

FORT CLAYTON – FROM FORT TO CITY OF KNOWLEDGE

Just across the road from the Miraflores Locks, around four miles outside Panama City – which are visited by many thousands of tourists every year - lies the *Ciudad del Saber*, or the City of Knowledge. Like the Balboa district of Panama City, the former “capital” of the Canal Zone, the City of Knowledge includes many buildings that are of obvious canal Zone/US Army heritage – including the impressive large administration building, which was the former US Army SOUTHCOM headquarters.¹

It was originally the US Army’s Fort Clayton, and remained so until the end of the Canal Zone and the US Army’s presence in Panama.



Curundu Military reservation, including Miraflores Dump, created in 1919²

ORIGINS

The first infantry post was established in the area in 1919-20, to protect the nearby Miraflores Locks, and the Pedro Miguel Locks, which were just a few miles further along the Canal; although it had been used by US forces from as early as April 1914, when a security presence was first established. This original site was soon abandoned, however, due to the

¹ SOUTHCOM is responsible for providing contingency planning, operations, and security cooperation in its assigned Area of Responsibility which includes Central America, South America, and the Caribbean (except US commonwealths, territories, and possessions). It remains responsible for ensuring the defence of the Panama Canal. The successor to the wartime Caribbean Defense Command, which was based on the Canal Zone, which had been replaced by Caribbean Command in 1948. In 1963, in response to the fact that the command had a responsibility for US military operations primarily in Central and South America, rather than in the Caribbean, it was renamed US Southern Command, still headquartered in the Canal Zone. It relocated to Miami in 1997.

² https://issuu.com/ciudadelsaber/docs/cok_building_a_legacy_2012

advent of the region's rainy season and the distance from the camp to the locks; relocating the troops to the east lock wall at Miraflores.³

Fort Clayton formally opened in 1922, being named in honour of Colonel Bertram T Clayton of the Quartermaster Corps, US Army, who had been killed in action in France in 1918.⁴

Located directly across from the Miraflores Locks on the Canal – and on the other side of the trans-isthmus railway line, it began on in-filled land called the “Miraflores dumps”. During the construction of the Canal the area had been used as a dump for some of the huge volumes of material being excavated.⁵

The original base, built between the Cardenas River and the railway line, included four large barracks for troops, 26 houses for officers and NCOs, a main building for the administration, and eleven additional structures for stables and warehouses.⁶ A large open expanse existed north of that main section and was named Miller Field and was used as an airfield before Albrook Airfield, closer to Balboa and Panama City, was constructed (see below).

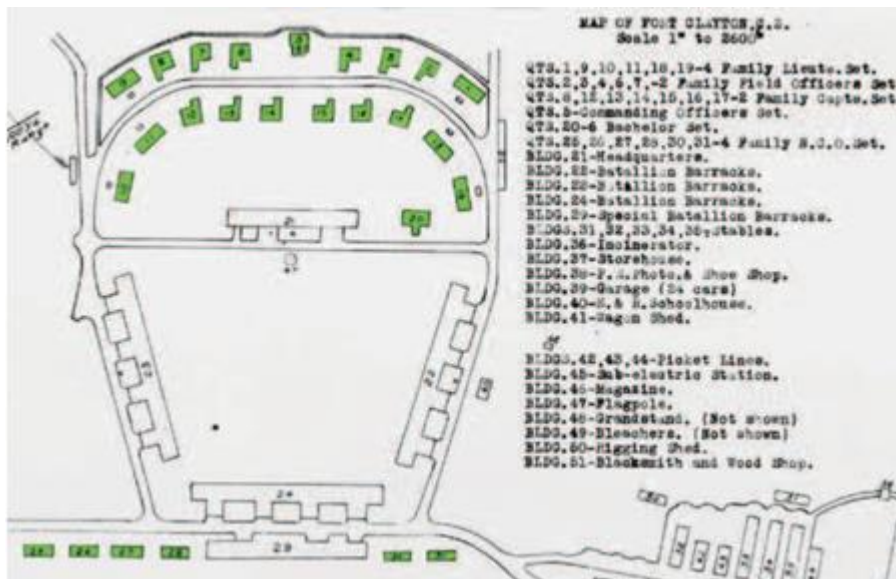
³ *Guarding the Gates: The Story of Fort Clayton - Its Setting, Its Architecture, and Its Role in the History of the Panama Canal* by Susan I Enscoe, Suzanne P Johnson, Julie L Webster, and Gordon L Cohen (ERDC/CERL Monograph 00-01, Construction Engineering Research Laboratory, US Army Engineer Research and Development Center, September 2000): <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA388262.pdf>

⁴ The naming being by way of General Order 91, dated 19 July 1919.

