

**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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy

other name/site number Lowry Air Force Base Building 880; 5AH2908

2. Location

street & number 1016 Boston Street N/A not for publication

city or town Aurora N/A vicinity

state Colorado code CO county Arapahoe code 005 zip code 80230

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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Colorado Historical Society, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:) _____ _____	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)

- public-local
- private
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(check only one box)

- district
- building(s)
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

DEFENSE/military facility

Current Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/senior center and day care facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

NO STYLE

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls WOOD/weatherboard

roof ASPHALT

other BRICK

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Description

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.)

Property is:

- 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Narrative Statement of Significance

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

MILITARY

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1942

1955-1958

Significant Date

1942

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

U.S. Army, Quartermaster Corps

Primary location of additional data:

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

Wings Over the Rockies Museum, Denver, CO

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

1. 1/3 5/1/0/4/5/7 4/3/9/7/5/8/1
Zone Easting Northing (NAD 27)

2. 1/3 /// ///
Zone Easting Northing

3. 1/3 /// ///
Zone Easting Northing

4. 1/3 /// ///
Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title R. Laurie Simmons and Thomas H. Simmons, historians (prepared for the property owner)

organization Front Range Research Associates, Inc. date 22 November 2006

street & number 3635 West 46th Avenue telephone 303-477-7597

city or town Denver state CO zip code 80211

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs: Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items: (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name/title City of Aurora

street & number 15151 E. Alameda Pkwy. telephone _____

city or town Aurora state CO zip code 80012

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications 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. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 7 Page 1

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

Narrative Description

The Air Force Academy Commandant of Cadets Building (Building 880) is located in the northeast quadrant of the former Lowry Air Force Base in Aurora, Colorado. The building is one of seven still standing that are historically associated with the interim Air Force Academy that operated on the base during 1955-58. Lowry, established in 1937, is currently being redeveloped for residential, retail, and public uses. The block on which Building 880 is located was once filled with rectangular cadet dormitories surrounding a central open space. Today the nominated building, which faces southwest, stands alone at the southern end of its block. The recently rehabilitated 1942 building is distinguished by its H-shaped plan. The one-story frame building has horizontal board drop siding with corner boards, a gabled roof with composition roofing and overhanging eaves, eight-over-eight-light double-hung sash windows, and a concrete block foundation (Photograph 1). A multi-story brick chimney, stepped out from the center of the façade, is a distinguishing feature. The building now serves as a community center for the City of Aurora and houses a preschool, before/after school child care center, and adult day care facility. Of the extant buildings associated with the Academy, the Commandant of Cadets Building retains the highest degree of historic physical integrity and is considered most representative of the cadet era on the base.

Front (Southwest)

The front of the building (southwest wall) has projecting gabled roof wings flanking a center wing on the north and south (Photograph 1). The southwest wall of each projecting wing has a rectangular louvered vent at the apex of the gable face and two widely-spaced eight-over-eight-light double-hung sash windows below (Photograph 2). The northwest wall of the south wing has an entrance with a metal door at the west end and a window further east. The central wing intersects the midpoints of the north and south wings, creating courtyards at the front and rear. The front of the center wing (Photograph 3) has a window at the south end. At the center of the facade is a multi-story brick chimney that is stepped away from the frame wall of the building. The chimney is composed of orange and brown brick laid in a pattern with four rows of stretchers between rows of headers. There are boards at the corners and marking the first story of the chimney, and metal speakers are attached near the top of the building. Adjacent to the chimney on the north is a projecting, flat roof, frame entrance bay with double metal doors with large rectangular lights. The sides of the entrance bay have large two-part windows. A window is adjacent to the entrance bay on the north. The southwest wall of the north wing has two windows.

Northwest

The west end of the northwest wall of the north wing has an entrance with a metal door flanked by windows facing a raised concrete stoop with steps and metal pipe railings (Photograph 4). There is a similar entrance flanked by windows facing a concrete stoop at the east end of the wall (Photograph 5). Between the two entrances are two windows, each with a small, metal, louvered vent near it.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 7 Page 2

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

Northeast

The northeast walls of the projecting north and south wings, like those of the southwest, have louvered vents at the gable apex and two widely spaced windows below (Photograph 6). The northeast wall of the north wing also has metal utility boxes. The southeast wall of the north wing has three windows. The center wing has an entrance sheltered by an arched awning toward the south end. North of the entrance are two windows and south of the entrance is a small vent. The northwest wall of the south wing has a small vent at the west end and three widely spaced windows.

Southeast

The southeast wall of the south wing has a central, projecting, gabled roof, frame entrance bay with drop siding and double metal doors (Photograph 7). East of the entrance bay is a single metal door flanked by windows (these elements are widely spaced). West of the entrance bay are three windows, a set of double flush metal doors, and a single window at the west end (Photograph 2).

Landscape

The H-shaped plan of the building creates courtyards on the southwest and northeast. The southwest courtyard has a central, curving, concrete sidewalk leading to the entrance. Flanking the sidewalk are wide strips of grass and adjacent the building are areas with ornamental gravel and shrubs. There is a large curved parking lot in front of the building on the southwest. On the northwest, the western half of the yard next to the building is enclosed with a chainlink fence. There are concrete sidewalks, grass, and a concrete patio with several picnic tables. A large evergreen tree is at the west entrance. At the east end is a concrete patio with low brick walls. Further north is an open space bordered by trees. North-northeast of the building is a circular area paved outlined with brick and with a large playground structure. The center courtyard on the northeast is enclosed by a chainlink fence and has grass, concrete sidewalks, a large maple tree, and flower beds. There is an open field to the northeast with maple and other trees. Adjacent to the building on the southeast are areas with ornamental gravel and rose bushes, a concrete sidewalk, grass, and trees.

Alterations

The interior of the building has been modified several times during its life and it does not retain its Air Force Academy era appearance. In 1998 a Colorado State Historical Fund grant provided partial funding for rehabilitation of the exterior of the building for its present uses by the City of Aurora. The project included replacing a double door entrance on the façade with a projecting entrance bay. Paneled wood doors were replaced with metal doors. Raised wood stoops on the northwest wall were replaced with concrete stoops. On the southeast wall a door and adjacent window were replaced with double doors. The number of windows was reduced on walls of the projecting wings facing the front courtyard from four to two. The northwest wall between the projecting stoops was altered from having six windows to two windows and two vents. A shed roof addition on the east side of the center wing was removed. Nonhistoric siding (that had been applied over the original drop

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 7 Page 3

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

siding) was removed, and new wood siding replicating the original was applied where necessary. Rolled roofing was replaced with asphalt composition roof shingles.



Figure 1. The Commandant of Cadets Building (Building 880) is the H-shaped building in the foreground pictured in this c. 1955-56 oblique aerial photograph (view northwest). SOURCE: U.S. Air Force Academy Library, photographic collection.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 4 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

Statement of Significance

The Commandant of Cadets Building (Building 880) has a national level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Military as the most intact remaining resource associated with the original site of the United States Air Force Academy at Lowry Air Force Base during 1955-58. While the permanent home of the Air Force Academy was under construction north of Colorado Springs, a portion of Lowry in Aurora, Colorado, served as its interim home for the first three classes of cadets. Dedication of the school in July 1955 marked the first creation of a major military academy in the country since 1845. Founding of the Academy followed the designation of the U.S. Air Force as a separate branch of the military in 1947 and marked recognition of the importance of air power in the Cold War era.

Housed in refurbished World War II era frame buildings, the first three classes at the new institution began their education at Lowry Air Force Base. Young lieutenants known as "Air Training Officers" served as upper classmen (Air Training Officers) through the summer of 1957. While at Lowry many of the fundamental traditions of the "West Point of the Air" were inaugurated, including a cadet honor code and class system, adherence to rigorous academic standards, adoption of the falcon mascot, and participation in intercollegiate athletics. President Eisenhower wrote of the importance of the Academy's pioneer class in influencing the direction of the institution: "The standards of intellect, obedience and leadership which have been established by the Class of 1959 will bear strongly upon the growth of future tradition."¹

The survival of Building 880 as a representative of the Academy at Lowry AFB is particularly fitting, as it housed the Commandant of Cadets, who was responsible for airmanship, military, and physical training, including the development of such traits as leadership, character, and ethics that would mold the cadets into Air Force officers. Maj. Gen. Harold W. "Pete" Todd (retired), a member of the first graduating class, observed that the Commandant's building was "the Citadel of Honor, the place where the true core of the Air Force Academy lay," which uniquely embodied "the essence of the training in character, discipline, and integrity at the fledgling Academy." The building is considered to be the most intact of those remaining that were part of the interim Air Force Academy in 1955-58. Six other buildings are still extant which were associated with the Academy at Lowry AFB, but exhibit alterations and additions or lack the level of historical significance displayed by Building 880. The City of Aurora recognized this significance in 1995, when it designated the building an Aurora Historic Landmark.²

The significance of the permanent site of the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs was recognized in 2004, when the Cadet Area was designated as a National Historic Landmark. The academies of the other principal military branches are also designated National Historic Landmarks. The Air Force is distinguished as the only branch of the military which had an interim site for its service academy. This reflects the importance the military and civilian leadership placed on the rapid creation of such a

¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Message to Graduates of Pioneer Class, undated (c. 3 June 1959), on exhibit at the Wings Over the Rockies Museum, Denver, Colorado.

² Harold W. "Pete" Todd, Maj. Gen. U.S. Air Force, Retired, Air Force Academy, Colorado, Interview by Thomas H. Simmons, 30 May 2006.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 5 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

school for the Air Force and the need for an expanding officer corps to meet the challenge posed by the Soviet Union in the aerospace arena. The operation of the Academy at Lowry AFB for three years enabled the Air Force to gain a head start in commissioning additional officers before the permanent facility opened.

Building 880 is also significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level as a rare surviving example of World War II era military construction. Although such buildings were once plentiful at military bases throughout the region, base closures and demolitions have severely depleted their numbers. Built in the summer of 1942 as an office and storage facility, Building 880 represented efforts to rapidly mobilize the nation's defense in the months after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Standardized plans that could be erected with minimum cost, skill, and time were developed to produce thousands of buildings needed to house the expanding military. Building 880, with its H-shaped plan, gabled roof, drop siding, and tall brick chimney, displays historic physical integrity.

The period of significance for the building for Military history is 1955 through 1958, representing the years the building housed the Commandant of Cadets during the tenure of the Cadet Wing and the U.S. Air Force Academy at Lowry. The building meets the requirements of Criteria Consideration G for exceptional importance as part of the original site of the Academy. The Commandant of Cadets Building played an integral part in the creation and operation of the interim Air Force Academy at Lowry and in the successful transition to its permanent location. The period of significance for the building for Architecture is 1942 (the year it was constructed).

Introduction

Even though the temporary site and accommodations are makeshift at best, some things which will be permanent and lasting are being shaped and molded into an everlasting tradition and tribute. These are, for example: the honor code, military discipline, and cadet tradition.

