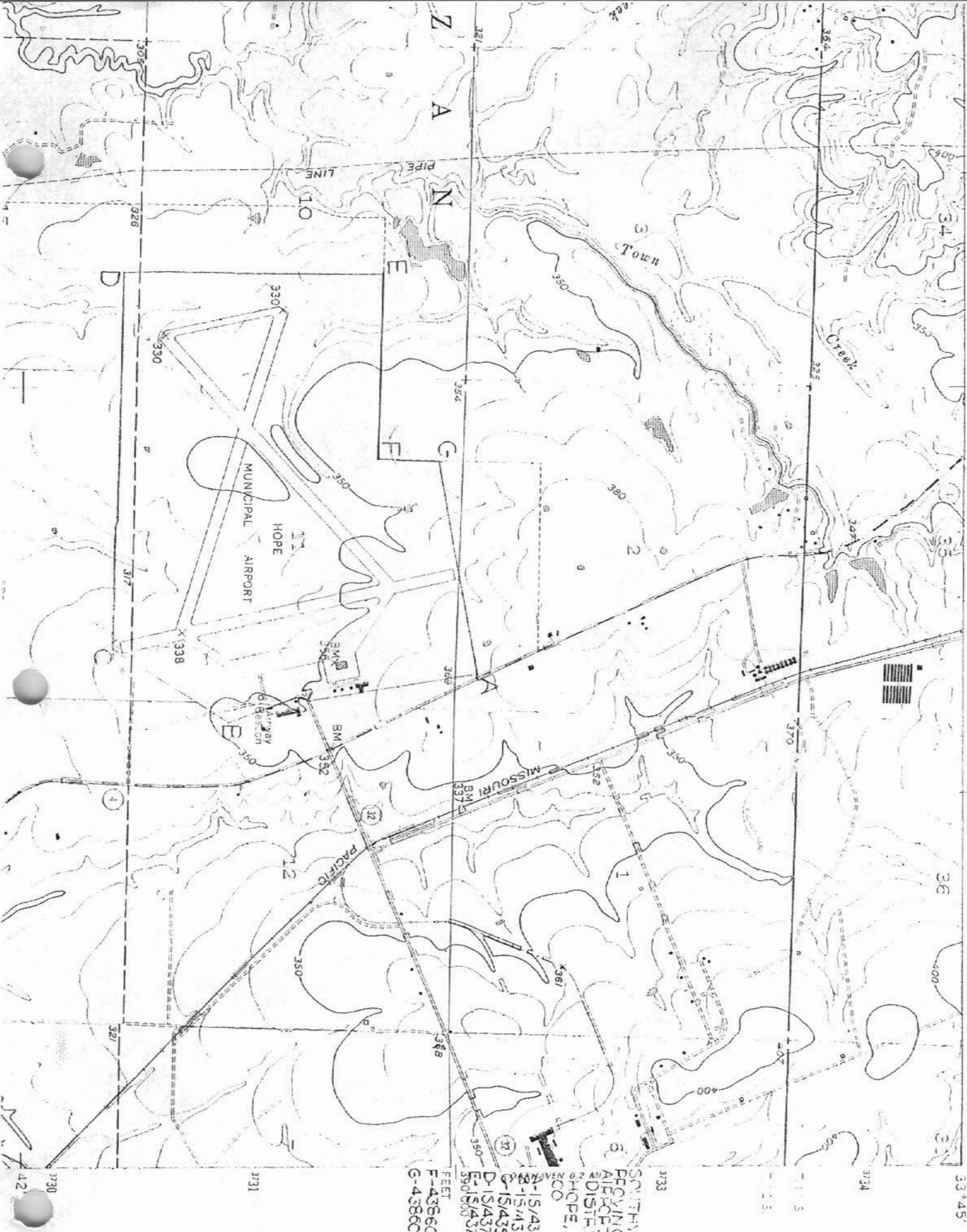
Name/Title: Holly Hope/Survey Historian

Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: 10/02/98

Street & Number: 1500 Tower Bldg., 323 Center