Clayton had been a graduate of the US Military Academy, and had served as a member of a 1915 defence board tasked with formulating plans for defending the Canal. On 31 May 1968, a memorial plaque rededicating the Fort in honour of Colonel Clayton was unveiled on the Canal side of Building 95.

⁵ *Guarding the Gates: The Story of Fort Clayton - Its Setting, Its Architecture, and Its Role in the History of the Panama Canal* by Susan I Enscoe, Suzanne P Johnson, Julie L Webster, and Gordon L Cohen (ERDC/CERL Monograph 00-01, Construction Engineering Research Laboratory, US Army Engineer Research and Development Center, September 2000): <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA388262.pdf>

⁶ https://issuu.com/ciudadelsaber/docs/cok_building_a_legacy_2012



Original plan of Fort Clayton in 1919

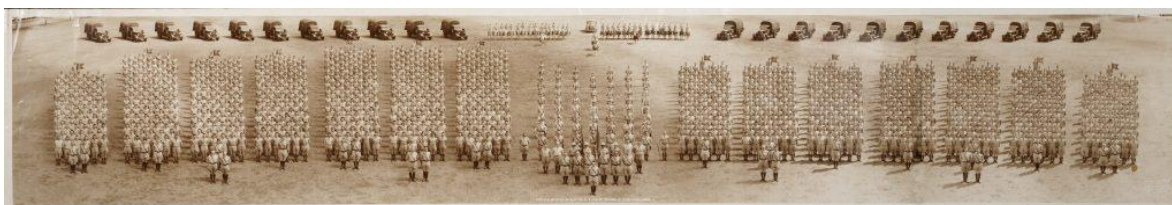


The original Fort Clayton in 1922

The original layout of the base was horseshoe-shaped and strictly axial, in an almost identical design to that employed for Fort Davis built at the same time (located on Gatun Lake, to protect the Gatun Locks at the Atlantic entrance to the Canal, and officially established in December 1919). Instead of being assigned to the Armed Forces, the responsibility for the design and development of the plans went to the Panama Canal's Building Division, which had all the necessary technical personnel. The design of the original Fort – horseshoe-shaped and its neoclassical-inspired buildings – were designed by the renowned architect Samuel M Hitt, who also completed the Canal Administration Building in Balboa and the Gorgas Hospital in Ancon.⁷

⁷ <https://ciudadelsaber.org/en/know-our-history/>

In the original form, three enormous barracks were built around a large trapezoidal open space, known as the Parade Ground. Each had enough space for four infantry companies, with a fourth, “special” barracks that had three floors rather than two. The officers lived in a different section, separated from the troops. At the time, officers were expected to be married and to move to Panama with their families, but the only officer entitled to live with his family in a private, unshared space was the base commander, a colonel. The barracks were all demolished in 1957, when they were replaced by a group of simple duplex houses. The first unit based at Clayton was the 33rd Infantry Regiment, which was based there from 1920 until 1941 (when it redeployed to Trinidad, with later detachments to Suriname). It had been formed in the Canal Zone in 1916, specifically for employment there.⁸ It was later returned to Fort Clayton in February 1946.⁹



The 33rd Infantry Regiment paraded at Fort Clayton on 9 May 1939

MILLER FIELD

In the period of World War 1 and just after, rudimentary landing fields were constructed at several military bases throughout the Canal Zone. The first, and main, airfield in the Canal Zone was France Field, near Colón – with no similar establishment at the Pacific end of the Canal. However, a landing field was provided at Fort Clayton, in the far north-west corner of the base where there would later be the main quadrangle and motor pool area. This field may have been functional as early as 7 March 1919, when the Panama Canal Department (the Army command) asked the Canal Zone authorities to build a temporary aircraft shelter there. However, the landing field was only used for emergencies, however, and aircraft were not normally present.

⁸ War Department General Orders No 22, 30 June 1916. During World War 1, it guarded Gatun Locks, dam and spillway, the Monte Lirio and Mindi Bridges, the Chagres River Bridge at Gamboa, the Pedro Miguel and Miraflores locks, Pier 18 and the dry dock at Balboa. During the period from 1916 to 1920, the regiment was engaged in exploring and charting the jungles of Panama.

