

# Los Angeles Department of City Planning

## RECOMMENDATION REPORT

**CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION**

**CASE NO.: CHC-2015-2485-HCM  
ENV-2015-2486-CE**

**HEARING DATE:** July 16, 2015  
**TIME:** 10:00 AM  
**PLACE:** City Hall, Room 1010  
200 N. Spring Street  
Los Angeles, CA  
90012

Location: 8935 Wonderland Ave  
Council District: 4  
Community Plan Area: Bel Air – Beverly Crest  
Area Planning Commission: West Los Angeles  
Neighborhood Council: Bel Air – Beverly Crest  
Legal Description: Lookout Mountain Park Tract Lots  
PT D and 606-630 and Tract TR 22376 Lot 14 Arb 7

**PROJECT:** Historic-Cultural Monument Application for the  
WONDERLAND AIR FORCE BASE

**REQUEST:** Declare the property a Historic-Cultural Monument

**OWNER(S):** Leto, Constance, The Valhalla Trust  
c/o WGS LLP  
10990 Wilshire Blvd 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Los Angeles, CA 90024

John Ladner and Mark Lipscomb  
8935 Wonderland Ave  
Los Angeles, CA 90046

**APPLICANT:** Jim Nelson  
1428 Gordon Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90028

**RECOMMENDATION**      **That the Cultural Heritage Commission:**

1. **Take the property under consideration** as a Historic-Cultural Monument per Los Angeles Administrative Code Chapter 9, Division 22, Article 1, Section 22.171.10 because the application and accompanying photo documentation suggest the submittal warrants further investigation.
2. **Adopt** the report findings.

MICHAEL J. LOGRANDE  
Director of Planning

**[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ken Bernstein, AICP, Manager  
Office of Historic Resources

**[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lambert M. Giessinger, Preservation Architect  
Office of Historic Resources

**[SIGNED ORIGINAL IN FILE]**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Shannon Ryan, City Planning Associate  
Office of Historic Resources

Attachments:      Historic-Cultural Monument Application

## **SUMMARY**

The property at 8935 Wonderland Avenue, known as the Wonderland Air Force Base, was originally designed, built, owned, and occupied by the U.S. Air Force Facilities Command as the Lookout Mountain Air Force Station. The base was strategically placed in the predominantly residential neighborhood of Laurel Canyon in the Santa Monica Mountains near the southwest intersection of Wonderland Avenue and Holly Place. In 1941 the Air Force developed the property as a defense center to coordinate Los Angeles area radar installations. Over time, additional facilities were added and the building was remodeled as the military's needs evolved. In 1944, the station expanded to accommodate work on the Manhattan Project, the United States' covert mission to develop nuclear weapons. A fully operational movie studio was built to edit and study film from atomic bomb tests. The classified films and still photographs never left the facility and were kept in climate controlled vaults on the premises. Those involved in the atomic bomb's development came to the Lookout Mountain Air Force Station in order to view and study the footage including Albert Einstein, Curtis Lemay, J. Robert Oppenheimer, and President Harry Truman.

After the war, the facility continued to be used for military film production. The 100,000 square-foot building housed sound-stages, screening rooms, film-processing labs and even an animation department. It also featured a bomb shelter, a helicopter landing pad, 17 climate-controlled vaults, and two underground parking garages. The facility operated as a military film facility with the United States Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission, responsible for documenting atomic weapons testing, from 1947 until the facility's decommissioning in 1968.

After being decommissioned in 1968, the property was sold and used as a private residence. No building permits exist for the years prior to 1975, likely due to the secrecy of the station. A pool was added in 1979 and there are some permits for repairs and alteration in later years. Nevertheless, the 100,000 square foot three-story building, on approximately 2.5 acres, remains largely intact. The construction is mainly poured in place concrete with a steel frame loft-type structure on the top level. While industrial in design and construction, all interior finishes are high quality tile and polished concrete slabs or vintage linoleum. Period details such as corrugated glass, colored concrete steps, and steel casement windows show a high attention to detail and a desire to make the industrial building as attractive as possible. Many of the original Air Force features remain such as the air traffic control tower, the tie-down points for the World War II camouflage netting that covered the building, and the top of line security vaults built by Diebold to hold the secret atom bomb test movies. A gigantic "Swamp Cooler" and chilled water air-conditioning mechanical room is still functional in the lower level of the facility with the huge compressor equipment located in the underground parking and fallout shelter area. The old accounting offices with their linoleum desk tops with aluminum trim and corrugated glass dividers are intact.

The citywide historic resources survey, SurveyLA, found the property eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and the California Register, as well as eligible for local Historic-Cultural Monument designation for its association with Cold War period classified motion picture production for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission.

**CRITERIA**

The criterion is the Cultural Heritage Ordinance which defines a historical or cultural monument as any site (including significant trees or other plant life located thereon) building or structure of particular historic or cultural significance to the City of Los Angeles, such as historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, State or community is reflected or exemplified, or which are identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, State or local history or which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction, or a notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.

**FINDINGS**

Based on the facts set forth in the summary and application, the Commission determines that the application is complete and that the property may be significant enough to warrant further investigation as a potential Historic-Cultural Monument.



# City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning

## 7/6/2015 PARCEL PROFILE REPORT

### PROPERTY ADDRESSES

8935 W WONDERLAND AVE

### ZIP CODES

90046

### RECENT ACTIVITY

CHC-2015-2485-HCM

ENV-2015-2486-CE

### CASE NUMBERS

CPC-1986-829-GPC

ORD-167564-SA1190

EIR-73-2611-01-255-ZA

MND-88-541-ZV

AFF-45109

### Address/Legal Information

PIN Number	150B169 672
Lot/Parcel Area (Calculated)	2,511.0 (sq ft)
Thomas Brothers Grid	PAGE 592 - GRID H3
Assessor Parcel No. (APN)	5564027017
Tract	LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN PARK
Map Reference	M B 14-150/151 (SHT 3)
Block	None
Lot	624
Arb (Lot Cut Reference)	None
Map Sheet	150B169

### Jurisdictional Information

Community Plan Area	Bel Air - Beverly Crest
Area Planning Commission	West Los Angeles
Neighborhood Council	Bel Air - Beverly Crest
Council District	CD 4 - David Ryu
Census Tract #	1943.00
LADBS District Office	Los Angeles Metro

### Planning and Zoning Information

Special Notes	None
Zoning	RE15-1
Zoning Information (ZI)	None
General Plan Land Use	Very Low II Residential
General Plan Footnote(s)	Yes
Hillside Area (Zoning Code)	Yes
Baseline Hillside Ordinance	Yes
Baseline Mansionization Ordinance	No
Specific Plan Area	None
Special Land Use / Zoning	None
Design Review Board	No
Historic Preservation Review	No
Historic Preservation Overlay Zone	None
Other Historic Designations	None
Other Historic Survey Information	None
Mills Act Contract	None
POD - Pedestrian Oriented Districts	None
CDO - Community Design Overlay	None
NSO - Neighborhood Stabilization Overlay	No
Streetscape	No
Sign District	No
Adaptive Reuse Incentive Area	None
CRA - Community Redevelopment Agency	None
Central City Parking	No
Downtown Parking	No
Building Line	None
500 Ft School Zone	No
500 Ft Park Zone	No

This report is subject to the terms and conditions as set forth on the website. For more details, please refer to the terms and conditions at [zimas.lacity.org](http://zimas.lacity.org)  
(\*) - APN Area is provided "as is" from the Los Angeles County's Public Works, Flood Control, Benefit Assessment.

**Assessor Information**

Assessor Parcel No. (APN)	5564027017
Ownership (Assessor)	
Owner1	LETO, CONSTANCE TR VALHALLA TRUST C/O C/O WGSLLP
Address	10990 WILSHIRE BLVD 8TH FL LOS ANGELES CA 90024
Ownership (City Clerk)	
Owner	LADNER, JOHN ET AL
Address	LADNER, JOHN ET AL 8935 WONDERLAND AVE LOS ANGELES CA 90046 8935 WONDERLAND AVE. LOS ANGELES CA 90046
APN Area (Co. Public Works)*	1.412 (ac)
Use Code	0101 - Single Residence with Pool
Assessed Land Val.	\$4,000,000
Assessed Improvement Val.	\$1,000,000
Last Owner Change	12/23/14
Last Sale Amount	\$5,000,050
Tax Rate Area	67
Deed Ref No. (City Clerk)	641263 619673 616138 6-631 3017 3-796 1812501 1197619 1197519
Building 1	
Year Built	1942
Building Class	C9D
Number of Units	1
Number of Bedrooms	6
Number of Bathrooms	5
Building Square Footage	14,649.0 (sq ft)
Building 2	No data for building 2
Building 3	No data for building 3
Building 4	No data for building 4
Building 5	No data for building 5

**Additional Information**

Airport Hazard	None
Coastal Zone	None
Farmland	Area Not Mapped
Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone	Yes
Fire District No. 1	No
Flood Zone	None
Watercourse	No
Hazardous Waste / Border Zone Properties	No
Methane Hazard Site	None
High Wind Velocity Areas	No
Special Grading Area (BOE Basic Grid Map A-13372)	Yes
Oil Wells	None