--Pete Todd, 1956³

The United States erected its Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs during the Cold War, but the idea of creating a separate university for educating and training air officers dated to shortly after World War I. While the iconic modern buildings on the permanent campus were being constructed, an interim Academy operated at Lowry Air Force Base during 1955-58.⁴ This interim Academy was housed in a group of buildings erected during the rapid expansion of the base's mission during World War II. At the interim location, much of the organization and many of the educational philosophies and traditions that distinguish the Academy today were established as the pioneer classes of cadets received their initial instruction. The Commandant of Cadets office, occupying Building 880 at Lowry, played a central role in the lives of the cadets and the history of the Academy during its first three years. As former cadet Maj. Gen. Harold W. "Pete" Todd judges, "If you look at what the school is and was . . . the real essence of a military school . . . is the portion which teaches our military ethic,

³ Pete Todd, "The Air Force Academy: Past, Present, and Future," *The Talon*, February 1956, 5.

⁴ While most of Lowry Air Force Base was situated in the City and County of Denver, the interim Academy buildings were all located in the portion of the base in Arapahoe County, which today is part of the City of Aurora.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 6 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

develops it. The source of that development was in that building and the people who were in and around it.”⁵



Figure 2. Lt. Gen. Hubert Harmon, first Superintendent of the Air Force Academy, is shown at the interim Academy site, flanked by Brig. Gen. Robert M. Stillman (Commandant of Cadets, left) and Col. Robert F. McDermott (Dean of Faculty, right). SOURCE: Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, Plate XXIII.

The Need for an Air Force Academy

The idea of creating a United States Air Force Academy was promoted and debated for many years before it came to fruition during the Cold War era. In 1907 a military air service was incorporated into the Army Signal Corps. Immediately following the end of World War I, proponents of an increased role for air service recommended the establishment of a separate university, modeled after West Point and Annapolis, to provide education and training in tactics and air power for future officers. In 1920 a school for the professional education of air officers opened at Langley Field, Virginia. In 1931 the school moved to Maxwell Field, Alabama, and it was renamed “Air University” in 1946. A separate pilot training school, the Air Corps Training Center, also was established during the 1920s at Randolph Field, Texas. The Army Air Forces, created on the eve of World War II as a counterpart of the Ground Forces, received resources and opportunities enabling it to play a decisive role in the conflict. The importance of American air power expanded dramatically during and after the war, as

⁵ Harold W. “Pete” Todd, Maj. Gen. U.S. Air Force, Retired, U.S. Air Force Academy, Colo., Interview by Thomas H. Simmons, 30 May 2006 [hereinafter referred to as Todd Interview].

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 7 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

did the number of air officers. When the United States reorganized its military under the National Security Act of 1947, the United States Air Force (USAF) was established as a separate and equal branch. At that time, only 41 percent of Air Force officers had baccalaureate degrees and only 10 percent of those had graduated from a military academy. The Air Force asserted that a new service academy to produce future officers was imperative given the demand for military leaders and the complex technological knowledge required of them.⁶

In 1948 a group of senior officers and experienced educators met at the Air University to discuss the broad outlines for creation of an academy. The committee vigorously endorsed the concept of a four-year air university, but did not recommend a location. In the same year, the Denver Chamber of Commerce sent a proposal to Air Force Secretary W. Stuart Symington encouraging the creation of an academy and asserting that Denver was the ideal location for such a school. Colorado Senator Edwin C. Johnson met with the Secretary to discuss the proposal and learned that the Air Force had plans to found an academy, provided that the idea was approved by Congress and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Symington indicated that he would be willing to consider Denver as a possible site for such a "West Point of the Air," although it quickly became apparent that a number of other cities also were hoping to secure the school. In 1949 a Service Academy Board, headed by University of Colorado President Robert E. Stearns and with Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower serving as vice-chair, advised the establishment of a four-year Air Force Academy "without delay."⁷

In November 1949 Secretary Symington created an advisory committee, the Site Selection Board, to evaluate proposals from communities across the country and offer recommendations. Colorado Springs and Denver entered the academy site competition, as did communities in other parts of the state. The Board reviewed over three hundred potential sites, narrowing the field to eight preferred choices, including Colorado Springs. Subsequently, lengthy debates over the location and need for an academy and the country's involvement in the Korean War delayed progress on the legislation, and a final site was not named at that time.⁸

On 1 April 1954 President Eisenhower signed a law authorizing the Air Force Academy and reopened the study of potential sites for the school. Air Force Secretary E. Harold Talbott appointed a new five member Site Selection Commission to review the proposals of communities across the country.⁹ The rules for selection of the new Academy location provided that if the group unanimously agreed on one site Talbott would accept their choice; but if there was disagreement about the location, the committee would submit three sites from which the Secretary would choose. Members of the Commission visited Lowry Air Force Base before examining the potential Academy locations in Colorado. Lowry had achieved recent distinction as the location of Eisenhower's "Summer White

⁶ General T.R. Milton, USAF, "The Air Force Academy: A Fine 25 Years," reprinted in Col. Burton C Andrus, Jr., ed., *25th Year Anniversary Pictorial Review United States Air Force Academy* (N.p.: Association of Graduates of the United States Air Force Academy, 1979), 10-11; Daniel J. Hosington, "United States Air Force Academy, Cadet Area," *National Historic Landmark Nomination*, 2 June 2003.

⁷ *Denver Post*, 14 January 1949, 36 and 27 January 1949, 1; Hosington, 24-25.

⁸ *The Rocky Mountain News*, 25 June 1954, 20; *The Talon*, June 1958, 4-5.

⁹ The Site Selection Commission included Maj. Gen. Hubert Harmon, Gen. Carl A. Spaatz, Gen. Charles Lindbergh, and two civilians.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 8 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

House.” The base dated to 1937, when Congress approved funds to convert a 1904 tuberculosis hospital into an Air Corps Technical Training School. During World War II, the installation expanded significantly as its educational mission increased. An estimated 168,000 persons received training at Lowry during the conflict. Eventually Colorado Springs was evaluated as the best place in the state for the new school, and Coloradans threw their support behind the El Paso County city. As an added incentive, the state set aside \$1 million for the purchase of land to be donated for the project if Colorado Springs received the award.¹⁰

Selection of an Interim Site

From a pool of more than five hundred sites proposed for the Academy, three finalists were presented to Secretary Talbott on 3 June 1954: Colorado Springs; Lake Geneva, Wisconsin; and Alton, Illinois. Shortly before Talbott was scheduled to make a final inspection of Colorado Springs prior to announcing his choice, the city sweetened its proposal by offering to provide the Air Force with a temporary site for the Academy while the permanent campus was built. This offer addressed a concern of the Air Force, which wanted to begin turning out young officers as quickly as possible. The Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce announced that the full facilities of Colorado College, the Broadmoor Hotel, and the University of Denver had been offered to the Air Force for use as temporary facilities. Air Force officials were already contemplating interim sites, among them Lowry Air Force Base. On 22 June 1954 Talbott, before traveling to Colorado Springs, reviewed the base with Lowry Commander Brig. Gen. John T. Sprague and Maj. Gen. E.L. Eubanks, head of the Air Force Technical Training School.¹¹

Talbott announced that Colorado Springs would be the site of the new Academy on 25 June 1954. In the end, the city was chosen because it had an excellent climate, favorable flying conditions, enthusiasm for the project, and, as Talbott stated on the eve of his decision, the most “magnificent” site. The selection of Colorado Springs virtually ensured that the interim Academy would be located in the Denver-Colorado Springs area. The Air Force expected that the permanent Academy would not be completed and functional until the summer of 1957 and that the temporary site would be located relatively nearby in order to facilitate the supervision of construction and to reduce transportation costs in the interim period and during the move. On the day following Talbott’s announcement, an inspection team from Washington arrived to begin gathering information on the facilities that might be suitable for the interim Academy. Locations examined (all in the Denver vicinity) were the University of Denver, Fort Logan, and Lowry. A choice was not announced immediately, but on 28 June the *Denver Post* asserted, “. . . the school is to operate, beginning in July, 1955, in temporary quarters—probably at Lowry air base in Denver.”¹²

¹⁰ Frank Wright, “How Colorado Landed the Air Academy,” *Denver Post, Empire Magazine*, 22 June 1969, 14; US Department of the Air Force, *Wings Over the Rockies: The Lowry Air Force Story* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Air Force, 1990); *Denver Post*, 12 April 1954, 1.

¹¹ *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*, 16 June 1954, 1 and 23 June 1954, 1.

¹² *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*, 23 June 1954, 1 and 25 June 1954, 20; Edgar A. Holt, M. Hamlin Cannon, and Carlos R. Allen, Jr., eds. *History of the US Air Force Academy, 27 July 1954 to 12 June 1956* (Colorado Springs: U.S. Air Force Academy, 1957), 191 and 219 [hereinafter referred to as Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*]; *Denver Post*, 26 June 1954, 1 and 28 June 1954, 3.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 9

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado



Figure 3. The interim site of the Air Force Academy was located in the northeast corner of Lowry Air Force Base. This view to the northwest shows the parade ground, the Commandant of Cadets Building (the H-shaped building above and to the left of the bleachers), and two-story cadet dormitories. SOURCE: U.S. Air Force Academy Library, photographic collection.

Academy planners searching for an interim site quickly identified a section in the northeastern part of Lowry with facilities that could be converted for use by the new school and grounds that could be landscaped to present a “credible” appearance. The site was suited to the new purpose because it included both facilities for academic and military training. Although many of the existing buildings would require modification, little new construction would be necessary. The existing buildings were part of an area developed in 1942 and known as “Lowry Field No. 2.” Lowry No. 2 addressed the base’s expanded training responsibilities during the war and included barracks surrounding an open parade ground, a command post, dining halls, a chapel, a service club, and support buildings. The self-contained unit was dedicated to the training of aircraft armorers. In 1954 the buildings at Lowry No. 2 were being utilized for the base’s intelligence, transportation, and comptroller schools.¹³

¹³ Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 191 and 219; Michael H. Levy and Staff Sgt. Patrick M. Scanlan, *Pursuit of Excellence: A History of Lowry Air Force Base, 1937-1987* (Lowry Air Force Base, Colorado: History Office, 1987), 40; *Lowry Airmen*, 6 August 1954, 3.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 10 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

In early July 1954, Maj. Gen. Hubert Harmon, the Air Force Special Assistant for Academy Matters, spent two days conferring with officers at Lowry regarding the base's probable selection as the site for the interim Academy. Harmon indicated that the naming of Lowry was "almost assured." On 19 July Harmon recommended to Secretary Talbott that Lowry become the temporary Academy site, and an announcement selecting the base was made the same day. The existing schools on the site that included 1,300 students and several hundred faculty and staff members would be transferred to Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas.¹⁴