⁹ http://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/Fort_Clayton/FC_index.htm For more information on the Regiment, see http://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/Fort_Clayton/33rdinfreg.pdf

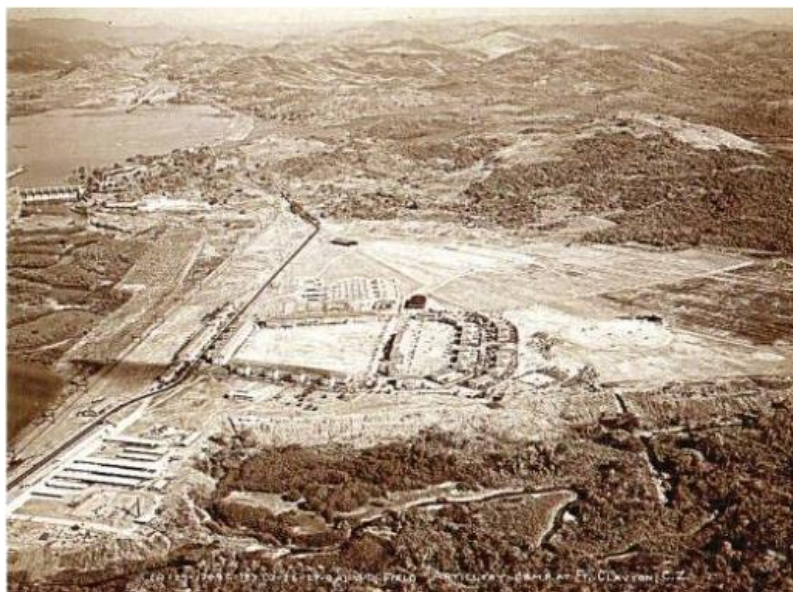
By 1928, the landing field included a US AU-Steel Hangar, a standard hangar design that was used at airfields throughout the US. In January 1929, a barracks and operations office were built.

However, in 1929, the US Congress authorised funds for what became Albrook Field, which was completed in 1931, with what had become known as Miller Field being officially closed on 18 June 1932.

Construction of the 2nd Field Artillery stables at Fort Clayton required the removal of the hangar facility, with some elements relocated to Albrook Field.¹⁰



Clayton Fire Station, built in 1920 as part of Fort Clayton, remains in use today



View of Fort Clayton in 1927

¹⁰ *Guarding the Gates: The Story of Fort Clayton - Its Setting, Its Architecture, and Its Role in the History of the Panama Canal* by Susan I Enscoe, Suzanne P Johnson, Julie L Webster, and Gordon L Cohen (ERDC/CERL Monograph 00-01, Construction Engineering Research Laboratory, US Army Engineer Research and Development Center, September 2000): <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA388262.pdf>

The 1930s

During 1933-34 (and later during World War 2) there was further development of what had already become a large establishment. By the mid-1920s, the physical deterioration of World War 1-era Army cantonments had become serious, but it took almost another decade for funding to be appropriated for remedial work.¹¹ The work in the 1930s was to include residential areas, as well as such things as stables, barracks, and recreational facilities.

The population of Fort Clayton rose from 2,180 (63 officers and 2,117 men) in 1934 to 3,636 (93 officers and 3,543 men) in 1939. By then those units located there included a regiment of the Corps of Engineers, with others from the Field Artillery, the Medical Corps, the offices of the Quartermaster.¹²

World War 1-era "Whippet" light tanks at Miller Field in 1935



In the early 1930s, the 2nd Field Artillery arrived at Fort Clayton and a large all-in-one barracks was built for the unit just inside the main gate. The battalion was equipped with pack 75 mm Mountain Howitzers, with the components all carried by mules. This necessitated a lot of mules so a large series of stables was built, on a site where a motor pool was situated in World War 1. The "mule skimmers" of the Field Artillery would mount up their guns and wend their way up into the hills to the north, towards Pedro Miguel, where they would have live fire. At the outbreak of World War 2, the unit was the only major unit still stationed at Fort Clayton. The mules remained in use until at least 1941.¹³

¹¹ Although Congress in 1926 had enacted Public Law No. 45, which authorised the Secretary of War to close and sell some installations to raise money for necessary new construction.