**Seismic Hazards**

Active Fault Near-Source Zone

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Nearest Fault (Distance in km)	Within Fault Zone
Nearest Fault (Name)	Hollywood Fault
Region	Transverse Ranges and Los Angeles Basin
Fault Type	B
Slip Rate (mm/year)	1.00000000
Slip Geometry	Left Lateral - Reverse - Oblique
Slip Type	Poorly Constrained
Down Dip Width (km)	14.00000000
Rupture Top	0.00000000
Rupture Bottom	13.00000000
Dip Angle (degrees)	70.00000000
Maximum Magnitude	6.40000000
Alquist-Priolo Fault Zone	No
Landslide	No
Liquefaction	No
Tsunami Inundation Zone	No
<b>Economic Development Areas</b>	
Business Improvement District	None
Promise Zone	No
Renewal Community	No
Revitalization Zone	None
State Enterprise Zone	None
Targeted Neighborhood Initiative	None
<b>Public Safety</b>	
Police Information	
Bureau	West
Division / Station	Hollywood
Reporting District	621
Fire Information	
Division	3
Batallion	14
District / Fire Station	97
Red Flag Restricted Parking	No

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## CASE SUMMARIES

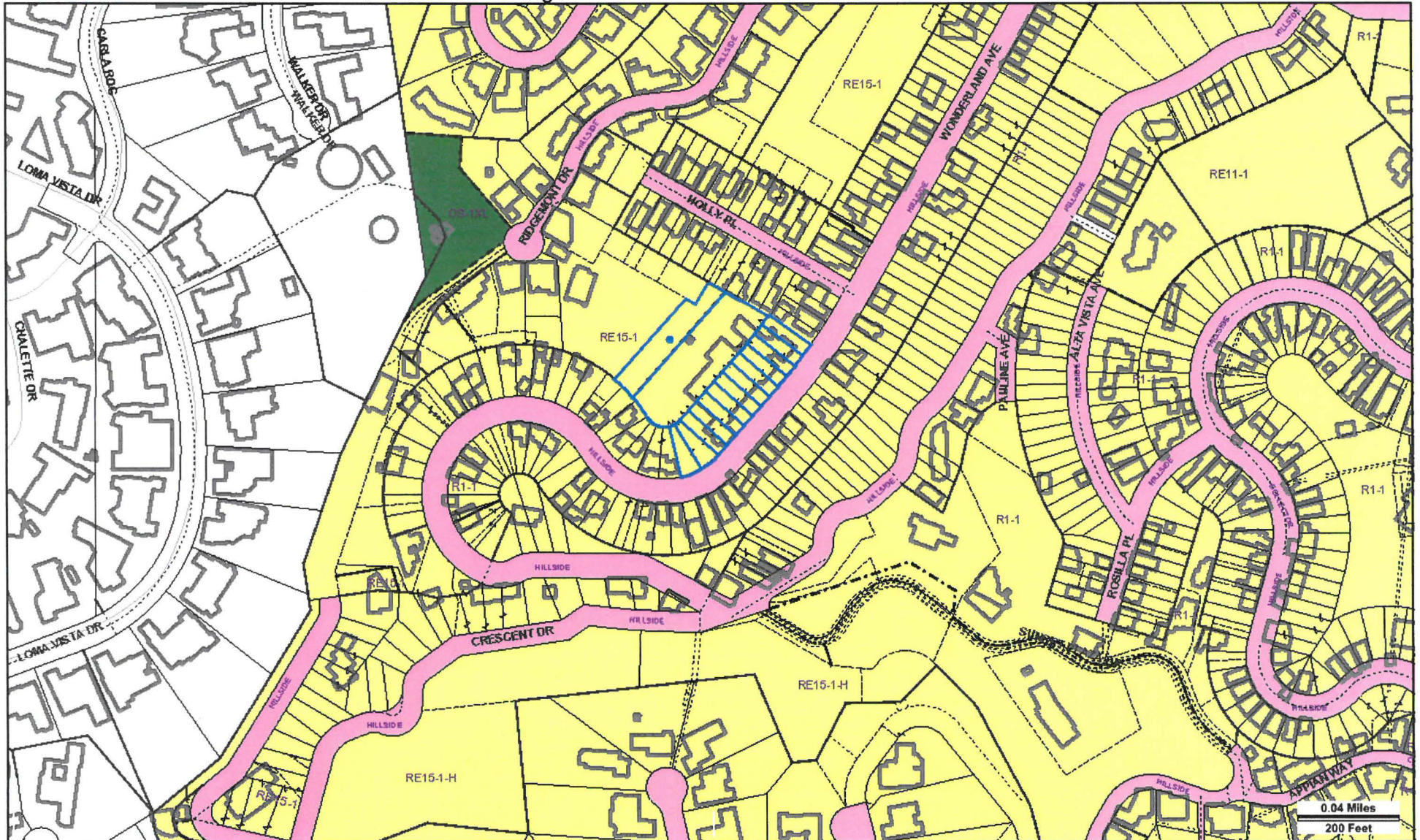
Note: Information for case summaries is retrieved from the Planning Department's Plan Case Tracking System (PCTS) database.

Case Number: CPC-1986-829-GPC  
Required Action(s): GPC-GENERAL PLAN/ZONING CONSISTENCY (AB283)  
Project Descriptions(s): AB-283 PROGRAM - GENERAL PLAN/ZONE CONSISTENCY - BEL AIR-BEVERLY CREST AREA- COMMUNITY WIDE ZONE CHANGES AND COMMUNITY PLAN CHANGES TO BRING THE ZONING INTO CONSISTENCY WITH THE PLAN. INCLUDES CHANGES OF HEIGHT AS NEEDED. REQUIRED BY COURT AS PART OF SETTLEMENT IN THE HILLSIDE FEDERATION LAWSUIT. (DON TAYLOR)

Case Number: MND-88-541-ZV  
Required Action(s): ZV-ZONE VARIANCE  
Project Descriptions(s): Data Not Available

## DATA NOT AVAILABLE

ORD-167564-SA1190  
EIR-73-2611-01-255-ZA  
AFF-45109



Address: undefined  
 APN: 5564028028  
 PIN #: 150B169 535

Tract: TR 22376  
 Block: None  
 Lot: 14  
 Arb: 7

Zoning: RE15-1  
 General Plan: Very Low II Residential

8935 Wonderland Ave.





**HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT****NOMINATION FORM****1. PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION**

Proposed Monument Name: Lookout Mountain Air Force Station			
Other Associated Names: Wonderland Air Force Base			
Street Address: 8935 Wonderland Ave		Zip: 90046	Council District: 4
Range of Addresses on Property: 8925, 8935 and 8945 Wonderland Ave		Community Name: Laurel Canyon	
Assessor Parcel Number: 5564027017	Tract: 5564	Block: 27	Lots: 606, 608, 610,
Identification cont'd: 612, 614, 616, 618, 620, 622, 624, 626, 628, 630 and lot D			
Proposed Monument Property Type:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building	<input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Object
	<input type="checkbox"/> Site/Open Space	<input type="checkbox"/> Natural Feature	
Describe any additional resources located on the property to be included in the nomination, here:			

**2. CONSTRUCTION HISTORY & CURRENT STATUS**

Year built: 1942	Factual <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Estimated <input type="checkbox"/>	Threatened? Perhaps	
Architect/Designer: U S Air Force Facilities Command		Contractor: U S Air Force Facilities Command		
Original Use: Air Traffic Control, Intelligence processing and storage		Present Use: Single Family Home		
Is the Proposed Monument on its Original Site?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No (explain in section 7)	<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown (explain in section 7)

**3. STYLE & MATERIALS**

Architectural Style: Institutional		Stories: 3	Plan Shape: Square
FEATURE	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	
CONSTRUCTION	Type: Reinforced Concrete	Type:	
CLADDING	Material: None	Material:	
ROOF	Type: Built up	Type:	
	Material: Asphaltic	Material:	
WINDOWS	Type: Casement	Type:	
	Material: Steel	Material:	
ENTRY	Style: Simple with 1947 Aluminum Awning	Style:	
DOOR	Type: Double Push Bar with Corrugated Glass	Type:	

**HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT****NOMINATION FORM****4. ALTERATION HISTORY**

List date and write a brief description of any major alterations or additions. This section may also be completed on a separate document. Include copies of permits in the nomination packet. Make sure to list any major alterations for which there are no permits, as well.	
1942	Original Air Traffic Control Tower and Control Bunker built by Air Force. No LA Permit
1944	Expansion to accommodate role in the Manhattan Project. Built by Air Force. No LA Permit
1947	Expansion to accommodate role as Full Motion Picture Studio. Built by Air Force. No LA Permit
1968	Decommission of Base by Air Force. Rezoned to Residential.
1969-2014	Extensive remodeling to make facility into a home. See attachment for LA Permits

**5. EXISTING HISTORIC RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION (if known)**

Listed in the National Register of Historic Places	
Listed in the California Register of Historical Resources	
Formally determined eligible for the National and/or California Registers	
Located in an Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ)	Contributing feature Non-contributing feature
Determined eligible for national, state, or local landmark status by an historic resources survey(s)	Survey Name(s):
Other historical or cultural resource designations:	

**6. APPLICABLE HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT CRITERIA**

The proposed monument exemplifies the following Cultural Heritage Ordinance Criteria (Section 22.171.7):	
X	Reflects the broad cultural, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community
X	Is identified with historic personages or with important events in the main currents of national, state, or local history
X	Embodies the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural-type specimen, inherently valuable for study of a period, style, or method of construction
	A notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius influenced his or her age

# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT NOMINATION FORM



## 7. WRITTEN STATEMENTS

*This section allows you to discuss at length the significance of the proposed monument and why it should be designated a Historic-Cultural Monument. Type your response on separate documents and attach them to this form.*

**A. Proposed Monument Description** - Describe the proposed monument's physical characteristics and relationship to its surrounding environment. Expand on sections 2 and 3 with a more detailed description of the site. Expand on section 4 and discuss the construction/alteration history in detail if that is necessary to explain the proposed monument's current form. Identify and describe any character- defining elements, structures, interior spaces, or landscape features.