St. Telephone: (501) 324-9880

City or Town: Little Rock

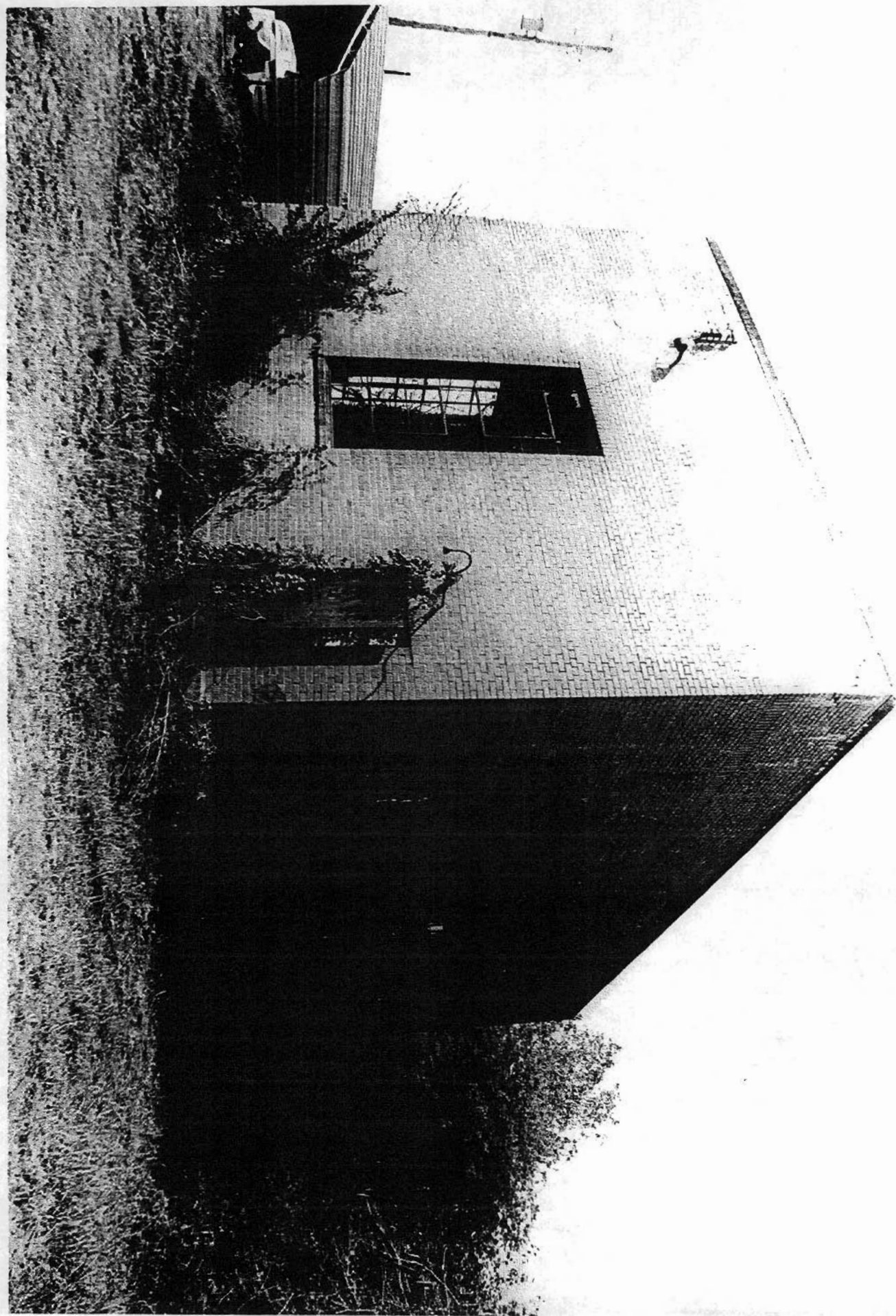
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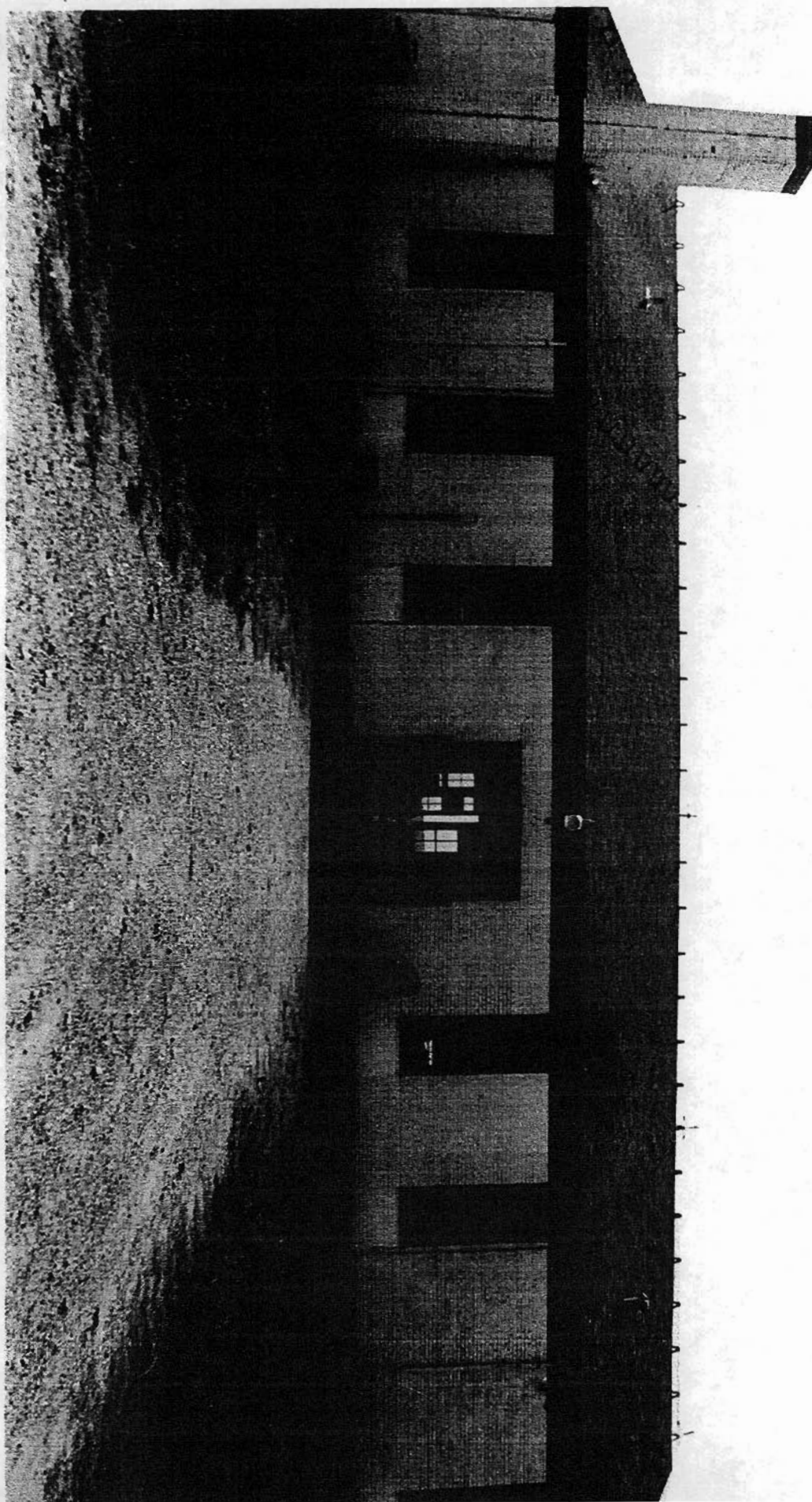