On 27 July 1954, Talbott advised Harmon that the Air Force Academy at Lowry would operate as a separate agency under the direct control of the Air Force. He indicated that the school would be attached to the Air Training Command for support functions until it was capable of performing such duties itself. As one historian of the Denver base noted, "The people at Lowry were honored by the selection, but it did pose new housing problems." Space on the base was already at a premium, and some grumbled about the lengths the base would go to accommodate the Academy. General Harmon reminded Lowry's General Sprague that the new school was "the most damn important tenant anybody ever had." John Bond, then a young noncommissioned officer assigned to assist in getting the interim Academy established, observed that when the Air Force Academy staff first arrived they got everything they requested: "they walked on water."¹⁵

The Academy Administration

Superintendent Harmon

On 14 August 1954 General Order No. 1, activating the Academy and designating Lowry as the interim site of the school, was published, and Hubert Reilly Harmon (1892-1957) became the first superintendent. Harmon, a native of Chester, Pennsylvania, already had compiled a long and distinguished career when he accepted the appointment as Superintendent. In 1915 he had graduated from the military academy at West Point, where Dwight Eisenhower was a classmate. Among subsequent career highlights, he was named Chief of Staff of the Air Service Command, 3rd Army, at Coblenz, Germany in 1919. During the 1920s he was an executive officer with the Air Service in Washington, D.C. After several years of study and teaching, he assumed command of the 19th Bombardment Group in 1936. Graduating from the Army War College in 1938, he joined the War Department general staff and became chief of the Operations Branch, Personnel Division. During World War II he commanded the 6th Air Force in the Caribbean Theater and the 13th Air Force in the South Pacific, among other assignments. After the war he served as senior Air Force member of the United States delegation of the United Nations military staff committee. In 1949, despite qualification for mandatory retirement status due to length of service, Harmon was appointed Special Assistant for

¹⁴ *Denver Post*, 12 July 1954, 2; George V. Fagan, *The Air Force Academy: An Illustrated History* (Boulder: Johnston Books, 1988), 49; Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAF 1954-1956*, 191; Levy and Scanlan, 40.

¹⁵ Melvin F. Porter, *A Forty Year Look at Lowry Air Force Base, 1937-1977* (Lowry Air Force Base, Colorado: Lowry Technical Training Center, January 1978), 37; Lowry Air Force Base, Denver, "Transcript of General John T. Sprague's Meeting with United States Air Force Academy," 10 December 1954, on file at Wings Over the Rockies Museum Archives, Denver, Colorado; John Bond, Archivist, Wings Over the Rockies Museum, Denver, Colorado, Interview by Thomas H. Simmons and R. Laurie Simmons, 14 August 2006.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 11 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

Air Force Academy Matters at Air Force Headquarters. He retired in 1953, but President Eisenhower called him back to serve as Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff for Air Academy Matters. In that position he worked tirelessly to insure that the concept of an air academy became a reality.¹⁶

As Superintendent, Harmon developed the organizational framework, philosophy, and curriculum of the Academy, hired key members of the original staff, and worked to establish its traditions. The people who filled significant positions within the interim Academy were assembled as quickly as possible, including the Dean of Faculty, Commandant of Cadets, Chief of Staff, heads of staff elements within the Commandant's office, and academic department heads. The tremendous job of identifying, screening, and interviewing suitable candidates for positions in the school proceeded immediately. General Harmon personally interviewed most of the key staff before approving their appointments, and he desired to be involved in all important aspects of establishing the Academy. Harmon and the personnel he selected were guided by the following mission statement for the school:

To provide instruction, experience, and motivation to each cadet so that he will graduate with the knowledge and the qualities of leadership required of a junior officer in the United States Air Force, and with a basis for continued development throughout a lifetime of service to his country, leading to a readiness for responsibilities as a future air commander.¹⁷

The position of Superintendent was the culmination of Harmon's illustrious career. In addition to overseeing the creation and operation of the interim Academy, he also participated in the planning and development of the permanent site. The first Air Force Academy yearbook, dedicated to Harmon, contained a tribute from the first class of cadets: "He brought us, through selfless example, to the true meaning of honor and devotion to country." On 31 July 1956 Harmon retired due to ill health, and he passed away in February 1957. In 2004, General Harmon was officially designated by the Air Force leadership as "the father of the Air Force Academy." Harmon Hall, the administration building at the permanent site, is named for him. Maj. Gen. James E. Briggs became the next Superintendent of the Academy.¹⁸

Commandant of Cadets

Colonel Robert M. Stillman served as the Academy's first Commandant of Cadets, from 1 September 1954 to 1 August 1958.¹⁹ The Commandant's stated mission was to "to train and condition the cadet for his role as an officer and leader in the Air Force." The Office of the Commandant of Cadets, housed in Building 880, was the headquarters of the Cadet Wing. The Commandant had

¹⁶ *Colorado Springs Gazette*, 31 March 1974, 1B; Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 194; Pete Todd and Lou Tidwell, "Transition," *The Talon*, May 1956, 4-5; Department of the Air Force, "United States Air Force Biography: Lieutenant General Hubert R. Harmon," retrieved from <http://www.af.mil/bios> on 14 November 2006.

¹⁷ Fagan, 50; USAFA, Denver, Colorado, "Dedication Ceremony," 11 July 1955 on file at Wings Over the Rockies Museum Archive, Denver, Colorado; "The Mission," *The Talon*, January 1958, 4.

¹⁸ Fagan, 62; Todd Interview.

¹⁹ Stillman was succeeded by Maj. Gen. Henry R. Sullivan, Jr. in August 1958.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 12

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

responsibilities for training, discipline, and professional development, and the Commandant served as the head of the Department of Military Studies. The Commandant's office refined and provided instruction in the honor code's use and significance. His command covered such diverse areas as cadet housing and food services, student government, social events, budgets, and cadet recreational activities. He served as one of the most prominent spokesmen for the Academy. The Commandant's subordinate organizations were responsible for conducting courses in navigation and military training. The Commandant's influence was felt in all aspects of a cadet's life, and those who occupied the position during the Academy's early years have been described as having ". . . directly shaped the uniqueness of the Academy as an institution of higher education, while indirectly determining the future look of Air Force leadership."²⁰

Robert Stillman (1911-1991) was born in Greenville, Ohio, and grew up in Pueblo, Colorado, a steelmaking town south of Colorado Springs. He attended Colorado College for two years before entering West Point, where he was a football star and later a member of the coaching staff. Graduating from West Point in 1935, Stillman completed flying school and then served with the 50th Reconnaissance Squadron in Hawaii from 1937 to 1940. During World War II he served as the commander of the 322nd Bomb Group in the 8th Air Force. He was shot down over Holland in 1943 and spent the rest of the war in a prisoner of war camp near Sagan, Germany. Stillman subsequently served as head of the Training Division, Headquarters, 3rd Air Force; deputy chief of staff at Tactical Air Command Headquarters; commander of the Tactical Air Command at Stewart Field; and deputy for operations of the 1st Air Force Headquarters. In 1950 he entered the National War College in Washington, D.C., and, in 1951, he became chief of the Assignment Division in the Directorate of Military Personnel. Former Air Force Academy librarian George Fagan described Stillman as "a burly, genial man with a great sense of humor. He was an avid sports fan and took great pleasure in telling amusing stories about athletes he had known. He was a man's man and enjoyed hunting and fishing. Like General Harmon, Stillman was a military traditionalist and believed in following the Military Academy pattern as closely as possible."²¹

In 1948 Stillman had been detailed to the Air Force Academy Planning Board at the Air University, which assisted with planning for the school. He learned that there was a good probability that General Harmon, who was expected to be the school's superintendent, would accept him as the Commandant of Cadets. Stillman began taking note of officers with outstanding effectiveness reports as possible candidates for the Academy staff. He sought primarily people who had attended military schools and who were familiar with the class system and had a strong feeling for the honor system. Stillman provided General Harmon with a list of the people he thought were qualified for the positions at the Academy. In the initial staff of the Commandant's office about 50 percent were graduates of West Point.²²

²⁰ Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 576; Jim Rhodes, "The Com's Shop," *The Talon*, June 1957, 4; Herman Gilster, US Air Force Academy, Colorado, Interview by Thomas H. Simmons, 30 May 2006; Andrus, Jr., 26.

²¹ Fagan, 64-65; Lee and Pittman, "Change and Progress," *The Talon*, June 1958, 9; Department of the Air Force, "United States Air Force Biography: Major General Robert M. Stillman," retrieved from <http://www.af.mil/bios> on 14 November 2006.

²² The Commandant's office initially included thirty-seven persons (sixteen officers, fifteen airmen, and six civilians). Robert M. Stillman, Former Commandant of Cadets, Interview by Russell W. Mank and Phillip S. Meilinger for the US Air Force Oral

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 13 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

Pete Todd states, "The beginning, and to me the essence of what the Air Force Academy is all about began with the Commandant of Cadets." *The Talon*, the cadet magazine, judged the work of the Commandant during the school's first three years:

Beginning with only a vague outline, the Commandant has met the problems of a completely new Academy. An honor code of which we are all proud was set up. . . . The actual administration of the cadets occupied a great deal of time, but the accompanying responsibility to the public occupied nearly as much. The Commandant as the General Officer closest to the cadets has had to shoulder much of the responsibility of winning the public to the cause of the Academy.²³

Air Officers Commanding

The Air Officers Commanding (AOCs) reported to the Commandant of Cadets. The AOCs were officers (senior captains or majors) who worked closely with the cadets to help them achieve their potential as officer candidates. Stillman judged that about 80 percent of the AOCs had attended military academies and most had inspiring combat records, many as fighter pilots in the Korean War. The Air Force felt that these seasoned officers would help the cadets understand that their future careers might entail combat.²⁴

Class System, Cadet Wing, and Air Training Officers

The new school adopted a class system wherein first year cadets, known as "Doolies," were categorized as fourth classmen, second year cadets were third classmen, and so on. The system was employed as another way to train cadets for their careers as officers. Each class received training based on their level of cadet experience, with the fourth class receiving the most intensive training and review. The new cadets were issued a handbook, *Contrails*, and required to learn everything in it. Among the concepts instilled in the fourth class cadets were the proper manner to behave toward their fellow students and officers, what activities were allowed or prohibited in the cadet area, requirements regarding personal appearance and the maintenance of uniforms and rooms, rules of proper conduct and courtesy, and information about the Academy and the Air Force. The class system was designed to teach cadets to accomplish assignments in the manner of an Air Force officer.²⁵

History Program, 1979, in the files of the Columbia University Oral History Research Office, New York City, New York [hereinafter cited as Stillman Interview]; Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USFA 1954-1956*, 576.

²³ Todd Interview; Lee and Pittman, "Change and Progress," *The Talon*, June 1958, 9.

²⁴ The Air Officers Commanding were the official commanders of their respective squadrons. The AOC title (a Royal Air Force term) was adopted to avoid confusion with the *cadet* squadron commanders. Stillman Interview, 8; Fagan, 65.

²⁵ Todd Interview; United States Air Force Academy website, "General FAQ," retrieved from <http://www.academyadmissions.com>, retrieved on 15 November 2006.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 14

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado



Figure 4. Newly arrived members of the Class of '59 are shown in this 11 July 1955 photograph carrying their clothing issue in duffle bags as an Air Training Officer (ATO) shouts orders. SOURCE: Fagan, 57.