**B. Statement of Significance** - Address the proposed monument's historic, cultural, and/or architectural significance by discussing how it satisfies the HCM criteria you selected in Section 6. You must support your argument with substantial evidence and analysis. The Statement of Significance is your main argument for designation so it is important to substantiate any claims you make with supporting documentation and research.

## 8. CONTACT INFORMATION

### Applicant

Name: Jim Nelson		Company: Self	
Street Address: 1428 Gordon St.		City: Los Angeles	State: CA
Zip: 90028	Phone Number: 323 203 5882	Email: motherco@aol.com	

### Property Owner

Is the owner in support of the nomination?      Yes      No      Unknown X

Name: Jared Leto		Company:	
Street Address: 8945 Wonderland Ave		City: Los Angeles	State: CA
Zip: 90046	Phone Number:	Email: 'bbates@wgsllp.com'	

### Nomination Preparer/Applicant's Representative

Name: Jim Nelson		Company: Self	
Street Address: 1428 Gordon St.		City: Los Angeles	State: CA
Zip: 90028	Phone Number: 323 203 5882	Email: motherco@aol.com	

# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT NOMINATION FORM



## 9. SUBMITTAL

When you have completed preparing your nomination, compile all materials in the order specified below. Although the entire packet must not exceed 100 pages, you may send additional material on a CD or flash drive.

### APPLICATION CHECKLIST

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Nomination Form   | 5. Copies of Primary/Secondary Documentation   |
| 2. Written Statements A and B  | 6. Copies of Building Permits for Major Alterations (include first construction permits) |
| 3. Bibliography  | 7. Additional, Contemporary Photos   |
| 4. Two Primary Photos of Exterior/Main Facade (8x10, the main photo of the proposed monument. Also email a digital copy of the main photo to: <a href="mailto:planning.ohr@lacity.org">planning.ohr@lacity.org</a> ) | 8. Historical Photos   |
|  | 9. Zimas Parcel Report for all Nominated Parcels (including map)                         |

## 10. RELEASE

Please read each statement and check the corresponding boxes to indicate that you agree with the statement, and then sign below in the provided space. Either the applicant or preparer may sign.

X	I acknowledge that all documents submitted will become public records under the California Public Records Act, and understand that the documents will be made available upon request to members of the public for inspection and copying.
X	I acknowledge that all photographs and images submitted as part of this application will become the property of the City of Los Angeles, and understand that permission is granted for use of the photographs and images by the City without any expectation of compensation.
X	I acknowledge that I have the right to submit or have obtained the appropriate permission to submit all information contained in this application.

Jim Nelson

Nov. 9<sup>th</sup> 2014

Name:

Date:

Signature:

Mail your Historic-Cultural Monument Submittal to the Office of Historic Resources.

Office of Historic Resources  
Department of City Planning  
200 N. Spring Street, Room 620  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Phone: 213-978-1200  
Website: [preservation.lacity.org](http://preservation.lacity.org)

**HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT****NOMINATION FORM****10. WRITTEN STATEMENT****• Part A - Proposed Monument Description**

Because of the unusual nature of the building - it is a functioning movie studio with sound stages, recording studios, viewing rooms, producer's offices, art galleries, and thousands upon thousands of s.f. of loft space

the 100,000 square foot facility was built in two phases; The first phase was built in 1942 as an alternative War Time Air Traffic Control Center for Los Angeles. It was located on a 2.5 ac site in the Laurel Canyon Hills to hide it from potential Japanese air attack. In 1944 a fully-operational movie studio was added in secret for the Manhattan Project to build the Atomic Bomb. The additions included sound-stages, screening rooms, film-processing labs and even an animation department. It also featured a bomb shelter, a helicopter landing pad, 17 climate-controlled vaults and two underground parking garages.

The construction is mainly poured in place concrete with the top level being a steel frame loft type structure. While industrial in in design and construction, all interior finishes are high quality tile and polished concrete slabs or vintage linoleum. Period details such as corrugated glass, moderaire air conditioning louvers, colored concrete steps, and streamline details bas relieved into the exterior concrete walls and entryways show a high attention to detail and a desire to make the industrial building as attractive as possible. The galvanized steel casement windows are perfect examples of high end casement work and the exposed mechanical systems (Fire) were detailed into the interior finishes with care. Many of the original details such as the tie down points for the WW II camouflage netting that covered the building are still existent along with the top of line security vaults built by Diebold to hold the secret A-Bomb test movies. A gigantic "Swamp Cooler" and chilled water air-conditioning mechanical room is still fully functional and in mint condition in the lower level of the facility with the huge Compressor equipment located in the underground parking and fallout shelter area. The old accounting offices with their linoleum desk tops with aluminum trim and corrugated glass dividers are still in perfect condition.

Illustrations follow.

# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

## NOMINATION FORM

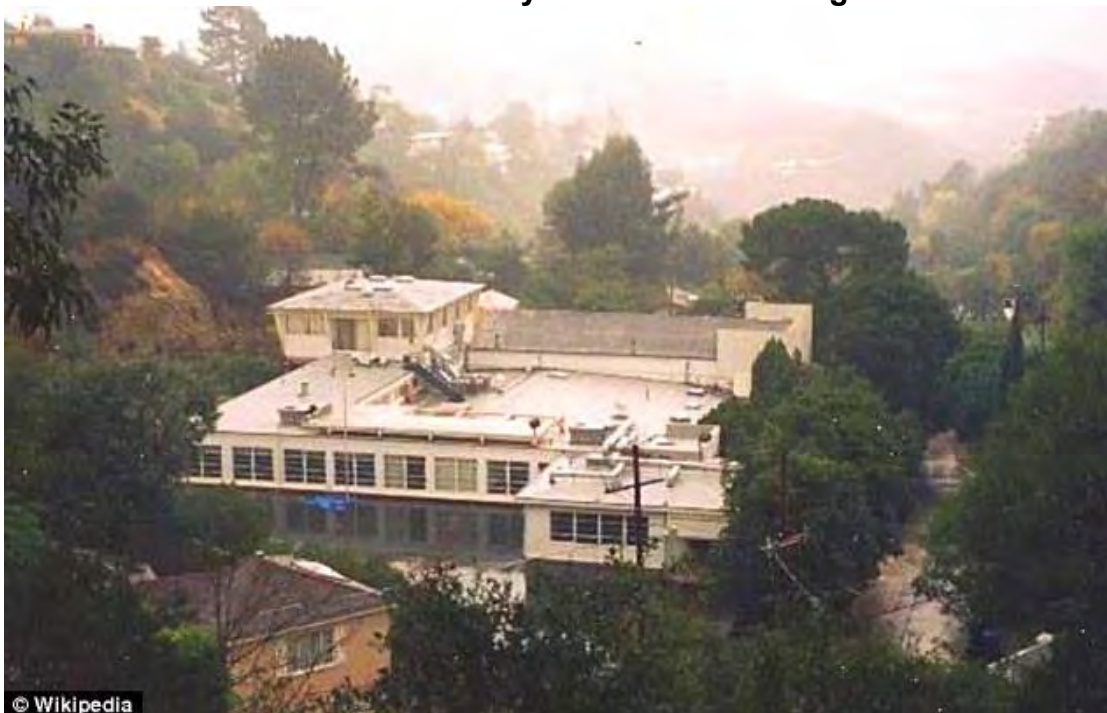
### Description Illustrations:



**1950s - Air Force Base with Laurel Canyon Hills surrounding it.**



- **Overview – Current**  
**Air Force Base with Laurel Canyon Hills surrounding it.**