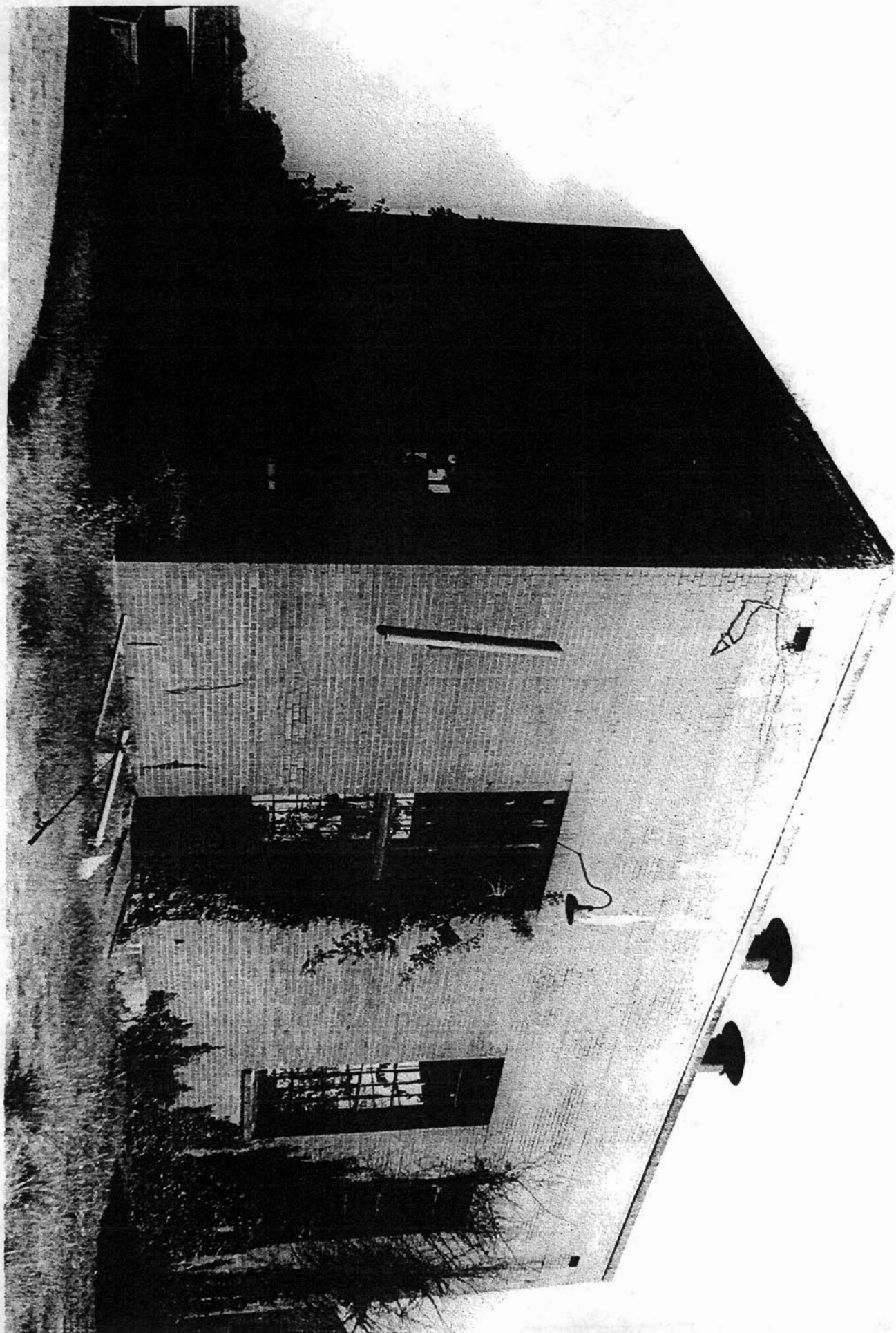
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AIRPORT