Within the organizational scheme at the Academy, the student body was to be known as “the Cadet Wing.” The wing was divided into squadrons, which were described as units “combining the fraternal bonds characteristic of a tactical squadron in the Air Force with those ties found in a Greek fraternity in college, the Squadron is a primary source of motivation in the never-ending round of competitive activities covering the three primary facets of cadet life: academics, military, and athletics.” During the first summer the cadets were divided into three squadrons, which expanded to four squadrons during the first year.²⁶

Since all cadets entering the Academy in 1955 would be freshmen, planners struggled with how to provide role models for the first class. The most popular suggestion was that upperclassmen from the two established academies fill such positions. However, the Academy staff decided that Air Force lieutenants, some just out of flying school and given the designation as “Air Training Officers” or “ATOs,” would serve as upperclassmen. General Harmon believed that this group of young men from a variety of backgrounds would contribute a “broader viewpoint in our student body.” The ATOs were screened thoroughly to insure that they represented “the best young officers in the Air Force.”²⁷

Seventy bachelor lieutenants came to the Academy to fill positions as ATOs. The young men performed duties such as supervising formations, attending meals with the cadets, working with the

²⁶ Andrus, Jr., 30.

²⁷ Quoted in Fagan, 53; Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 584.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 15

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

students on drills and parades, and conducting inspections. The ATOs lived with the cadets in the dorms during the first year, while during the second year one ATO per squadron was assigned to the dorms in the evening. The ATOs instituted rigid discipline and drilling for the cadets, "intended to mark their transition from the irresponsibility of teen-age youth to the stern demands of service to the Air Force and the nation." For the cadets, the ATOs were a source of authority and voice of discipline that tested their physical and emotional endurance. Journalist Ed Mack Miller wrote that the ATOs ". . . attempted to build a quick tradition in the Air Force Academy, and to a large extent they succeeded. They made the first-year cadets spring between classes, talk like jet-rated parrots, and eat 'square meals,' sitting on the leading edges of their chairs." After the summer training in 1957, the ATOs departed and the Class of '59 took over the responsibilities of upperclassmen utilizing methods taught to them by the ATOs.²⁸

The Commandant selected and supervised the ATOs, and he described them as eager pilots who were "a composite of the younger generation of the Air Force." Most had attended military schools, so they were familiar with barracks life. When they arrived at Lowry, the ATOs were given training in the various fields that they would be responsible for teaching to the cadets. Herman L. Gilster, a graduate of West Point and one of the ATOs, states that the Commandant's office "was really the center of our activity, those of us who were in the military training side. It was the first building I experienced at the Academy." Stillman judged that creating a class system by selecting Air Training Officers (ATOs) was one of the major accomplishments of the first year. The Commandant believed that the enthusiasm of the ATOs influenced the cadets, and he later commented, "I think the ATOs, in coming out there and working with the cadets, living with them, trying to set an example for them, these young men were competing with each other, and I think the ATO idea was the best concept we had."²⁹

Academics and Training

The curriculum for the Academy had been under study for many years, and a committee of officers with specialized fields of education and experience developed the program of instruction, which was subsequently critiqued and refined by the military planning staff and university consultants. The Academy's faculty and staff further reviewed and refined the program and began preparing the materials and making decisions necessary to begin teaching. As George Fagan observed, "During the 1955-56 academic year, the course content was being revised constantly."³⁰

General Harmon was adamant that he wanted a course of study with more flexibility than that of the other academies to fit future Air Force needs and one that would create second lieutenants who could become general officers. He wanted to turn out men who were well rounded and comfortable in both

²⁸ Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 214; Ed Mack Miller, *Men of the Contrail Country* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), 154; Todd Interview.

²⁹ Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 226-227; Todd and Tidwell, "Full of Sound and Fury" *The Talon*, October 1957, 8; Gilster Interview; Rhodes, "The Com's Shop," 6; Stillman Interview, 8.

³⁰ Fagan noted that, despite all of the planning, during the first semester it became evident that demands on the cadets were too great and their days were over-scheduled, a dilemma that would "cause much agony and discontent for the Academy over the next quarter century." USAFA, "Dedication Ceremony"; Fagan, 53-54 and 74; Todd Interview.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 16 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

military and civilian life and understood history, culture, and philosophy as well as science. Each cadet's education would include a broad general education in the humanities and science, as well as airmanship, flying, navigation, and military work. Classes were small in the first years, with a maximum of twelve to fourteen students, and were grouped according to ability. Of primary importance for cadets were skills in reading, writing, and speaking, and the ability to pursue intellectual lines of inquiry as well as develop a sense of duty and discipline. During the first year, training included mathematics, chemistry, physics, engineering drawing, English, history, philosophy, and geography. General Benjamin Chidlaw, chief of the Air Defense Command at Colorado Springs, echoed Harmon's philosophy, noting that flying would be "secondary to the development of well-rounded leaders." The Academy's curriculum would cover the arts and sciences taught by great universities around the country, and General Chidlaw predicted that "some significant innovations in military science will be developed here." Among the innovations of the Academy curriculum were the inclusion of an enrichment program which allowed cadets to take elective classes and the creation of the first Department of Astronautics in the country in 1957.³¹

The Air Force assembled a group of top educators to teach the cadets. As at the older academies, the faculty of the Air Force Academy was dominated by career military officers, who were supplemented by visiting civilian instructors. Brig. Gen. Don Z. Zimmerman, Dean of the Faculty, administered the academic courses, which included social sciences, humanities, and scientific studies. The science curriculum included the basics of engineering and an orientation toward aviation, along with other courses that would lead to graduation with a specific science degree. Zimmerman was reassigned in December 1955, and Robert McDermott, who had been serving as head of the Economics Department and Acting Dean, moved into the position the following year. In 1957 McDermott became the first permanent professor at the school. After the first year, the curriculum was revised to lessen an overloaded academic schedule for the cadets.³²

The Commandant of Cadets oversaw the Airmanship program, which included flying, military, and physical training. The Academy curriculum departed from that of other colleges in its inclusion of flight training to prepare the cadets for their career. Initially, air navigation was the principal component of flight training taught. Cadets received the same instruction as air force navigators and received navigator certification upon graduation. The training coincided with the desire of the Air Force to qualify as many men as possible.³³

The Department of Military Studies, also headed by the Commandant, provided another component of the cadet education: preparing the young men for their service in the Air Force as junior officers and future commanders. The military education included instruction in leadership, methods, and protocol. Working within the Cadet Wing chain of command, the cadets learned responsibility to and

³¹ Jim Branton, "In Quest of Knowledge," *The Talon*, December 1956, 4; *Rocky Mountain News*, 25 June 1954, 36 and 13 December 1954, 87; Hosington, 29.

³² *Rocky Mountain News*, 13 December 1954, 87; Milton, "The Air Force Academy, 13; "The Mission," *The Talon*, January 1958, 5; Fagan, 62, 87-88.

³³ USAFA, "Dedication Ceremony"; Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 295; "The Mission," *The Talon*, January 1958, 5.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 17 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

for others. Annual field trips to other military installations provided a fuller understanding of the Air Force and its policies and responsibilities.³⁴

Also under the supervision of the Commandant, physical training was considered an essential component of the cadet's education. Colonel Robert V. Whitlow became the first Director of Athletics at the Academy. From the beginning, the physical education program of the school was viewed as an important component, along with academics and military training, in producing a well-rounded person. In addition to physical education classes, cadets were required to participate in intramural and intercollegiate sports programs. Athletic programs were believed to contribute to strength, endurance, coordination, self-confidence, teamwork, and leadership skills. Whitlow believed that a competitive football team would bring the Academy publicity and funds that could be used to expand the athletic program. The first freshman football game was held at the University of Denver stadium in front of a crowd of 10,000 on 8 October 1955, and a very competitive eight-game schedule followed. In the second year Academy teams participated in the Rocky Mountain Conference.³⁵

Preparing the Facilities

The Act authorizing the creation of the Air Force Academy allotted the expenditure of \$1 million for the provision of temporary facilities. Officials at Lowry were pleased at the amount provided to improve buildings on the base, although delays in receiving the funding caused some consternation. The buildings at Lowry No. 2 had deteriorated since their construction in 1942, having stood vacant for several years before the Korean War resulted in their reactivation for use by training schools. It took time to vacate the buildings and for work to begin on their rehabilitation for the Air Force Academy. As late as September 1954, the Academy planners had only two rooms in which to work, and adequate space did not become available until January 1955. Although the Air Training Command was tasked with supplying logistical support for the school, many at Lowry believed their first responsibility was to the air base. A joint tenancy agreement between the Academy and Lowry spelling out logistical support procedures was signed on 15 August 1955 and revised in 1956. The agreement specified that the Academy would encompass sixty buildings.³⁶

On 24 November 1954 the first bids for rehabilitation and remodeling of buildings at the base for the interim Academy were accepted. The first group of buildings to be improved included the Commandant's office (Building 880), chapel, gymnasium, theater, dispensary, cadet club, fire station, cadet supply, cadets' office, barber shop, and a new gate house. Among other improvements needed were the remodeling of the barracks, mess hall, and other buildings; conversion of the heating plants in the barracks from coal to gas; the addition of street lighting; and the construction of athletic fields. Major Arthur J. Witters worked with Lowry personnel on rehabilitation of the barracks and other buildings for the Academy's needs. He later became the first Director of Installations,

³⁴ USAFA, "Dedication Ceremony"; "The Mission," *The Talon*, January 1958, 5.

³⁵ USAFA, "Dedication Ceremony"; Fagan, 67-70; *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*, 31 May 1959, 9.