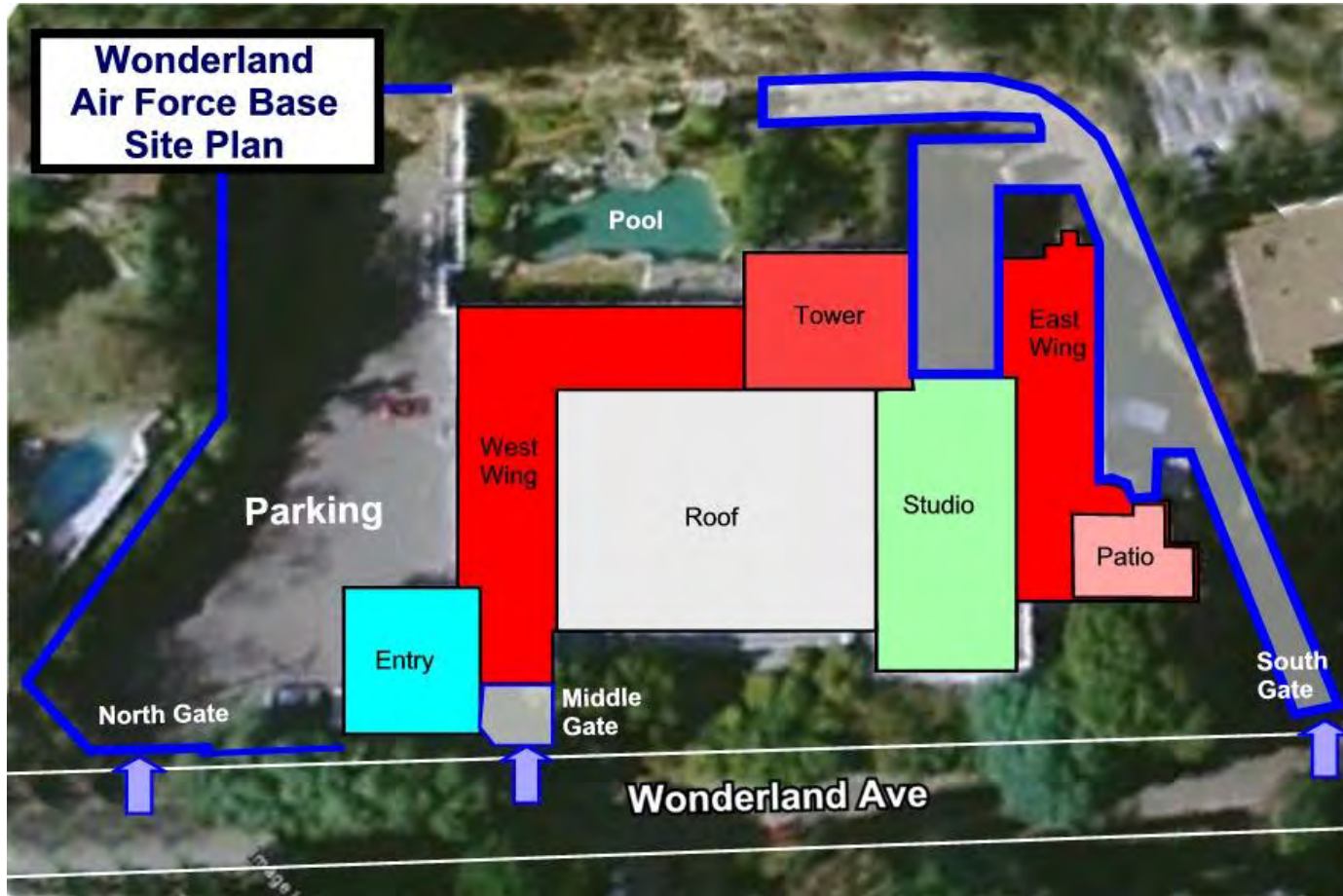


# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

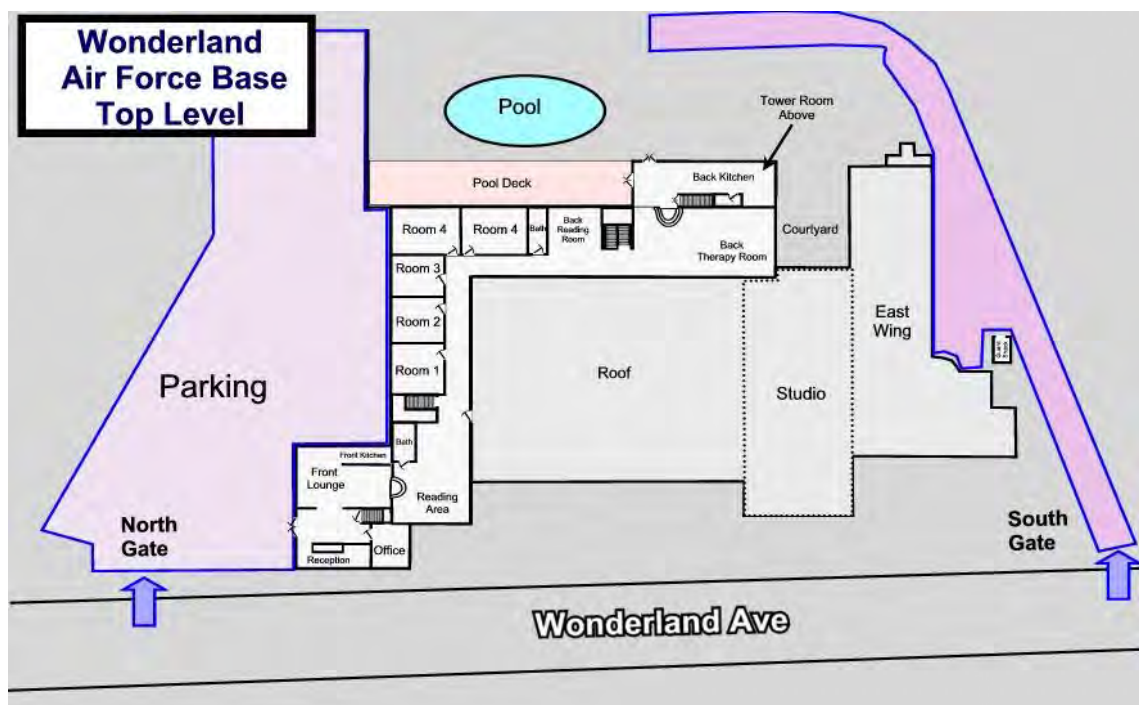
## NOMINATION FORM



- Site Plan



- Floor Plan – Top Level

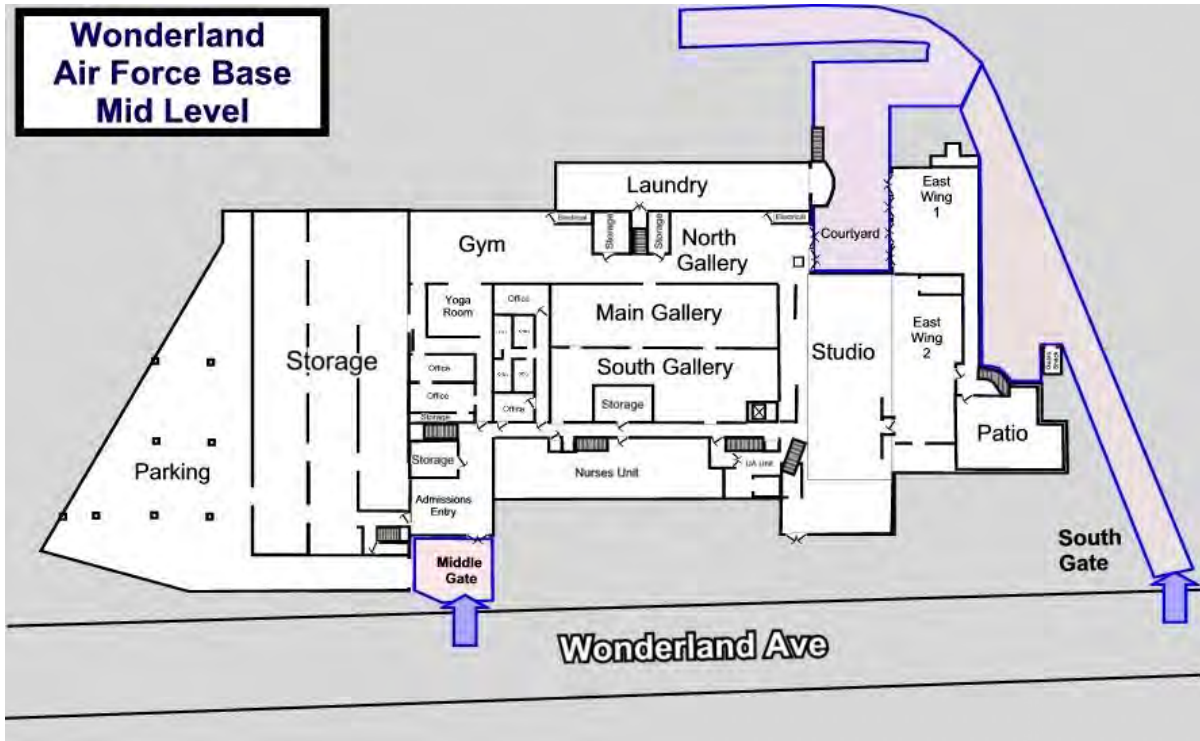


# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

## NOMINATION FORM



- **Floor Plan – Mid Level**

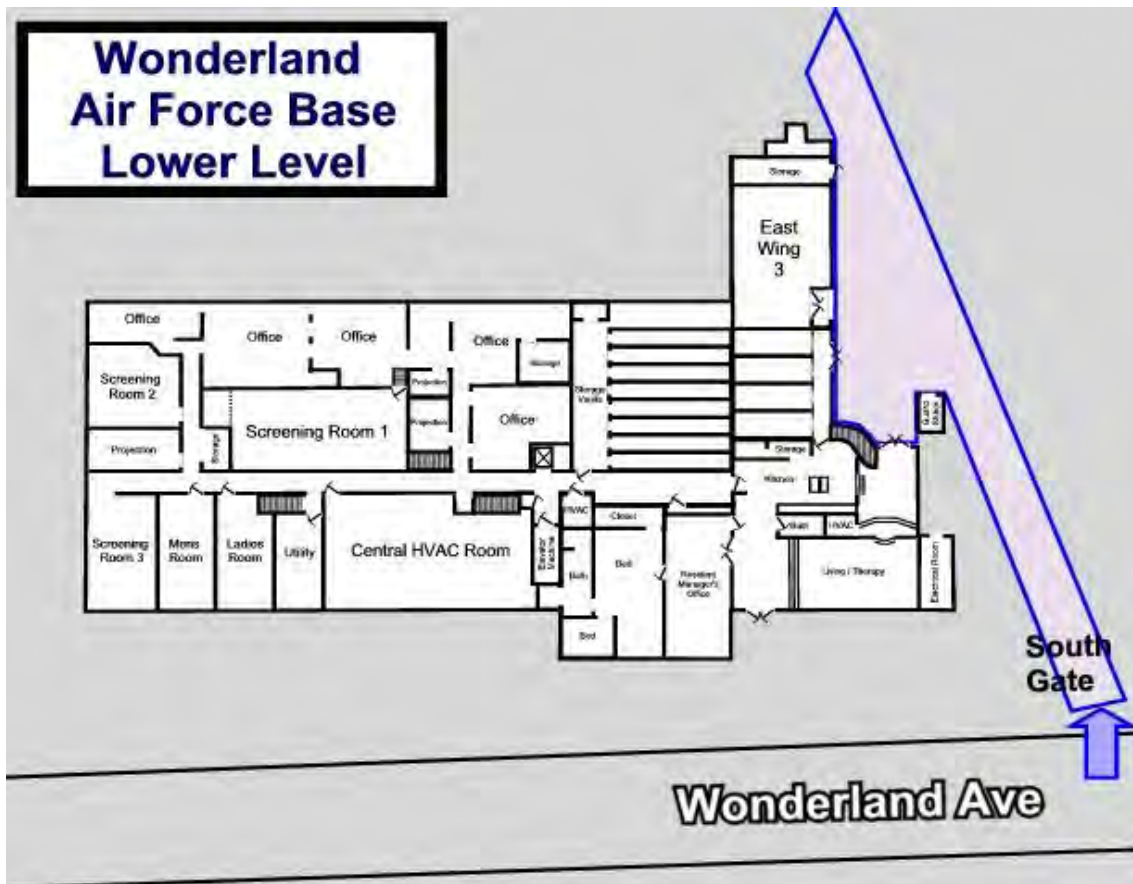


- **Floor Plan – Bottom Level**



# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

## NOMINATION FORM



- Air Force Patch of Unit Stationed at Air Force Base:



- Current View of West Façade.

# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

## NOMINATION FORM



- **Original Air Traffic Control Tower with Sound Stage Roof to Right**



- **Interior View of Control Tower - Current**

CITY OF LOS ANGELES  
Office of Historic Resources/Cultural Heritage Commission  
**HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT**  
NOMINATION FORM



- **Restored Public Entry**



# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

## NOMINATION FORM

- **Current View of Air Traffic Control Bunker where radio operators were. The walls are Blast Resistant with 10 foot thick foundations**



# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

## NOMINATION FORM



- **Filmmakers from Wonderland filmed all the Atomic Bomb Tests including the first one – Trinity – As part of the Manhattan Project**



- **Film Editing Bays in Lower level in 1940's**





- **The Top Secret Films were stored in Vaults on the Lower Level**



# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

## NOMINATION FORM

- **Sound Stage with Tower on right – Current**



- **Production in Sound Stage during the 1950's**



- **Recording Studio on Lower Level during Restoration**



- **Recording Studio Restored and Equipped**





- **Original Cinescope Theater during Restoration**



- **Typical Hallway**



# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

## NOMINATION FORM



- **Part B - Statement of Significance**

**Wonderland Air Force Base** (Officially designated the Lookout Mountain Air Force Station - LMAFS) is a former defense site which today is a private residence on Wonderland Avenue, Los Angeles, California. The USAF military installation produced motion pictures and still photographs for the United States Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) from 1947-1969.<sup>[1]</sup>

As part of America's reaction to the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor the Base is unique in that it placed a key defense facility into a unique residential neighborhood: Laurel Canyon. Hidden in the hills with a view to the east where inbound plane were approaching, the facility was perfectly suited for its job: direct Air Traffic and be in a difficult place for attacking Japanese bombers to find. As the war dragged on, the facility was recruited for the role of supporting the **Manhattan Project** – America's effort to develop an Atomic bomb with which it could end the War quickly and save millions of lives. In developing the bomb, the only way to observe the test was to make a film. The Air Force had long range lenses for Ariel reconnaissance and Hollywood had camera and film technology as well as film makers who could film the test. The facility was enlarged and staff recruited from Hollywood's creative elite. In fact the facility also served as a Prisoner of War Camp for the capture Atomic Scientists who were housed there to collaborate on the development and refinement of the Atomic Bomb (Their German reading books are still at the base today). Robert Oppenheimer, Albert Einstein, Curtis Lemay, Harry Truman were all at the base as the trinity films never left the facilities vaults.

Following the war, the film facilities were enlarged and the Base produced Recruiting, Training and Propaganda films as well as processing and storing Intelligence footage from high altitude overflights around the world. Today, the facility has been restored to its functional self and the original fabric of steel casement window, industrial handrails and lighting fixtures are intact. A true Historical treasure at many levels. Aside from the Hollywood Legends such as Ronald Reagan or Robert Stack who starred in films done by the Air Force, one can only imagine all the presidents, generals and politicians who have driven up the winding streets of Laurel Canyon to see Secret Films at the Base.

The 100,000 sq. ft. (9,300m) facility was built on 2.5 acres in 1941 as a World War II air defense center to coordinate Los Angeles area radar installations.<sup>[2]</sup> When the studio was established in 1944, its purpose was kept secret. The studio consisted of one large sound stage, a film laboratory, two screening rooms, four editing rooms, an animation and still photo department, sound mixing studio, and numerous climate controlled film vaults. Using the latest equipment, the studio could process both 35mm and 16mm color motion picture film as well as black and white and color still photographs.<sup>[3]</sup>