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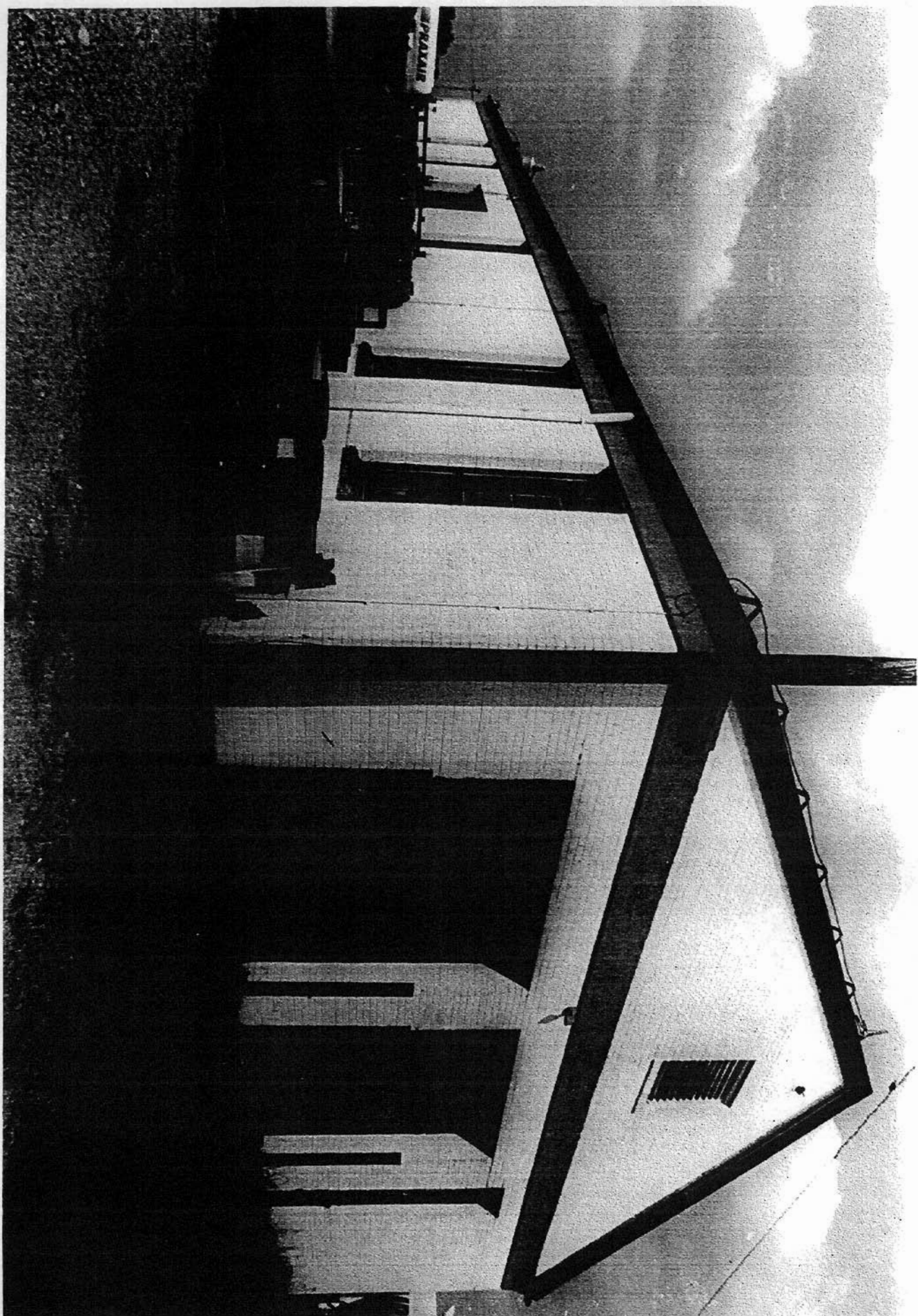