³⁶ A contemporary map of the area shows sixty-nine buildings in use by the Academy. Fagan, 49 and 51; Sprague Meeting Transcript; Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 195, 197, and 198.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 18

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

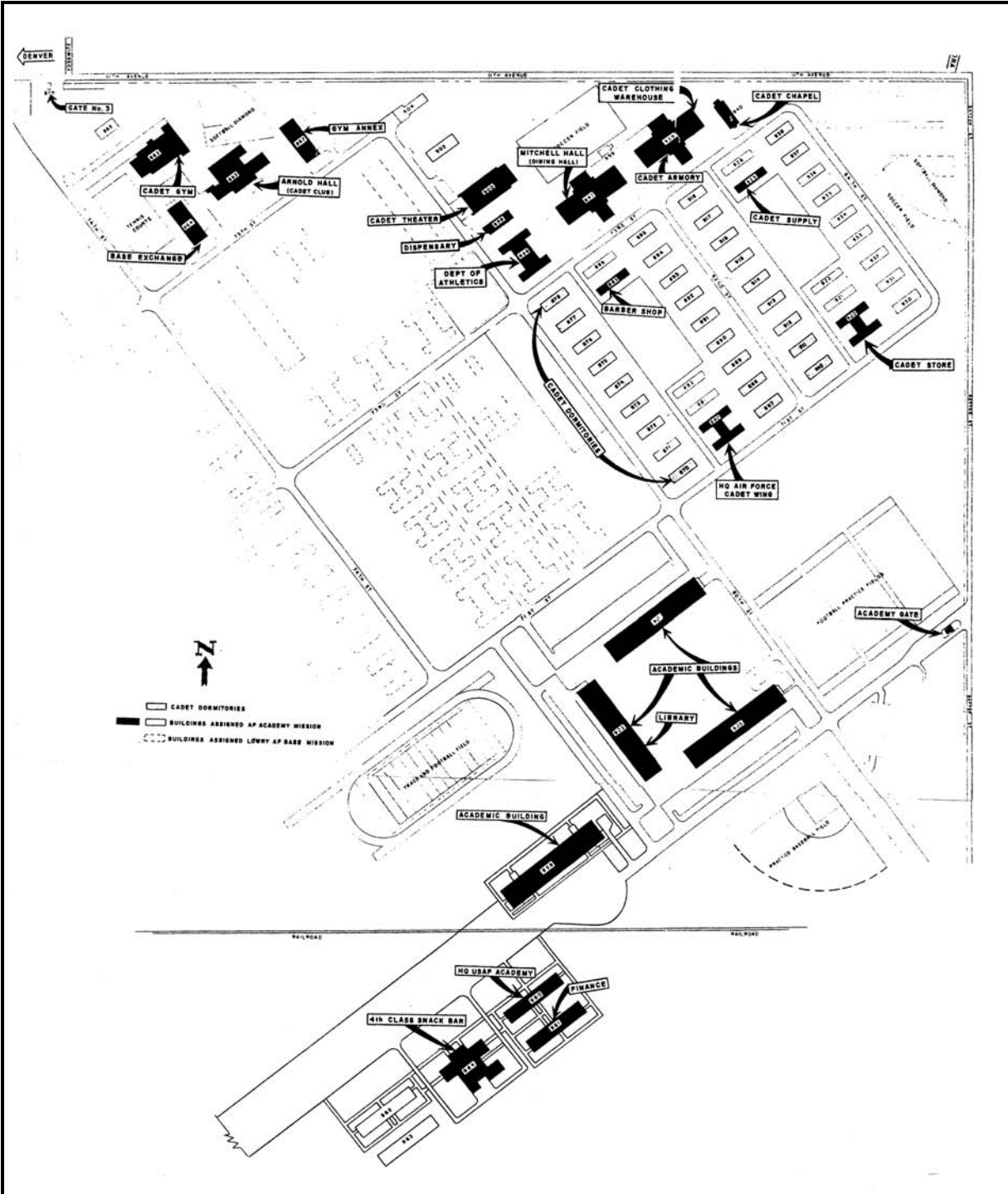


Figure 5. The interim Air Force Academy site in the northeast corner of Lowry Air Force Base included sixty-nine buildings and various athletic fields. Building 880 is identified as the headquarters of the Air Force Cadet Wing. SOURCE: Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAF 1954-1956*.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 19

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

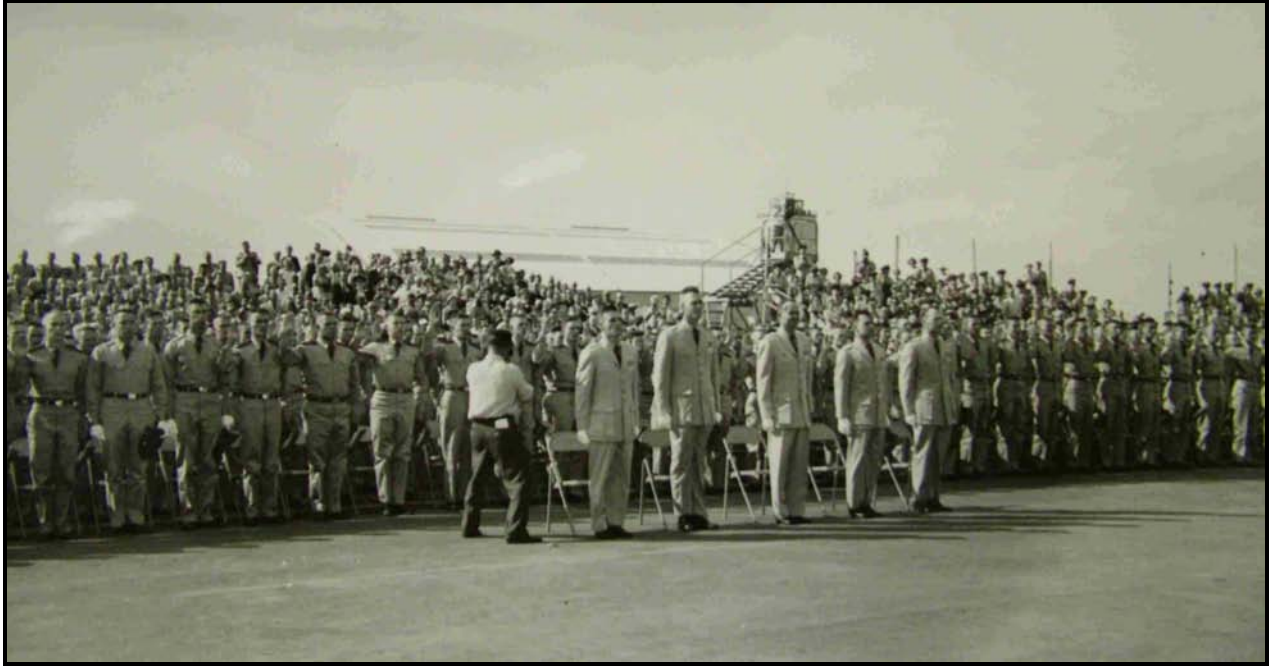


Figure 6. The interim home of the U.S. Air Force Academy was officially dedicated on 11 July 1955, in a ceremony attended by Air Force Secretary Harold Talbott. A flyover by Air Force bomber and fighter aircraft and an exhibition of precision flying by the Thunderbirds were highlights of the event. SOURCE: Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*.

involved with the Air Force Academy Construction Agency and the architectural firm designing the permanent buildings in Colorado Springs.³⁷

Much of the rehabilitation money was spent converting the frame World War II era barracks into dormitories with two-man rooms for twenty-four cadets and four junior officers. The dormitories surrounded two parade and drill grounds where the cadets fell out for training and mess formations. Some concerns had been raised about Colorado's climate causing rheumatic fever, so "extensive health measures" for cadet living were undertaken, including placing only two cadets in each room. The young students had almost no direct contact with the rest of Lowry; according to an article written for the base newspaper "they lived an insular life."³⁸

The Academy was described as "a base within a base," since almost everything the cadets needed for the first year was found on the campus. The interim campus included three two-story yellow brick classroom and administration buildings (previously used by intelligence and accounting schools) bordering a quadrangle ornamented with a red "Matador" self-propelled guided missile at the center. Air Force officials named buildings serving major cadet functions after prominent airmen, such as the

³⁷ Wilson & Co., *Master Plan, Lowry Air Force Base, Denver Colorado, Written Report* (Denver: Wilson & Co., 1955); Fagan, 50.

³⁸ *The Talon*, June 1958, 6-7; Roger G. Miller, Lowry Technical Training Center Historian, "The Air Force Academy at Lowry Air Force Base," unpublished manuscript in the files of Wings Over the Rockies Museum Archives, Denver, Colorado.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 20 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

dining facility, General Billy Mitchell Hall, which served meals providing 4,000 to 4,500 calories per day to fuel the cadet's strenuous schedule. General H.H. "Hap" Arnold Hall, the cadet club, was the social center of cadet life. Facilities of the club included a reception room where cadets could meet dates, lounges, a television and radio room, game rooms, a music room, a snack bar, and a ballroom for formal activities. These names of buildings at the interim Academy were transferred to buildings with the same functions at the Colorado Springs site. Other campus facilities included a chapel offering Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish services and an 872-seat theater. A cadet store enabled students to purchase supplies such as textbooks, uniforms, shaving equipment, toothpaste, and other personal items. Supplies for the store were purchased from local businesses whenever possible.³⁹

Projects were approved for seeding and irrigating the parade grounds, creating athletic fields (including football and softball fields and tennis courts), improving streets and building sidewalks, and landscaping and tree planting. A nine-station obstacle course and a bayonet practice area were created. Airmanship instruction would take place on the drill grounds, athletic fields, and at the cadets' maneuver area on a bombing range east of Buckley Field.⁴⁰

The entrance of the H-shaped Commandant's building (No. 880) faced southeast toward the parade ground. In 1942 the one-story frame building had been administrative offices and supply rooms for the training schools at Lowry. John Bond remembers that the building was just used for storage when he arrived in 1955. After its remodeling to house functions under the Commandant's authority, the building included the Military Studies classrooms and the office of the Commandant.⁴¹

Recruiting the Cadets

Major James Hunter was responsible for the program of recruiting and selecting cadets for the interim Academy. In late 1954 a catalog was printed and mailed to high schools, colleges, and libraries across the country. To qualify as a potential cadet, a young man had to be a United States citizen of good moral character, between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two, never married, physically fit for flying, and a resident of the area from which he was nominated. Some six thousand young men applied to become part of the first class, submitting to competitive examinations that would determine the successful candidates.⁴²

During its first four years, the cadet appointment system at the Air Force Academy differed from that of other military academies. Each congressman could appoint up to ten candidates for the school. Nominees for the class were required to take tests to determine their scholastic and flying aptitude, as well as standard physical and mental tests. Members of Congress would nominate 85 percent of the appointments, while 15 percent would come from other sources, such as the president, vice president, members of the military, sons of Medal of Honor winners, and those of deceased or

³⁹ *Denver Post*, 6 July 1955, 23; Fagan, 51; Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 227; *Rocky Mountain News*, 15 December 1954, 17.

⁴⁰ *Cervi's Journal*, 4 November 1954, 2; Jack Engeman, U.S. Air Force Academy: *The Life of a Cadet, A Picture Story* (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, c. 1957), 26; Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 227.

⁴¹ Bond Interview, 14 August 2006; Todd Interview.

⁴² Fagan, 50, Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 323, 325 and 333.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 21

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

disabled veterans. Small committees of senior Academy officers made the selection of specific candidates based on review of their records. The names selected were forwarded for a final vote by the Academy Board. The system resulted in the appointment of high caliber cadets, and it continued to be used after 1959.⁴³



Figure 7. This photograph of cadets in formation shows the two-story cadet dormitories, which were remodeled World War II barracks. SOURCE: Fagan, 73.

Dedication of the Air Force Academy at Lowry

On 11 July 1955 the first class of young men reported to the interim Academy. The first class included 306 cadets from forty-four states, the District of Columbia, the Canal Zone, Guam, and Brazil. The largest numbers of students came from New York, California, Texas, and Ohio. Valmore W. Bourque of South Hadley Falls, Massachusetts, became the first registered cadet at the Academy.⁴⁴ After signing in, the new students were given routine medical exams, shorn of long hair, issued rifles, and taken to the quadrangle and the parade ground to learn to march and to practice for their first inspection. Although planners had envisioned and prepared for the major events of the first day, many of the less significant aspects were handled in a spontaneous manner. John Bond recalls being instructed to take the first group of cadets to their barracks area, without any particular directions as to how this should be accomplished. Bond asked the young men if any knew how to march, and receiving an affirmative reply, he told them to fall in line. The cadets proceeded past cars

⁴³ Fagan 52; *Denver Post*, 28 June 1954, 3.