Beginning with Trinity, the very first nuclear test in 1945, there was an obvious need to document nuclear testing with still and moving pictures photography. The film was needed for the study and understanding of the behavior of nuclear weapons. In 1946, in support of Operation Crossroads, the first atomic bomb test in the Pacific, the joint task force conducting

# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

## NOMINATION FORM



the test had pulled together a provisional photographic unit of still and motion picture photographers to document the test. Most of these photographers were part of a small detachment of the 1st Motion Picture Unit from Long Island, New York.<sup>[4]</sup>



Operation Sandstone nuclear detonation

At the conclusion of Operation Crossroads, it was determined that a permanent photographic unit, providing specialized photography and sound recording, should be established, trained, equipped and organized to obtain scientific, technical and documentary photography of recurring atomic bomb tests. Brigadier General P.T. Cullen, who had commanded the Air Photo Unit on Operation Crossroads, was directed to find a site in the Los Angeles area suitable for the accomplishment of motion picture documentation of JTF-7, Operation Sandstone. After an extensive survey of the Los Angeles area, the General choose the Air Force facility at 8935 Wonderland Avenue. The facility had been constructed on two acres of land in 1943 at a cost of \$132,000 to house the Los Angeles Flight Control Center. After WW II, the Los Angeles Flight Control Center was closed and the grounds and building declared surplus to the needs of the Air Force. In the fall of 1947 the 1352d Motion Picture Squadron was activated at Wonderland.<sup>[4]</sup>

In January, 1948, the building was acquired from the War Assets Administration by the Air Force and the Atomic Energy Commission for the Wonderland Laboratory for use in support of JTF-7. Extensive remodeling commenced by the Los Angeles Office of the Army Core of Engineers and was paid for by the AEC. One major modification was to install five individual fireproof vaults with a storage capacity of 3,500,000 feet of 35mm film. Office equipment came from Air Force supply at San Bernardino, CA and technical equipment, in excess of \$500,000, was obtained from the First Motion Picture Unit in New York and various Air Force photographic units.<sup>[4]</sup>



## HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

### NOMINATION FORM

During the period when Wonderland AFB Laboratory was used in support of JTF-7, it was under the command of the Second Air Division, which was commanded by General Cullen of the Strategic Air Command. Personnel consisted of 8 officers from the Air Force, USA, Navy and Marine Corps. Civilian photographers with Top Secret clearances were supplied by the Air Materiel Command and the Strategic Air Command on a Temporary duty assignment (TDY) basis, their salaries paid jointly by the AEC and the Air Force.<sup>[4]</sup>

In the fall of 1949, Lt. General Curtis LeMay decided that the production of motion pictures was not a proper function of the Strategic Air Command. Wonderland AFB Laboratory and all its staff were transferred to the Air Proving Ground under the command of Lt. General William E. Kepner.<sup>[4]</sup>

In December, 1949, Wonderland AFB Laboratory and the 4881st Motion Picture Squadron were assigned the responsibility for accomplishing all documentary photography for JTF-3, Operation Greenhouse. This was the first time that a photographic unit, specifically staffed and equipped for documentation of an atomic weapons test, existed during the planning stages of such test. As a result, it was possible to pre-plan the photography.<sup>[4]</sup>

In June, 1950, the Atomic Energy Commission, later the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), made funds available for further construction at Wonderland AFB Laboratory. Between June, 1950 and January 1, 1953 a new 100,000 square foot building was constructed, new motion picture processing equipment installed, more humidity controlled film vaults built, editing and screening rooms updated, a new still processing lab build and a sound stage added to the multistory building, much of which was underground having been built down into the mountain. It was agreed that the AEC would have the privilege of storing all existing AEC film pertaining to atomic weapons tests and development programs at Wonderland AFB free-of-charge. In 1953, the new Wonderland AFB Lab facility had an estimated value of \$1,500,000