¹² https://issuu.com/ciudadelsaber/docs/cok_building_a_legacy_2012

¹³ http://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/Fort_Clayton/FC_index.htm



Some of the mules who had Fort Clayton as their home in the 1930s



Aerial view of Fort Clayton in the 1930s

WORLD WAR 2

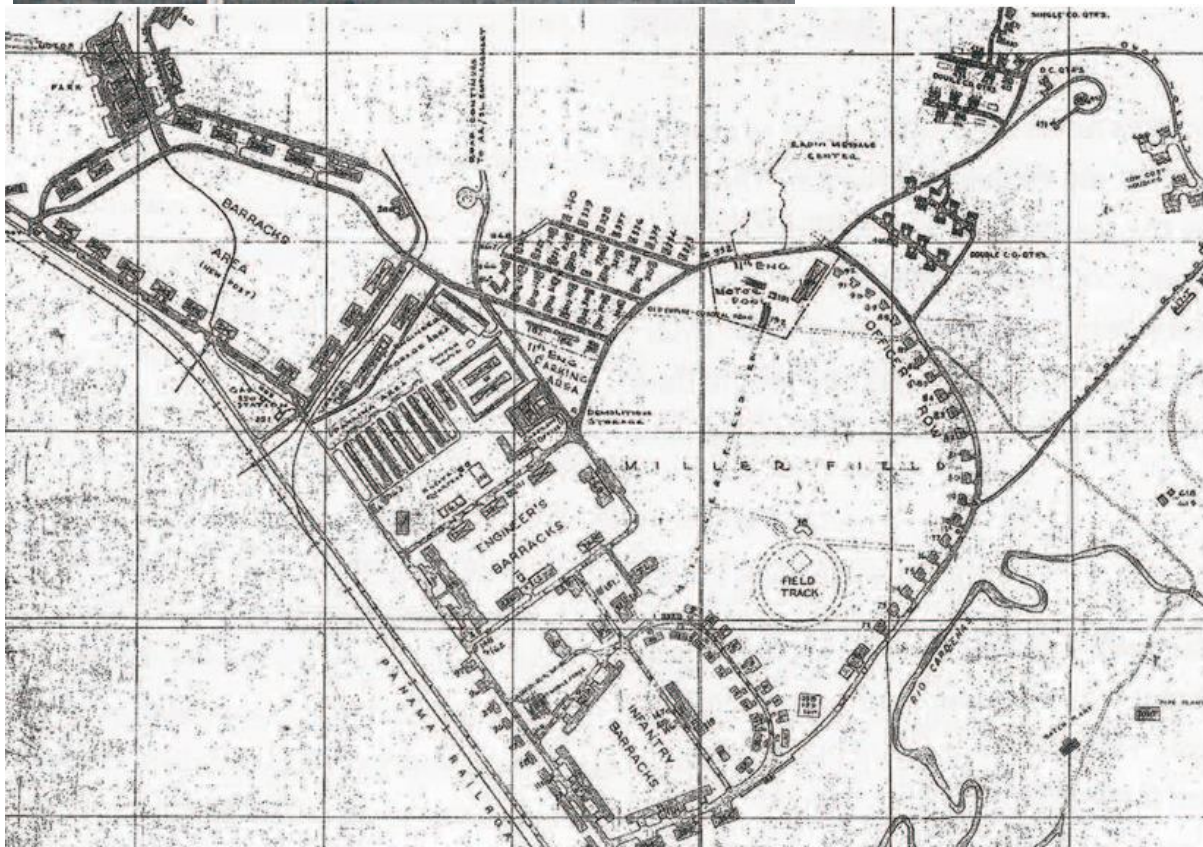
After World War 2 began in 1939, the Canal Zone's military population increased exponentially and it became necessary to enlarge the base. New housing was needed for the troops and their officers. By 1939, Fort Clayton had been developed over almost all of the entire original fill area, so new construction was begun "*on and around a high hill on the other side of the Cardenas River, the hills forming the edges of the river valley being the ones that would be occupied from World War II*".

For a Coast Artillery Corps contingent, a vast expansion was made on the north-west side of the base, beyond an area that had been used until then for warehouses, parking lots, the fire station, and other utilitarian structures. This new area was named, with great originality,

“New Post”. Between 1940 and 1941, the new construction included seventeen barracks of three different types that were designed to house 100, 150 or 200 men. On the opposite end of the base, next to the original complex of 1919-1920, three more barracks were built. On 14 December 1940, a spur from the trans-isthmus railway line to the Fort opened. This was used to bring in supplies, including the for the new construction underway on the base until 1943. The total construction investment in the post, has been estimated at costing more than \$14.6 million by June 1946. However, demobilisation and funding cuts would then essentially end new construction projects at Fort Clayton in the immediate postwar years.