⁴⁴ Bourque became the first academy graduate to be killed in action. *Rocky Mountain News*, 12 July 1955, 5 and 8.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 22 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

of waving parents, as well as rolling movie cameras. Bond was immediately reprimanded: "You were not supposed to march them; that is to be done after they are trained by their upper classmen."⁴⁵

Dedication Ceremony

Planning for the dedication of the Academy began months before the event. The Air Force viewed the ceremony as a way to mark a milestone in its history, publicize the new school, and educate the country about its mission. Although the cadets would participate in the ceremony, the Commandant did not expect miracles of the new students, who would receive just a few hours of training prior to the dedication. Stillman believed that the young men could appear in their new uniforms, with their hair cut, and with "a sufficiently high degree of herd instinct" to be able to move in unison to a position on the parade ground.⁴⁶

On 9 July the general public was invited to visit the Academy and hear a concert by the Air Force Band, view exhibits about the school, watch a flying demonstration by the Thunderbirds, and tour the facilities. On 11 July a similar program for invited guests and the Academy personnel was held as part of the formal dedication of the school. Air Force officials, parents of cadets, representatives of other service branches, local civic leaders, members of Congress, and foreign-air attaches attended the official dedication ceremony. The Air Training Officers had drilled the cadets in the marching formations they would utilize for the event. With less than four hours of coaching, the charter class of cadets marched in front of the three thousand guests. When the cadets first appeared, marching in unison behind an Air Force band, "a wave of disbelief swept over the crowd." By the time the young men reached the ceremonial area on a runway near the Academy and the bleachers constructed especially for the event, the crowd was on its feet, giving the men a thunderous ovation. Commandant Stillman recalled, "As these kids came in you could see they were tense as hell, but they wanted to look good, and by golly they did look good. I was proud. I think that was my big moment. When these brand new kids came there and after such a short period of drill were so intent on looking good, I knew they wanted to succeed."⁴⁷

Precision honor guards from West Point and Annapolis performed an intricate close-order drill to welcome the class. Secretary Talbott read a greeting from President Eisenhower for "the foundation ceremony of the United States Air Force Academy" that wished the institution "brilliant success." Talbott noted that the objective of the new school was to provide leaders for the future and declared, "The struggle for recognition has given way to success. The Air Force has come of age. We are here to found a great institution, one that is dedicated to the United States Air Force."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*, 31 May 1959, 9; Stillman Interview, 45; *Rocky Mountain News*, 12 July 1955, 5; John Bond, "As I Remember It," Undated Manuscript in the files of Wings Over the Rockies Museum Archives, Denver, Colorado, and Interview 14 August 2006.

⁴⁶ Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 203.

⁴⁷ Fagan, 55; *Lowry Airmen*, 22 June 1956; Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 212-13; Stillman Interview, 45; *Rocky Mountain News*, 12 July 1955, 5.

⁴⁸ *Rocky Mountain News*, 12 July 1955, 5; Holt, Cannon, and Allen, *USAFA 1954-1956*, 216 and 8; Fagan, 58.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 23 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

Commandant Stillman administered the oath of allegiance to the cadets, who swore “true faith and allegiance” to the Constitution. A spectacular Air Force aerial display followed, described as “a mighty armada of jet fighters and bombers” with an exhibition of precision flying by the Thunderbirds. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Nathan Twining then addressed the cadets, noting that “the eyes of the world will be upon you from this day on.” Twining described the responsibilities being assumed by members of the historic first class, noting: “You will have a chance that nobody else ever will have again. You will set the pace. Both the big things and the little things you do will establish customs and traditions.” The *Rocky Mountain News* headlined its summary of the day’s activities “Air Academy Dedication Starts Proud Tradition.” One observer of the day’s events commented,

As the 304 of them marched to the dedication, the traditions of American college life were yet to come—school song, mascot, student customs—but they were probably already being born as that first class swung along shoulder to shoulder beginning a career upon which the United States depends heavily for new leadership.

The ceremony was covered by CBS television and movie newsreel services that spread descriptions of the opening day throughout the country.⁴⁹

Summer Training and Trips

After completion of the dedication ceremonies the first cadets entered a two-month period of rigorous summer training organized by the Commandant of Cadets Office. The program was designed to instill in each cadet “a strong sense of honor, intense loyalty to his mission regardless of personal consequences, precision in thought and action, the ability to work smoothly with other people, and the ability to exercise group leadership.” The basic training at Lowry included learning how to march, shoot, and navigate with a compass. The first cadets ended the summer with a week-long bivouac on the Lowry Bombing Range, with the students learning how to fire weapons and witnessing demonstrations of firepower.⁵⁰

The initial class of cadets was not allowed to leave the interim campus unless they were escorted by a parent or officer. During the first two weeks at Lowry they were “quarantined” from the outside world. With few exceptions, the cadets remained on the campus year-round, even during the

⁴⁹ The Academy at Lowry received extensive attention from local and national news media. Descriptions of the opening day ceremonies were widely disseminated, and articles describing and explaining the new school were published throughout the first year. In 1957 a television series about the Academy was considered, featuring stories that would project cadets into conceivable situations. Filming of the series on the interim site using real cadets and professional actors was proposed. A similar program featuring West Point actually was produced during 1956-58. Eugene W. “Gene” Roddenberry, a former Air Force pilot who later created the television program “Star Trek,” was described as preparing a script for the Academy show. *Lowry Airmen*, 15 July 1955, 3; *Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph*, 12 July 1955, 1 and 6; Twining quoted in Fagan, 58; “United States Air Force Academy,” Special Pictorial Program, Reprinted from *Republic Aviation News*, 22 July 1955, in the files of Wings Over the Rockies Museum Archives, Denver, Colorado; *The Dodo* 26 October 1957; *Rocky Mountain News*, 12 July 1955, 5.

⁵⁰ Pete Todd and Lou Tidwell, “Year in Retrospect,” *The Talon*, June 1956, 7-8; M. Hamlin Cannon, Edgar A. Holt, and Victor Cohen, *History of the United States Air Force Academy: 13 June 1956 to 9 June 1958* (Colorado Springs: USAFA, 1 November 1958), vol. 1, 295.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 24

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

Christmas holidays. Academy officials organized events to keep the young men busy during the holidays on the base, including ski trips, caroling, tree trimming, movies, bowling, and dances. Annual Christmas concerts by the Academy band and choir had their origins at this time. Extracurricular activities filled some of the few unscheduled hours of cadet life during the school year. Intramural sports, reading, monthly formal dances, skiing, model airplane building, and participation in clubs such as the Cadet Forum, Forensic Association, Radio Club, Skeet Club, and Ski Club were popular during the first year. In the spring the students' first twelve-hour leave allowed them to explore Denver and the surrounding area. Pete Todd recalls that the students were allowed to leave the base three or four days a year, but were required to return by 11 p.m. These restrictions resulted in the cadets creating a new nickname for the Academy: "the Monastery."⁵¹

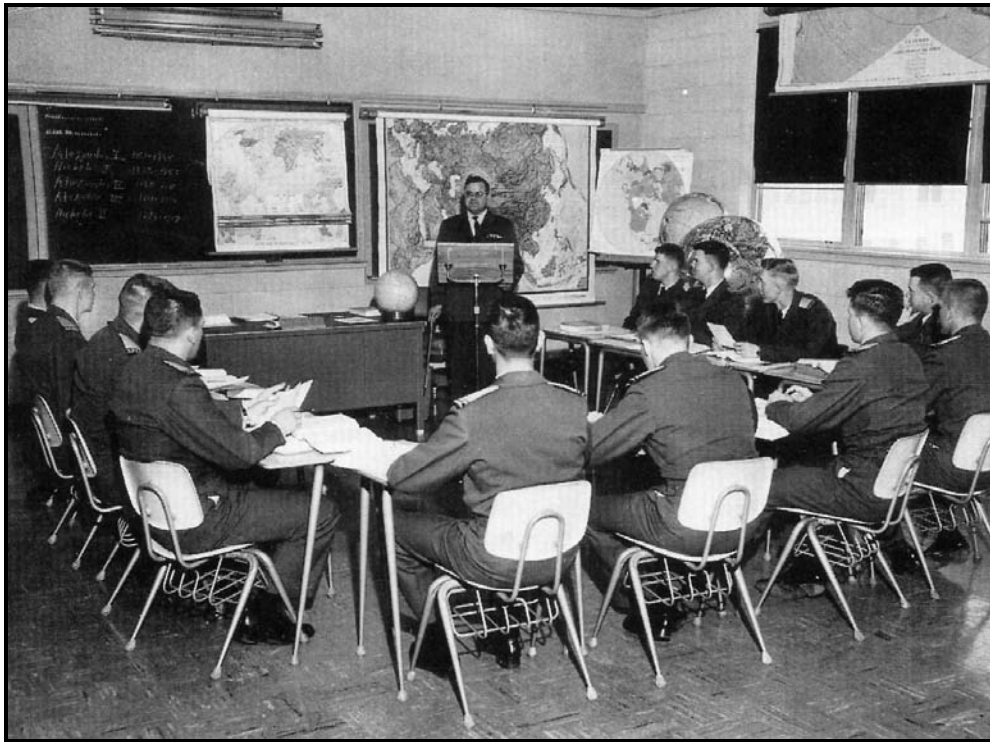


Figure 8. A rigorous academic curriculum was developed by Academy planners to turn out well-rounded future officers. SOURCE: Fagan, 72.