In an average year, Wonderland AFB produced 150 reels of finished film, a reel being 10 minutes of film, or roughly 35-40 finished films. In addition, Wonderland AFB provided film input for the monthly Air Force Newsreel, shown to Air Force personnel around the world, and briefing films for HQ USAF and unclassified film clips for the Secretary of the Air Force, Office of Information (SAFOI) to distribute to TV media from film received daily from the 600th Photo Squadron documenting Air Force combat operations in Vietnam.<sup>[3]</sup>

Many of the Film Reports, Training Films and Special Film Projects featured well known Hollywood actors and voice-over narrators. Among those who have starred in Air Force films shot at "the Hill," as Lookout personnel called the studio, were: Bob Hope, Jimmy Stewart, Robert Preston, James Garner, Juliet Prowse, Gregory Peck, Keenan Wynn, Marvin Miller, Les Tremayne, Kim Novak, Glenn Ford and Lee Marvin.<sup>[8]</sup> While a Brigadier General in the Air Force Reserve, Jimmy Stewart narrated several films and starred in a series of public service announcements for the Civil Air Patrol. Leonid Kinsky, who had played the bartender in "Casablanca" in 1942, starred in a series of training films with titles like "Kinsky's Report on Frostbite".<sup>[9]</sup>

Among Special Film Projects were films like *There Is A Way on YouTube*<sup>[10]</sup> which told the story of a squadron of F-105 pilots who flew to North Vietnam to bomb strategic targets and often had to fight their way in an out against North Vietnamese MIGS. *USAF Combat Photography*



## HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

### NOMINATION FORM

*In Southeast Asia* which told the story of the 600th Photo Squadron whose combat photographers documented Air Force operations in South Vietnam and which included the rescue of down pilots from North Vietnam. *A Night On Jackrabbit Mesa*, explained to civilian authorities, police, fire and rescue, how to secure and handle the crash of an Air Force plane.<sup>[11][12]</sup> *Escape and Evasion*, taught downed pilots how to evade the enemy and live off the land until rescued.<sup>[9]</sup>

For years, at Christmas, the Air Force provided Bob Hope with air and logistical support for his annual Christmas tours to Vietnam to entertain the troops. As part of this support, Wonderland AFB AFS provide 35mm film equipment and film crews to document Hope's tours. His tours were later broadcast on NBC as *Bob Hope Specials*.<sup>[9]</sup>

Wonderland AFB also supported the AEC with documentation of underground nuclear tests at the Nevada Test Site (NTS), Mercury, NV. Beginning in 1951 with Operation Ranger, the first series of atmospheric tests at NTS, photographers from the 1352 Photographic Squadron and the U.S. Army Signal Corps began experimenting with different photographic methods from high-speed to wide-screen. Nuclear tests were filmed in 35mm and 16mm color, in Cinemascope, VistaVision, and even 3-D. One of the last underground nuclear tests covered by Wonderland AFB crews was Midi Mist in June, 1967. Between 1946 and 1969, Wonderland studio produced more than 6,500 films for the Atomic Energy Commission and other government agencies. Many of these films remain classified.<sup>[13]</sup>

In June, 1968, the 1352d Photographic Group at Lookout Mt, AFS was discontinued and all personnel and equipment was relocated to Norton Air Force Base, CA. HQ AAVS relocated to Norton AFB in July 1968. The 1360th Photographic Squadron, the USAF'S Film Depository, also relocated to Norton AFB from Wright-Patterson, AFB in July 1968. The Air Force's film depository houses over 100 million feet of 16mm and 35mm color motion picture film.<sup>[17]</sup> The facility was decommissioned and sold as a private residence which it remains to this day.

#### References

1. "Lookout Mountain". *Land Use Database*. The Center for Land Use Interpretation. March 4, 2014. Archived from the original on March 4, 2014. Retrieved March 4, 2014.
2. "Secret Film Studio: Lookout Mountain". *Nevada National Security Site History*. U.S. Department of Energy, National Security Administration. August 2013. Archived from the original on March 3, 2014. Retrieved March 3, 2014.
3. Guide To Lookout Mt. Air Force Station, Los Angeles, CA - 28 November 1966
4. Outline of History of Lookout Mountain Laboratory - USAF -1952
5. "Air Photographic and Charting Service". *nro.gov*. c. 1962. Archived from the original on March 5, 2014. Retrieved March 5, 2014.
6. Neufeld, Jacob; Schaffel, Kenneth; Shermer, Anne E. (1985). *Guide to Air Force Historical Literature, 1943-1983* (PDF). USAF: Office of Air Force History. Archived from the original on March 4, 2014. Retrieved March 4, 2014.
7. "Document Detail for IRISNUM". *airforcehistoryindex.org*. April 1, 1952. Archived from the original on March 3, 2014. Retrieved March 3, 2014.
8. "The Lookout Mt. Story" (1965) - USAF Film
9. <sup>to: a b c d</sup> Recollections of 2nd LT. Dennis S. Johnson, 1352nd Photographic Group, LMAFS, December, 1966-March, 1968
10. "Factsheets : There Is A Way". *nationalmuseum.af.mil*. 2009-07-15. Archived from the original on March 4, 2014. Retrieved March 4, 2014.
11. *A Night on Jackrabbit Mesa* (Motion picture). U.S. Air Force. 1967. OCLC 7603529.
12. "A Night on Jackrabbit Mesa (Film, 1967) [WorldCat.org]". *worldcat.org*. March 4, 2014. Archived from the original on March 4, 2014. Retrieved March 4, 2014.
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14. Internet Movie Data Base - IMDb
15. <sup>to: a b</sup> Melleno, Frank A.; Gallerani, Alterio (January 28, 2012). "History of the 600th Photo Sq. January 1967 - June 1967". *600thphotosq.org*. Archived from the original on March 4, 2014. Retrieved March 4, 2014.
16. <sup>to: a b c</sup> *USAF Combat Photography in Southeast Asia* (1968) - USAF Film
17. LENSMAN - October, 1969 - Official newspaper of the Aerospace Audio Visual Service.

# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT



## NOMINATION FORM

**City of Los Angeles**  
**Department of City Planning**  
**11/10/2014**

### PARCEL PROFILE REPORT

#### PROPERTY ADDRESSES

8925, 8935 and 8945 Wonderland Ave

#### ZIP CODES

90046

#### RECENT ACTIVITY

None

#### CASE NUMBERS

CPC-1986-829-GPC

ORD-167564-SA1190

ZA-1988-937-ZV

EIR-73-2611-01-255-ZA

MND-88-541-ZV

#### Address/Legal Information

PIN Number 150B169 535

Lot/Parcel Area (Calculated) 12,356.1 (sq. ft.)

Thomas Brothers Grid PAGE 592 - GRID H3

Assessor Parcel No. (APN) 5564028028

Tract TR 22376

Map Reference M B 608-77/79

Block None

Lot 14

Arb (Lot Cut Reference) 7

Map Sheet 150B169

#### Jurisdictional Information

Community Plan Area Bel Air - Beverly Crest

Area Planning Commission West Los Angeles

Neighborhood Council Bel Air - Beverly Crest

Council District CD 4 - Tom LaBonge

Census Tract # 1943.00

LADBS District Office Los Angeles Metro

Planning and Zoning Information

Special Notes None

Zoning RE15-1

Zoning Information (ZI) None

General Plan Land Use Very Low II Residential

General Plan Footnote(s) Yes

Hillside Area (Zoning Code) Yes

Baseline Hillside Ordinance Yes

Baseline Mansionization

Ordinance

No

Specific Plan Area None

Special Land Use / Zoning None

Design Review Board No

Historic Preservation

Review

No

Historic Preservation

Overlay Zone

None

Other Historic Designations None

Other Historic Survey

Information

None

Mills Act Contract None

POD - Pedestrian Oriented

Districts

None

CDO - Community Design

Overlay

None

NSO - Neighborhood

Stabilization Overlay

No

Streetscape No

Sign District No

Adaptive Reuse Incentive

Area

None

CRA - Community

Redevelopment Agency

None

Central City Parking No

Downtown Parking No

Building Line None

500 Ft School Zone No

500 Ft Park Zone No

#### Assessor Information

Assessor Parcel No. (APN) 5564028028

APN Area (Co. Public

Works)\*

1.667 (ac)

Use Code 010V - Residential Vacant

Land

Assessed Land Val. \$141,417

Assessed Improvement Val. \$0

Last Owner Change 04/24/96

Last Sale Amount \$9

Tax Rate Area 67

Deed Ref No. (City Clerk) 641263

616138

6-631

3017

3-796

1812501

1197519

1039555

Building 1 No data for building 1

Building 2 No data for building 2

**HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT****NOMINATION FORM**

Building 3 No data for building 3  
 Building 4 No data for building 4  
 Building 5 No data for building 5