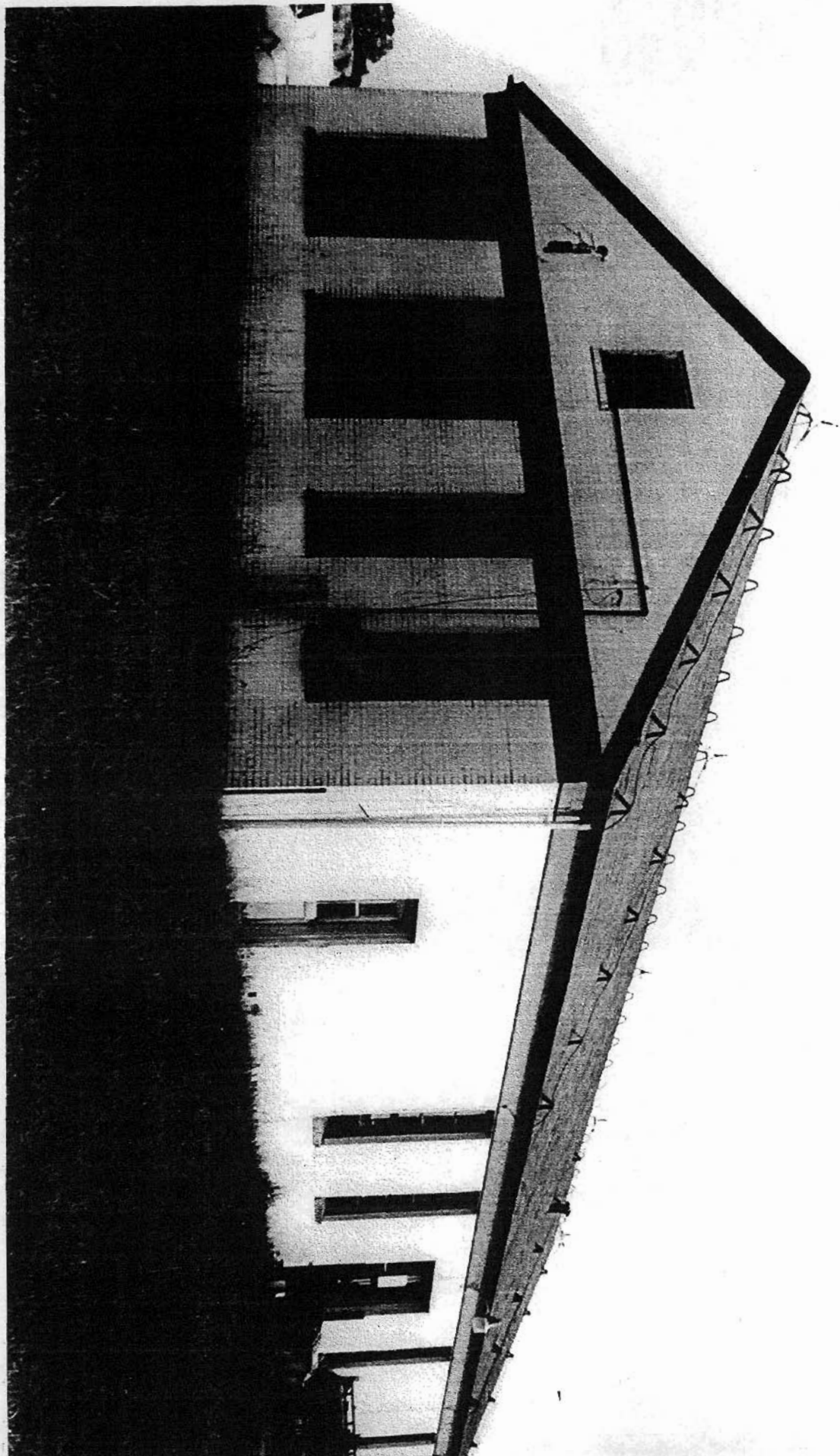
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- 2 NIGHT LIGHTING PLANT HE0785
- 3 HEATING PLANT HE0786
- 4 STORAGE BUILDING HE0787-NC
- 5 GARAGE HE0788-NC
- 6 BOMB ASSEMBLY HE0789
- 7 THE MAGAZINE HE0790
- 8 RUNWAYS
- 9 HANGAR APRON