During the summers the first cadets were sent to a variety of bases to broaden their understanding of the Air Force. The first class received navigation training and received observer's wings at graduation. During the first three years the Commandant's office arranged for the entire Cadet Wing to make summer trips to military facilities to watch Air Force officers in action. The trips were designed to let the students see the daily responsibilities of service and understand where they were headed following their education. The cadets viewed activities such as pilots being briefed and aircraft taking off and performing. These experiences were considered a way of motivating the

⁵¹ George Fagan observed that the plan to have families travel to Colorado at Christmas did not take into account potential winter storms. *The Dodo*, 15 November 1951 and 7 December 1957; Pete Todd and Lou Tidwell, "Year In Retrospect," *The Talon*, June 1956, 11; *Gazette Telegraph*, 12 July 1955, 1; Todd Interview.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 25 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

students to join one of the combat branches. Another memorable excursion took place in January 1957, when the cadets were invited to march in President Eisenhower's second inaugural parade.⁵²

Traditions Started at the Interim Academy

After the Academy opened at Lowry, a myriad of issues, both significant and trivial were waiting to be settled. A *Newsweek* article commented, "There is an unsettling, if challenging, newness about everything the cadets will experience." Pete Todd recalls the importance of the events of the first year: "Every day we were making history because we had never done it before. . . . Traditions formed almost by accident." Other decisions were made after lengthy study and discussion. George Fagan described the importance of the first years of the school:

During the three years that the Academy was housed at Lowry, many things happened which were unobserved and not recorded. The air was filled with high hopes and expectations for the newly established school. Everyone involved, administrators, faculty, and cadets, was ever conscious that he was engaged in an historic undertaking.⁵³

The Cadet Honor Code

Planning committees for the Academy recommended that an honor code be created, and that of West Point served as a basic model, modified to suit the Air Force. Academy leaders believed that an honor system was a bond between the cadets and the country's military heritage. As early as 1953, General Harmon had decided that such a code would be adopted as a cornerstone of the Academy. He established the honor code that guided the first and subsequent classes, embodied by the words "An honorable man will not lie, he will not steal, he will not cheat, nor will he tolerate among his associates anyone who will violate these precepts." Harmon believed that the goal of the honor code was "to produce an officer graduate whose character, integrity, and moral standards are impeccable." Before the first cadets arrived, Commandant Stillman assigned some of his officers the task of further developing and defining the honor system and providing examples of violations. He wrote cadets that the honor code must be viewed as "a way of life," that would guide them later as officers. The Class of 1959 received instruction regarding the code during its summer training and voted to adopt it. The code was to be administered by elected representatives of the cadets, and in the early years those who violated it were expelled. The wording of the code has changed very little over the years.⁵⁴

⁵² Todd Interview; Ed Mack Miller, 155; Stillman Interview, 22-23.

⁵³ "Air Academy: 'A Better Man for a Better Plane,' *Newsweek*, 6 June 1955, 59; Todd Interview; *The Dodo*, 26 October 1957; Fagan, 70.

⁵⁴ Todd Interview; Todd, "The Air Force Academy: Past, Present, and Future," 5; Fagan, 158; USAFA, *Air Force Cadet Manual* (Colorado Springs: USAFA, 1 July 1955); Robert M. Stillman, *The Honor Code: A Guide for the First Class of Air Force Cadets in Establishing Their Honor Code* (Denver: USAFA, c. 1955) in the files of Wings Over the Rockies Museum Archives, Denver, Colorado; Stillman Interview, 39; *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*, 31 May 1959, 13.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 26

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado



Figure 9. Before athletic contests, pep slogans were sometimes whitewashed on the roof of the Commandant of Cadets Building. Here two cadets are shown on subsequent clean-up duty. SOURCE: Query, "USAF Academy: Photos from 1956-1959," CD-ROM, 2nd ed.

Uniforms

One of the important issues decided at the interim Academy was what uniforms the cadets would wear. Commandant Stillman was a member of the Uniform Board that made the decisions regarding cadet clothing. The first class wore a modified Air Force uniform, but the school leaders believed a distinctive set of clothes such as was worn at the other academies would be more appropriate. Several military tailors submitted proposals for the clothing, but the Academy leaders found the designs inappropriate. The cadets had the opportunity to view some of the uniforms on display, and the student newsletter *The Dodo* wryly judged, "Some are so distinctive they're a panic." Secretary

Talbott contacted Cecil B. DeMille of Paramount Studios, who agreed to have one of his clothing experts, A.B. Hilton, create a uniform. After studying the clothing worn by students in academies in the United States and abroad, Hilton produced proposals that were reviewed in Hollywood by General Harmon and Colonel Stillman. Following their approval, prototypes were sewn and sent to the Academy for review and subsequent modification. ATOs then modeled the uniforms for Air Force officials in Washington, who approved the distinctive color, subsequently known as "cadet blue." At the conclusion of this process it took several more years to produce a complete set of uniforms for cadet use.⁵⁵

Cadet Wing Hostess

The position of Hostess was created at the interim Academy by leaders who wanted a way to provide social activities to help fill the cadets' time and save the students money needed for purchasing their uniforms and other supplies. Mrs. Gail McComas was appointed Cadet Wing Hostess; she was informally described as "the cadet's counselor, date book, inside wire to the Commandant, and crying shoulder." McComas, widow of a World War II fighter pilot and fondly known as "Mrs. Mac" by the cadets, served as Hostess from 1955 to 1977. She arranged dance classes for the cadets, taught them "social graces and decorum," and then found young women willing to serve as their dates. This process resulted in "softening of the rough edges" of the Academy social life, according to former cadets. The pioneer class of cadets took dancing lessons in Arnold Hall to prepare them for formal dances held during Christmas. A number of the men met their future wives at social events, and many cadets continued to have ties to Denver as a result of dating young women from the area.

⁵⁵ Rhodes, "The Com's Shop," 5; *The Dodo*, 26 October 1957, 1; Fagan, 78.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 27 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

Other Hostess duties included finding accommodations for visiting families, visiting cadets in the hospital, and planning activities for leisure time.⁵⁶

Other Traditions

Many of the traditions of the Academy were initiated by the cadets with guidance from the administration. The selection of a mascot of the Cadet Wing was given extensive consideration, and the students were given the final vote. Pete Todd recalls that a falcon was demonstrated and its abilities excited everyone. On 25 September 1955 the first class chose the falcon (named Mach I) as its mascot and symbol, and the first bird flew in a football halftime ceremony in 1956.⁵⁷ Silver and blue were selected as the school's colors. Cadets chose the design of their class ring, and on 29 May 1958 the first Ring Dinner and Dance was held. A cadet Prayer was selected, and an Air Force Academy Band formed for the first time. Publications were started, including *The Dodo*, a mimeographed product filled with typically cynical cadet humor, and a professionally printed monthly magazine known as *The Talon*. An informal tradition dating to the years at Lowry was the cadet prank, which at the interim site included such activities as inserting the nose of a P-51 fighter plane into the Commandant's office and painting pep slogans on the roof of the building. John Lee, a member of the Class of 1959, recalls that, since cadets were not allowed off base after "Taps" on the nights prior to football games, they painted up the Academy grounds as if it were the opponent's school. Building 880 was the main target of these expressions of school spirit. The tall chimney of the building was painted on one occasion.⁵⁸

The Move to Colorado Springs

At the end of February 1958, the Air Force announced that the Academy would move to its permanent home north of Colorado Springs in August. It had long been the hope of the organization that the first graduating class would spend at least one year at the permanent facility. The plan was to move the cadets even though all of the buildings would not yet be completed. Faculty and staff members were expected to keep their off-base living quarters in Denver and commute by bus to the new location until the Academy housing was finished. The Academy's flying arm that maintained the aircraft used for teaching cadets navigation, the 7625th Operations Squadron, was to remain based at Lowry until the Academy's landing strip was completed. The headquarters of the Academy also remained at Lowry until it was officially transferred just before the first class graduated in June 1959.⁵⁹ The school began moving from Lowry Air Force Base to its permanent site near Colorado Springs during the last week of July 1958, when the new campus was 88 percent complete. The Commandant directed the relocation of the Cadet Wing. Sixty cadets forming an "advance party" were sent to survey the site of the new Academy, work out the details for the move, and then act as guides when the rest of the students entered in August. On 2 August 1958 Brig. Gen. Henry R.

⁵⁶ Jim Reed, "The McComas Story," *The Talon*, January 1957, 4-5; Pete Todd and Lou Tidwell, "Year In Retrospect," *The Talon*, June 1956, 10; Fagan, 80 and 148; Todd Interview.

⁵⁷ Fagan, 137.

⁵⁸ Fagan, 79-80 and 136; Todd and Tidwell, "Year in Retrospect," 15; Todd Interview; John Lee, E-Mail to Front Range Research Associates, Inc., 8 June 2006.

⁵⁹ *Denver Post*, 27 February 1958, 3; Fagan, 126.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 28 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

Sullivan, Jr., a graduate of West Point, assumed duties as Commandant of Cadets from Robert Stillman.⁶⁰

Academy leaders decided to mark the momentous occasion of the move from the interim school at Lowry to the newly constructed Academy with a dramatic flourish. The freshmen cadets departed from Lowry in buses that transported them to the north entrance of the Colorado Springs site. From there they marched in formation onto their new campus, while assembled faculty, staff, friends, relatives, and others cheered their arrival. This parade began a tradition followed by future classes of Doolies, who upon completing their summer basic training marched onto the grounds. The cadets, who had spent three years in the modest buildings at Lowry, regarded the new Academy as “a major upgrade; an ultramodern, brand new facility.” Despite the fact that the school was still being built after they arrived, most found the basic transition went fairly smoothly.⁶¹

The First Class

The first class of the Air Force Academy, including 207 students, graduated on 3 June 1959. President Eisenhower sent a message to the graduating cadets, stating “The standards of intellect, obedience and leadership which have been established by the Class of 1959 will bear strongly upon the growth of future tradition.” The Academy’s promise to create future Air Force leaders was fulfilled. Among the graduating cadets were one Rhodes Scholar and two All-Americans (one in pistol and one in football). Ninety percent of the men who graduated proceeded to pilot training. Six graduates attended civilian graduate schools as part of the Air Force Institute of Technology program, one became a Marine officer, one became a Naval Aviator, and one graduated but was not commissioned for physical reasons. Two men went directly into navigation duty, while three took advanced navigation training. Five graduates received training at Air Force technical schools, and two were assigned administrative duties. Five were killed in combat during the Vietnam War and one became a prisoner of war in the infamous “Hanoi Hilton.” Among the graduates, eighteen became general officers. Graduate Karol J. Bobko became an astronaut, participating in three space flights. Many pioneer cadets flew combat missions, and a good number served twenty years or more in the Air Force. All of the classmates shared the bond of being a part of the first, the most determinative years, when the Academy was located at Lowry Air Force Base. As Pete Todd judges, “Whatever we did in our lives began here.”⁶²

Building 880 After the Air Force Academy’s Departure

In the years following the departure of the Air Force Academy, Lowry Air Force Base continued to educate thousands in its technical training schools. During this period many of the older buildings on the base were donated to other federal agencies or nonprofit groups for housing and educational

⁶⁰ *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*, 31 May 1959, sec. C 8-9; Fagan, 125; Brad Hosmer, “Moving In,” *The Talon*, October 1958, 19 and 45.

⁶¹ Todd Interview; Fagan, 126.

⁶² *Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph*, 31 May 1959, sec. C, 2 and 4 June 1959, 27; USAF Class of 1959, “An Abbreviated History of the Class of 1959,” retrieved from www.usafaclasses.org/1959 on 25 May 2006; NASA, “Biographical Data: Karol J. Bobko,” retrieved from <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios> on 14 November 2006; Todd Interview.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 29

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

purposes or were demolished. This included many of the base's World War II-era frame buildings. The former Commandant of Cadet's building housed Air Force administrative offices after the Academy departed. The 3470th Special Activities Squadron utilized the building until 1983. From 1983 until June 1994, the Wings Over the Rockies Heritage Center, the base museum, was located in the building. In 1984 the Academy's Class of 1959 held its 25th reunion at Lowry and dedicated an "Academy Room" in Building 880.⁶³



Figure 10. Between 1983 and 1994, the Lowry Heritage Center occupied Building 880, shown here in a 1980s view. SOURCE: Aurora History Museum, photographic collection.