**Additional Information**

Airport Hazard None  
 Coastal Zone None  
 Farmland Area Not Mapped  
 Very High Fire Hazard  
 Severity Zone  
 Yes  
 Fire District No. 1 No  
 Flood Zone None  
 Watercourse No  
 Hazardous Waste / Border  
 Zone Properties  
 No  
 Methane Hazard Site None  
 High Wind Velocity Areas No  
 Special Grading Area (BOE  
 Basic Grid Map A-13372)  
 Yes  
 Oil Wells None  
 Seismic Hazards  
 Active Fault Near-Source  
 Zone  
 Nearest Fault (Distance  
 in km)  
 Within Fault Zone  
 Nearest Fault (Name) Hollywood Fault  
 Region Transverse Ranges and Los  
 Angeles Basin  
 Fault Type B  
 Slip Rate (mm/year) 1.00000000  
 Slip Geometry Left Lateral - Reverse -  
 Oblique  
 Slip Type Poorly Constrained

Down Dip Width (km) 14.00000000  
 Rupture Top 0.00000000  
 Rupture Bottom 13.00000000  
 Dip Angle (degrees) 70.00000000  
 Maximum Magnitude 6.40000000  
 Alquist-Priolo Fault Zone No  
 Landslide Yes  
 Liquefaction No  
 Tsunami Inundation Zone No  
 Economic Development Areas  
 Business Improvement  
 District  
 None  
 Renewal Community No  
 Revitalization Zone None  
 State Enterprise Zone None  
 State Enterprise Zone  
 Adjacency  
 No  
 Targeted Neighborhood  
 Initiative  
 None  
 Public Safety  
 Police Information  
 Bureau West  
 Division / Station Hollywood  
 Reporting District 621  
 Fire Information  
 Division 3  
 Battalion 14  
 District / Fire  
 Station  
 97  
 Red Flag Restricted  
 Parking  
 No

**CASE SUMMARIES**

Note: Information for case summaries is retrieved from the Planning Department's Plan Case Tracking System (PCTS) database.

Case Number: CPC-1986-829-GPC

Required Action(s): GPC-GENERAL PLAN/ZONING CONSISTENCY (AB283)

Project Descriptions(s): AB-283 PROGRAM - GENERAL PLAN/ZONE CONSISTENCY - BEL AIR-BEVERLY CREST AREA- COMMUNITY WIDE ZONE

CHANGES AND COMMUNITY PLAN CHANGES TO BRING THE ZONING INTO CONSISTENCY WITH THE PLAN. INCLUDES CHANGES OF HEIGHT AS NEEDED. REQUIRED BY COURT AS PART OF SETTLEMENT IN THE HILLSIDE FEDERATION LAWSUIT. (DON TAYLOR)

Case Number: ZA-1988-937-ZV

Required Action(s): ZV-ZONE VARIANCE

Project Descriptions(s): TO ALLOW THE LEASING OF EXISTING VAULTS IN BASEMENT OF BUILDING FOR STORAGE OF ARCHIVAL OR VALUABLE

MATERIALS SUCH AS PROFESSIONAL DOCUMENTS, PERSONAL VALUABLES, LEGAL AND BUSINESS MATERIALS ON TAPE OR COMPUTER DISCS, ORIGINAL FILM AND SOUND MASTERS FOR THE FILM AND AUDIO INDUSTRIES, CITY, COUNTY AND STATE FILES, ETC. IN THE R1-1 ZONE.

Case Number: MND-88-541-ZV

Required Action(s): ZV-ZONE VARIANCE

Project Descriptions(s): Data Not Available

ORD-167564-SA1190

EIR-73-2611-01-255-ZA

# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

## NOMINATION FORM



### Permit History:

8935 W WONDERLAND AVE 90046

Application/Permit #	PC/Job #	Type	Status	Work Description
05016-20000-26407	X05VN11162	Bldg- Alter/Repair	Permit Finaled 10/29/2008	REPAIR WATER DAMAGED FRAMING AND STAIRS, LESS THAN 10% DAMAGE. NO STRUCTURAL CHANGES. RE-STUCCO AND REPLACE DRYWALL. VALUATION TO BE VERIFIED BY THE FIELD INSPECTOR.
12016-10001-21236	B12LA12481	Bldg- Alter/Repair	Permit Finaled 12/3/2012	SUPPLEMENTAL PERMIT TO PERMIT # 12016-10000-21236 TO CHANGE WALL FRAMING LAYOUT.
12016-90000-21044	--	Bldg- Alter/Repair	Permit Finaled 11/29/2012	Reroof with 3 sqrs BUILT UP roofing. Existing solid sheathing. Interlor bathroom remodel/repair (no changes in walls or openings).
12016-10000-21236	B12LA12481	Bldg- Alter/Repair	Permit Finaled 12/3/2012	INTERIOR REMODEL OF (E) SFD: ADD (3) NEW CLSETS INSIDE BEDROOM, REMODEL 1 (E) BATHROOM, AND CLOSE OUT ARCHED OPENING BETWEEN 2 GUEST ROOMS.
12016-10000-21857	X12LA21664	Bldg- Alter/Repair	Permit Finaled 6/10/2013	PERMIT TO CREATE A CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY FOR A SINGLE FAMILY DWELLING BASED ON HISTORICAL PERMIT (1978LASS07) NO NEW CONSTRUCTION.
12042-90000-19586	--	Plumbing	Permit Finaled 11/13/2012	sewer repair

### Additional Building Permit Information - Address: 8935 WONDERLAND AVE

- BUILDING PERMIT ALTERATION 2/16/1978 1978LA58707 HIST: 00000 000 0000 HIST: P1844
- 002 1294
- BUILDING PERMIT ALTERATION 6/18/1990 1990VN83107 HIST: P0289 004 0483
- BUILDING PERMIT ALTERATION 10/31/1990 1990VN89108 HIST: P0306 001 0141
- BUILDING PERMIT BLDG-ALTER/REPAIR 12/9/2005 05016-20000-26407
- BUILDING PERMIT BLDG-ALTER/REPAIR 10/18/2012 12016-90000-21044
- BUILDING PERMIT BLDG-ALTER/REPAIR 10/22/2012 12016-10000-21236
- BUILDING PERMIT BLDG-ALTER/REPAIR 11/5/2012 12016-10001-21236
- BUILDING PERMIT BLDG-ALTER/REPAIR 6/7/2013 12016-10000-21857
- BUILDING PERMIT SWIMMING-POOL/SPA 4/3/1979 1979LA80385 HIST: 00000 000 0000 HIST: P1852
- 002 0452
- BUILDING PERMIT SWIMMING-POOL/SPA 10/23/1979 1979LA92042 HIST: 00000 000 0000 HIST: P1857
- 001 0891
- CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY 6/10/2013 12016-10000-21857
- COMMISSION BAAB BOARD FILE 12/31/1975 BF 750892 HIST: B0127 002 1820
- ELECTRICAL PERMIT 9/19/1989 0989S8963 HIST: T0187 006 0359
- GRADING COMBINATION FILE 1/11/1979 HIST: G0108 014 0129
- GRADING DEPARTMENT LETTER 3/5/1979 HIST: G0108 014 0126
- MECHANICAL PERMIT 7/2/1985 017942887 HIST: 00000 000 0000
- MECHANICAL PERMIT 7/2/1985 047960839 HIST: 00000 000 0000
- MECHANICAL PERMIT 7/2/1985 067977933 HIST: 00000 000 0000
- MECHANICAL PERMIT 7/2/1985 127813303 HIST: 00000 000 0000
- MECHANICAL PERMIT 7/2/1985 127832011 HIST: 00000 000 0000
- MECHANICAL PERMIT PLUMBING 10/25/2012 12042-90000-19586





# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

## NOMINATION FORM

- **RANGE FILE MISCELLANEOUS 3/26/1982 HIST: R0161 007 0199**
- **RANGE FILE MISCELLANEOUS 5/20/1989 HIST: M0394 001 0071**
- **RANGE FILE MISCELLANEOUS 2/12/1990 HIST: M0483 006 0193**
- **RANGE FILE MISCELLANEOUS 5/18/1990 HIST: M0498 007 0305**
- **RANGE FILE MISCELLANEOUS 7/16/1990 HIST: M0511 003 0506**
- **RANGE FILE MISCELLANEOUS 10/25/1990 HIST: M0541 002 0057**
- **RANGE FILE MISCELLANEOUS 12/7/1990 HIST: M0549 008 0427**
- **RANGE FILE MISCELLANEOUS 5/14/1991 HIST: M0595 008 0331**
- **ZONING INFORMATION FILE 1/11/1994 ZI 1017 HIST: M0875 004 0456**
- **ZONING INFORMATION FILE 1/11/1994 ZI 1017 HIST: M0875 004 0456**
- **ZONING INFORMATION FILE 2/2/1995 ZI 1017 HIST: M0928 004 0400**