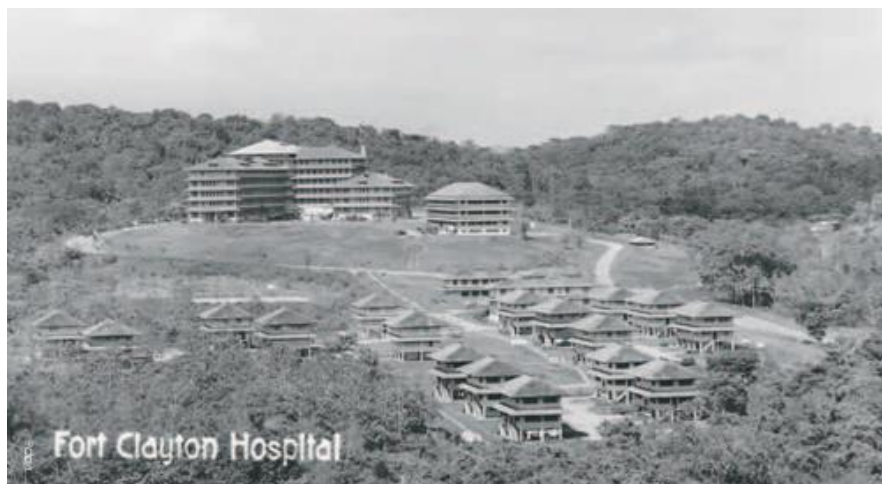
The base's second cinema, built in 1940, as a replica of the 1935 cinema. It was demolished in 1969



1942 map of Fort Clayton

By the end of the war, Fort Clayton was also home to schools for malaria prevention¹⁴, jungle warfare training¹⁵, and field training for Latin American officers and troops.¹⁶

Until 1942, when the last mules were taken away, Fort Clayton also had stables for the animals employed by the 2nd Field Artillery. New facilities for motor transport had begun to be put in place from the 1930s, and the area formerly occupied by the 2nd Field Artillery stables became the motor pool.



Fort Clayton Hospital during World War 2. The building is now the CSS (Social Security) headquarters for Panama¹⁷

Also from 1942, the Mobile Force¹⁸ also had its headquarters at Fort Clayton, being ready for occupancy on 28 February. It would be its headquarters until 1946.

¹⁴ See <https://raytodd.blog/2024/09/08/panama-in-world-war-2-the-war-illness-and-disease-updated/>

¹⁵ The jungle warfare training school would later move to Fort Sherman on the Caribbean coast, and become the US Army's premier jungle training school during the Vietnam War, as the Jungle Operations Training School, remaining in operation until mid-1999.

¹⁶ The Latin American school would eventually become the (infamous) US Army School of the Americas, and relocated to Fort Gulick. It was transferred to Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1984.

¹⁷ https://issuu.com/ciudadelsaber/docs/cok_building_a_legacy_2012

¹⁸ The Army's Mobile Force was activated on 16 February 1940, and the plan was for it to conduct a mobile defence in depth beginning at the beaches and not by the preparation of static defence positions. It consisted of four infantry and an engineer regiment, plus two artillery battalions.