In April 1991 Lowry Air Force Base was one of thirty-one major military installations identified for closure by the Department of Defense due to changing defense priorities following the Cold War era. The cities of Denver and Aurora created the Lowry Economic Recovery Project in 1992 to plan for redevelopment of the base, including residential, recreational, and educational functions. In April 1994 the last training class at the base completed its studies, and final closure came on 30 September 1994. The museum in Building 880 was moved to Hangar 401. Known today as the "Wings Over the Rockies Aviation and Space Museum," the facility includes a variety of displays reflecting periods of Air Force development, as well as documentary materials relating to the history of the base. One room in the building is dedicated to Air Force Academy history.⁶⁴

⁶³ Aurora History Museum, Lowry Heritage Museum Historic Nomination Form, 1994.

⁶⁴ *Denver Post*, 4 May and 29 June 1994; *Rocky Mountain News*, 4 May and 24, 26, 28 June 1994.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 8 Page 30 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

Following the removal of the museum from Building 880 there was some discussion of moving Building 880 to the Air Force Academy to preserve it. Instead, the City of Aurora acquired the building and acknowledged the historical significance of the building by designating it as an Aurora Historic Landmark in 1995. The city rehabilitated Building 880 to function as an adult day care program, preschool, before and after school program, and offices. Partial funding for the project was provided by Colorado's State Historical Fund. On 24 May 2001 the historic building was rededicated as an intergenerational community center with senior and preschool programs.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Bond Interviews, 14 August 2006 and 20 October 2006; City of Aurora Parks and Open Space Department, Lowry Intergenerational Center State Historical Fund Grant Application, 15 February 1996; City of Aurora, "Public Dedication Ceremony of Lowry Intergenerational Center at the Historic Lowry Building #880," 24 May 2001, in the files of Aurora History Museum, Aurora, Colorado.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 9 Page 31 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 9 Page 32 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. 10 Page 35 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

Geographic Information

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated area is indicated by the dashed line on the included sketch map. The building is located in the City of Aurora, Arapahoe County, Colorado.

Boundary Justification

The nominated area includes the building and the immediately adjacent land associated with it during the period of significance.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. PHOTOS Page 36 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

Common Photographic Label Information:

1. Resource Name: Commandant of Cadets Building (U.S. Air Force Academy)
2. Location: Aurora, Arapahoe County, Colorado
3. Photographer: Thomas H. Simmons
4. Date: June 2006
5. Negative on file at: Aurora History Museum
15051 E. Alameda Pkwy.
Aurora, CO 80012

Information Different for Each View:

6. Photograph Number, Description of View, and Camera Direction

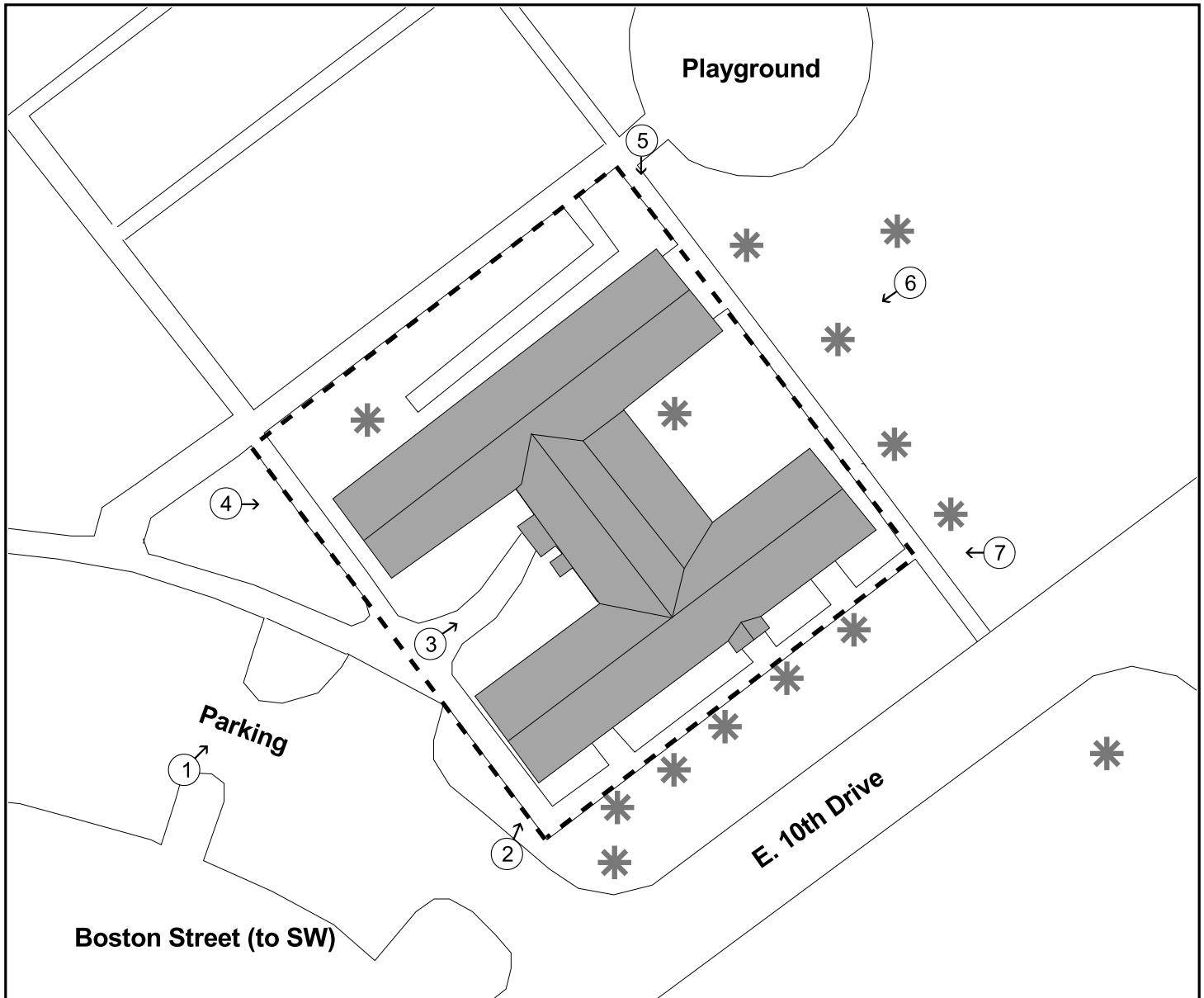
Photograph Number	Description of View	Camera Direction
1	Front	NE
2	Southwest wall of the south wing	NNE
3	Front (center section detail)	NE
4	Northwest wall of the north wing	E
5	Northwest wall of the north wing (to right) and the east end of the north wing (to left)	S
6	Rear, showing the center courtyard and the northeast ends of the south and north wings	SW
7	Southeast wall of the south wing	W

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. MAPS Page 37

Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

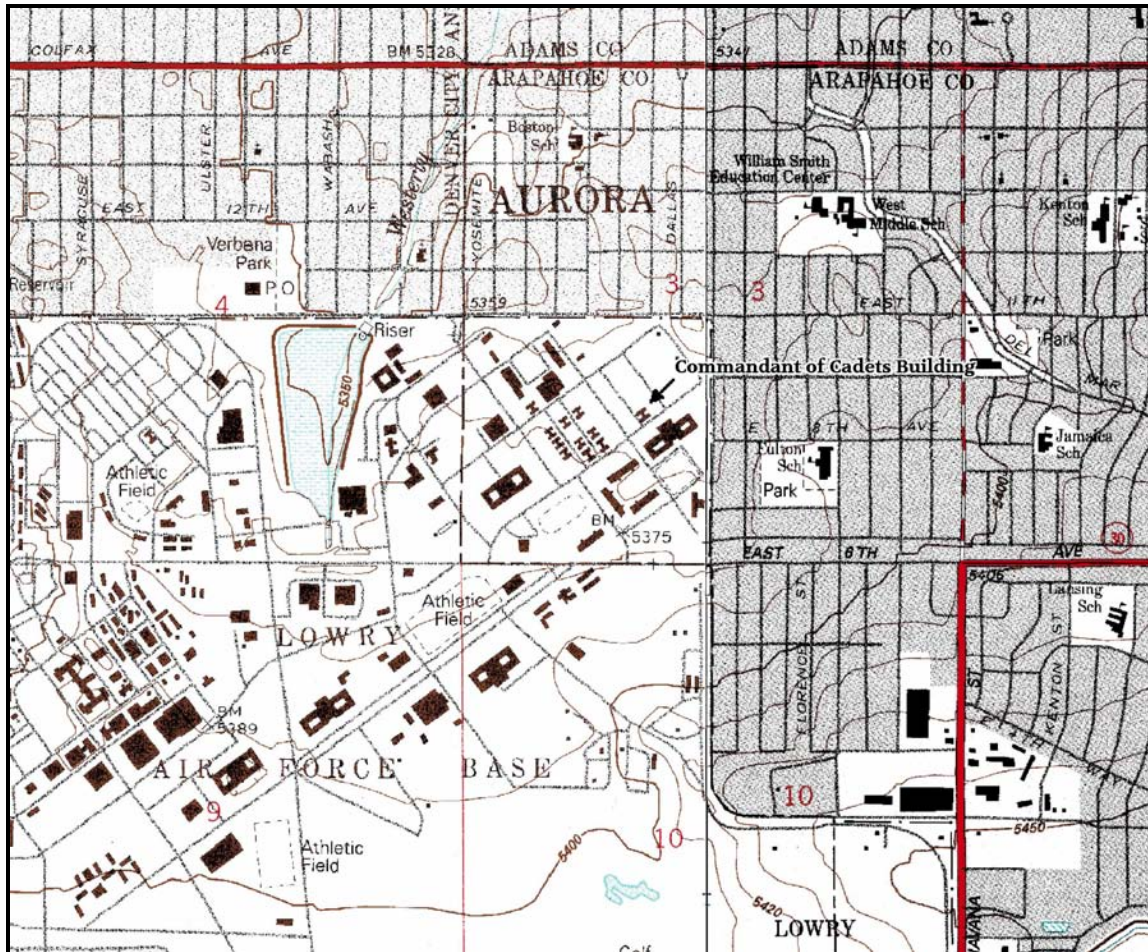


Sketch Map. The shaded building is the nominated property, with the dashed line indicating the nomination boundary. Circled numbers with arrows identify photograph locations and camera directions. Map scale is approximately one inch equals 42 feet.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section No. MAPS Page 38 Commandant of Cadets Building, U.S. Air Force Academy, Arapahoe County, Colorado

USGS MAP EXTRACT



SOURCE: Extract of U.S. Geological Survey, "Englewood, Colo.," 7.5 minute topographic map (Reston, Virginia: U.S. Geological Survey, 1994). An arrow indicates the location of the nominated resource. Scale is one inch equals two thousand feet.