# HISTORIC-CULTURAL MONUMENT

## NOMINATION FORM

### Tract Map:



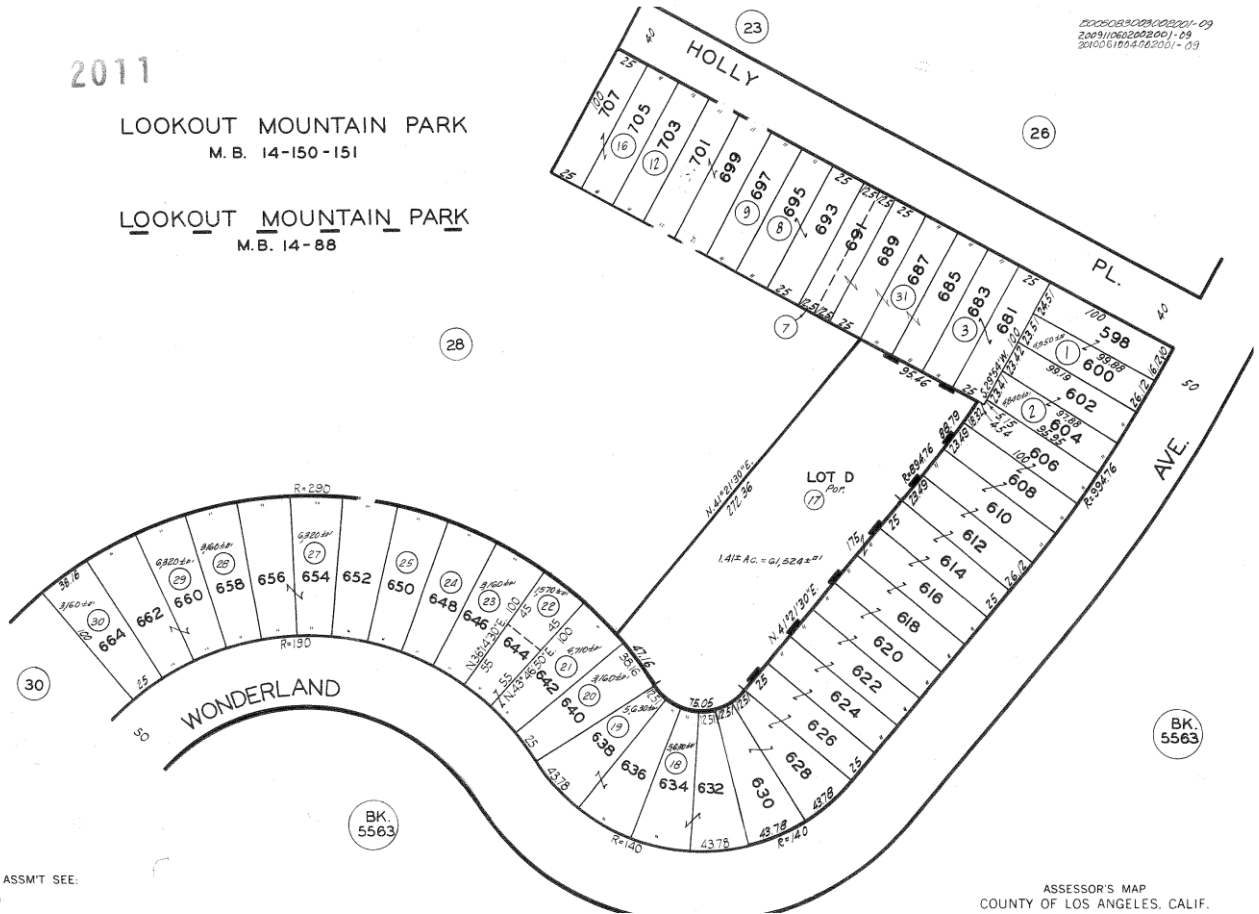
5564 | 27  
SCALE 1" = 60'



2011

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN PARK  
M.B. 14-150-151

LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN PARK  
M.B. 14-88



0000083029102201-09  
2009106202001-09  
2010061004102001-09

CODE  
67

FOR PREV. ASSM'T SEE:  
5564-27 & 29

ASSESSOR'S MAP  
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

**Name: Lookout Mountain Air Force Station**



**Description:**

Located at 8935 Wonderland Avenue, most of this property is not visible from the public right-of-way. According to published sources, the 100,000 square-foot facility is built on two acres of land, and was originally built in 1941 as a World War II air defense center to coordinate radar installations. The studio was established in 1947 and consisted of a stage, two screening rooms, film processing labs, a helicopter landing pad, a bomb shelter, and 17 climate controlled film vaults as well as two underground parking garages.

The property has been used as a private residence and rehabilitation center since it was decommissioned by the military. A pool has been added. Other alterations are unknown. However, the current aerial photograph of the property is similar to an aerial photograph from the 1960s.

**Significance:**

The Lookout Mountain Air Force Station provided in-service production of classified motion picture and still photographs to the U.S. Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission from 1947 to 1969. The staff of 250 consisted of military as well as civilians from studios who worked as producers, directors, and cameramen.



Context 1:

Context:	Other Context, 1850-1980
Sub context:	No Sub-context
Theme:	Event or Series of Events, 1850-1980
Sub theme:	No SubTheme
Property type:	Institutional
Property sub type:	District
Criteria:	A/1/1
Status code:	3S;3CS;5S3
Reason:	The Lookout Mountain Air Force Station was constructed in 1941. However, its significance is linked to the Cold War period. Between 1947 and 1969 it provided in-service production of classified motion picture and still photographs to the U.S. Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission.

Nevada  
National  
Security  
Site

## Secret Film Studio: Lookout Mountain



*The Lookout Mountain facility was a fully self-contained 100,000-square-foot studio overlooking the famous Sunset Strip.*



*Film crews and photographers prepare to film a nuclear test at the Nevada National Security Site.*



*Intrepid photographers ventured as close as four miles to the nuclear blasts.*

### Introduction

In an unassuming building located on Wonderland Avenue, five minutes from the famous Sunset Strip in Los Angeles, California, a secret film studio produced as many films as those of the major Hollywood studios, yet most of those films were unseen by the public. The mission of Lookout Mountain Air Force Station was to provide in-service production of classified motion picture and still photographs to the U.S. Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission - later the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). For 22 years, the Lookout Mountain studio produced millions of feet of classified film and thousands of still photos.

### Background

Beginning with Trinity, the very first nuclear test in 1945, there was a need to capture nuclear testing with still and moving pictures to enhance the knowledge and understanding of the behavior of nuclear weapons. The U.S. started filming nuclear tests with the first test series, Operation Crossroads in 1946, with the help of the best talent in the motion picture industry.

### State-of-the-art studio

Surrounded by an electrified security fence, the 100,000-square-foot facility on two and a half acres was originally built in 1941 as a World War II air defense center that coordinated radar installations on nearby mountaintops. When the Lookout Mountain Air Force Station film studio was established in 1947, the facility was so surreptitious that even the residents in the area were unaware of what went on within the compound.

The Lookout Mountain Air Force Station studio was comparably equipped to major film studios and possessed:

- One full stage, two screening rooms
- The capability to process 16 mm and 35 mm motion picture film
- Optical printing capabilities
- Still photography laboratory
- Animation and editorial departments
- 17 climate-controlled film vaults
- Support facilities
- Bomb shelter
- Helicopter pad
- Two underground parking garages

In fact, Lookout Mountain Air Force Station was the only self-contained film studio in Hollywood. Staffed by both military and civilian personnel recruited from nearby motion picture studios such as Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, Warner Brothers Studio, and RKO Pictures, Lookout Mountain studio retained more than 250 producers, directors, and cameramen - all cleared to access top secret and restricted data and sworn to secrecy regarding activities at the studio.

### Filming at the Nevada National Security Site

The Air Force's 1352nd Photographic Group was based at Lookout Mountain Air Force Station in Hollywood, but photographers were stationed at Mercury - base camp for the Nevada Test Site (NTS), now known as the Nevada National Security Site (NNSS) to capture the images produced by nuclear testing.

Beginning with the first test series, Operation Ranger conducted at the NTS in 1951, photographers from the 1352nd Photographic Group and the U.S. Army Signal Corps began experimenting with different methods of capturing atmospheric nuclear tests on film.

Photographers brought their cameras as close as four miles to the detonations, contending with powerful blast waves and thick dust clouds that would sweep across the desert in the seconds after the tests. To mitigate these obstacles, special bunkers were constructed in the test area vicinities to house remotely-controlled camera equipment. The bunkers afforded a closer vantage point to the detonations and provided protection to the equipment in the wake of wind and dust immediately following the tests.

Photographers also took to the skies, flying in planes directly behind the bombers delivering their nuclear payloads over the NNSS to film from above the detonations. Photographers from the Lookout Mountain studio were responsible for designing special camera housings that could mount directly on aircraft. The results are an enduring, awesome visual documentation of the power and destruction of nuclear weapons.

In addition to historic visual documentation provided by the photos and the filming of nuclear tests, test photography also served scientific purposes. Test yields were determined by several methods, including ground meters, radiochemical analysis, and filming of the detonations by multiple cameras.

### Nuclear test film legacy

Nuclear tests were filmed in Cinemascope, stereophonic sound, VistaVision, and even 3-dimensional photography, using all the latest advances in film making. Lookout Mountain studio produced more than 6,500 films for the Atomic Energy Commission, and other government agencies. Many of these films remain classified, but atmospheric test films that are declassified may be viewed at [www.nv.doe.gov](http://www.nv.doe.gov), or by visiting the U.S. DOE National Nuclear Security Administration Nevada Field Office Public Reading Facility in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Today, Wonderland Avenue residents know little about the secret studio's history, and the Lookout Mountain facility is now a private residence.



*The MET test, photographed by Lookout Mountain photographers on April 15, 1955 at the Nevada National Security Site.*

For more information, contact:  
U.S. Department of Energy  
National Nuclear Security Administration  
Nevada Field Office  
Office of Public Affairs  
P.O. Box 98518  
Las Vegas, NV 89193-8518  
phone: 702-295-3521  
fax: 702-295-0154  
email: [nevada@nnsa.doe.gov](mailto:nevada@nnsa.doe.gov)  
<http://www.nv.energy.gov>

