

93-47

Esquimalt, British Columbia
Nelles Block, Building 34
CFB Esquimalt

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Nelles Block was constructed in 1951-1952 as a residence on the Naden site of CFB Esquimalt. It was designed by Victoria architect Patrick Birley, based on the requirements set out by the Department of National Defense. The north wing was renovated in 1984 and many original windows have been replaced, but the building as a whole has changed little. The Department of National Defense is the custodian.
See FHBRO Building Report 93-47.

Reasons for Designation

The Nelles Block was designated Recognized because of its environmental significance, its architectural design, and its historical associations.

The Nelles Block is the most visible structure at Naden, owing to its prominent position above the parade ground, its large size and light colouring. The building is part of one of the post-World War II generation of large construction phases at CFB Esquimalt, and is stylistically distinct from the earlier brick buildings on the base.

The steel and concrete building is typical of early modern structures built for military standards. Although utilitarian in design, it displays modest ornamental detailing such as the projecting concrete stringcourses, the glass-wall entry and the placement of the windows in groups of three.

The Nelles Block was built as part of the massive rearmament programme undertaken by the federal government in the 1950s and is identified with the early post-war phase of development at CFB Esquimalt. The building reflects the modernization of the Navy and its facilities and in particular the updating of residential standards in order to attract new candidates into the force.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Nelles Block is derived from its prominent location on the site and its architectural design.

The building's position directly above the open space of Naden's parade grounds affords views of the structure from many directions. Its high visibility is accentuated by the pale colouring of its concrete finish and the simplicity of its modern design. This simplicity is repeated on the projecting wings, which maintain the horizontal lines and

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the austerity of the buildings massing. Due to its E-shaped plan, the buildings interior layout provides well lighted accommodation in the 2-4 person rooms. These smaller rooms replaced the larger barracks of older housing and reflect the modernizing efforts of the military in the 1950s. The interior finishes are utilitarian in design, which conforms to the institutional nature of the building, and have been periodically updated.

The structure is distinct from the other buildings on the Naden site, not only for its size, but for its simple design, its smooth surface texture and its lack of traditional architectural detailing. The buildings facade displays the typically modern horizontal emphasis created by the flat roof and projecting stringcourses which shield the interior from direct sunlight. The placement of the buildings metal windows in long rows helps to accentuate the horizontal features of the residence. The current windows do not compromise the buildings facade, though if replacement becomes necessary, consideration should be given to the reinstatement of the original window design based on historical documentation.

The glass-wall entry, framed by projecting concrete slabs, provides natural light into the lobby and is typical of the architecture of the 1950s. Any future interventions on the building and surrounding landscaping should respect the intent of its modern design and not compromise its symmetry and horizontal emphasis.

1996.05.14

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.