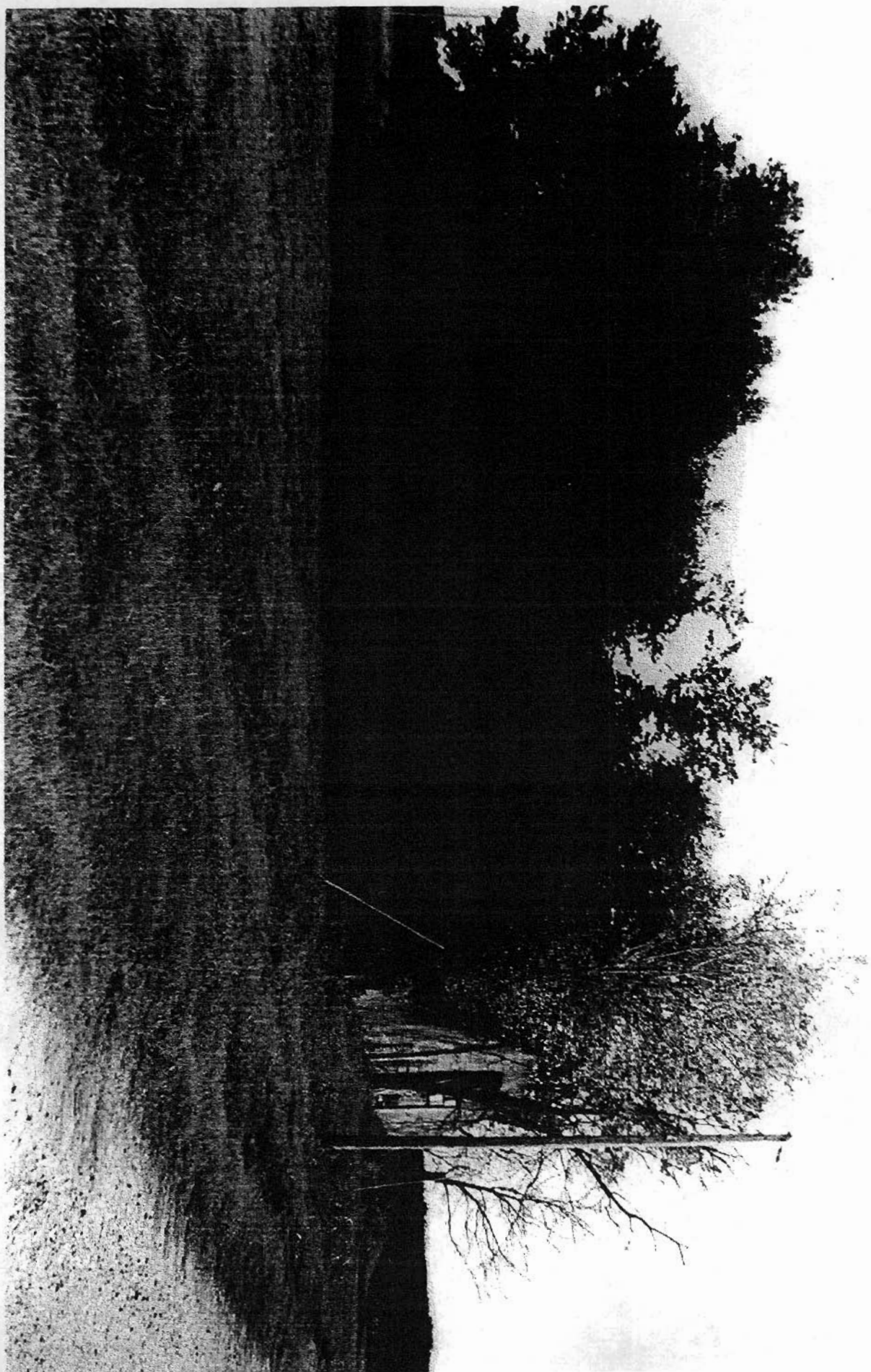


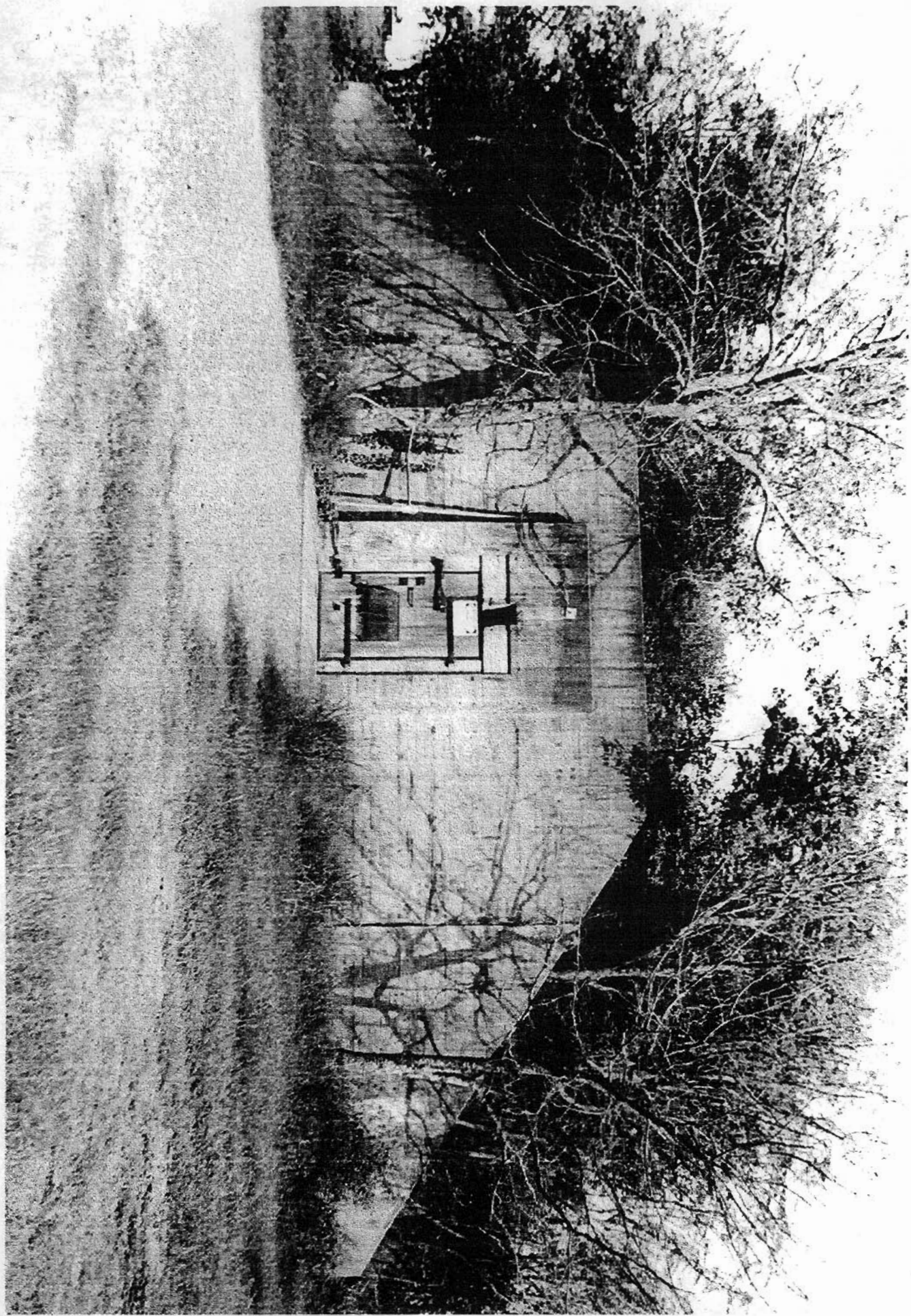


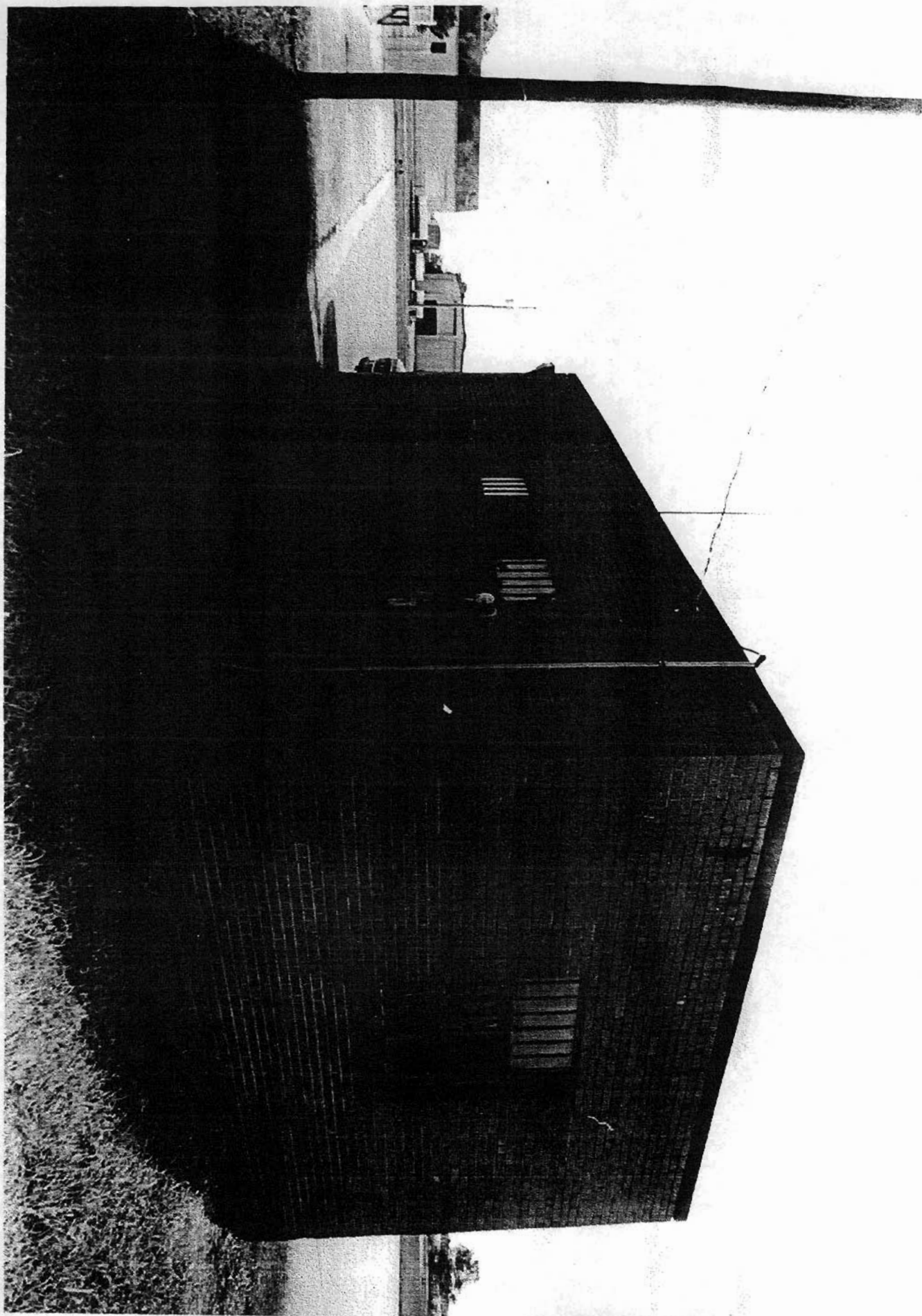












22.5 - 4000 ft. N. of
Ft. Carson, 1974, 9-4-74



Southwestern Proving Ground Airport Hangar

Used By The

616th Army Air Corps Detachment

While Testing Ammunition During World War II



From 1942-1945