Dummy AA gun and tank at Fort Clayton in 1943



38 houses for NCOs and completed in 1943

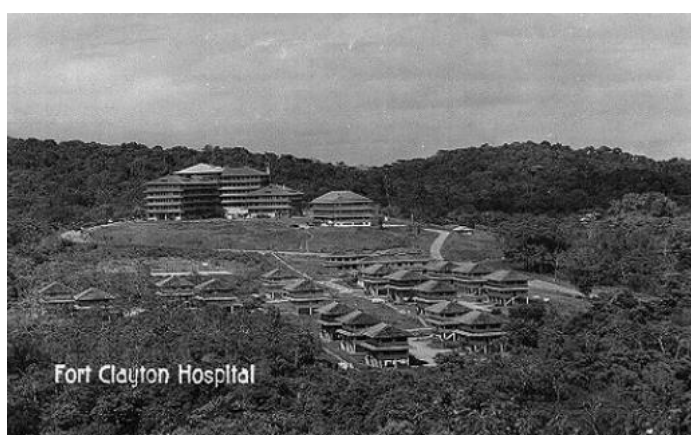
CHIVA CHIVA

Located about a mile north of Fort Clayton, this was a training area used by the troops based at Clayton. It was developed as part of the expansion of defences of the Canal Zone in 1940, being completed on 27 May at a cost of \$27,500. It consisted of around 100 acres (40.5 hectares). It was constructed by the 11th Engineers, assisted by enlisted men based at Clayton, and the Canal's Constructing Quartermaster provided all building materials and heavy equipment required for earthmoving. The Chiva Chiva Firing Range "*provided to serve all units stationed at Fort Clayton, to facilitate the completion of small arms firing*". It had three shed-type firing point shelters, each measuring 20 x 99 feet, with corrugated iron roofs

but no walls or floors. Parallel to the shelters were three target houses built entirely of reinforced concrete.¹⁹

POSTWAR

In 1950 and 1956, the boundaries of the Curundu Military Reservation²⁰ were readjusted, with several parcels of land being allocated to Albrook Air Force Base, which was closer to Balboa. The remaining property was included as part of Fort Clayton, and included the Post of Corozal²¹ and the Curundu Housing Area, which were some way from the established Fort, lying between it and Balboa.



Fort Clayton Hospital, aka Building 519, in a 1940s photograph. It would later become the headquarters of the country's social security (CSS) organisation

Included in the base, was the Fort Clayton Elementary School, which opened in 1963 - a three-story, air-conditioned structure which was formerly used as a barracks for soldiers. The student numbers ranged from a high of 380 students in 1979 to 209 students by January 1990. The pupils were dependents of Army, Department of Defense, and various other military and civilian personnel.²²

¹⁹ *Guarding the Gates: The Story of Fort Clayton - Its Setting, Its Architecture, and Its Role in the History of the Panama Canal* by Susan I Enscoe, Suzanne P Johnson, Julie L Webster, and Gordon L Cohen (ERDC/CERL Monograph 00-01, Construction Engineering Research Laboratory, US Army Engineer Research and Development Center, September 2000): <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA388262.pdf>

²⁰ The Curundu Military Reservation was established in 1919 (though not officially named as such until 1934). It originally encompassed Fort Clayton. Much of Curundu consisted of family and bachelor housing, with command and community support facilities.

²¹ Classified as a sub-installation of Fort Clayton, this area had been used as a settlement by the Isthmian Canal Commission (and original developed for the railroad) until then turned over to the Army in 1911 as construction of the Canal was completed. It was divided into West Corozal and East Corozal. The installation primarily served the Army as a supply depot and maintenance centre: *Guarding the Gates: The Story of Fort Clayton - Its Setting, Its Architecture, and Its Role in the History of the Panama Canal* by Susan I Enscoe, Suzanne P Johnson, Julie L Webster, and Gordon L Cohen (ERDC/CERL Monograph 00-01, Construction Engineering Research Laboratory, US Army Engineer Research and Development Center, September 2000): <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA388262.pdf>

²² <https://aoshs.org/collections/school-histories/na/yy/624/>



*1965 photo of the
base*

What happened to the base had much in common with what happened elsewhere in Army areas of the Canal Zone until its handover to Panama in 1999. In the 1950s, kitchens and bathrooms of the accommodation were redone and louvered windows were installed. Between 1976 and 1978, all the window frames were reduced in size to adapt them to new, smaller, sliding windows. In 1986, the roofs were changed as tiles were replaced with metal sheathing, and air conditioning systems were installed.

In 1968-69, the base saw further construction, taking what became its final shape. This was in large part because, although the military population of the Canal Zone was reduced (from 67,000 at its peak in 1943, to just 6,900 in 1959), more and more soldiers were arriving with their families. In 1961, the number of married personnel had risen to 45%, and it became necessary to modify the huge old barracks, where the troops slept in large dormitory rooms, or replace them with more adequate buildings with multiple individual dwellings. This led to the restructuration and expansion of the fort, a process that would be undertaken in four stages from 1947 through 1979. By 1979, after a series of housing projects, the urban area of the base had more than doubled, with the later expansion projects taking on more of a suburban character.²³

²³ https://issuu.com/ciudadelsaber/docs/cok_building_a_legacy_2012



Some of the houses built in the first postwar housing project in 1948-49, and known as "Hill 2"²⁴

In 1968, SOUTHCOM celebrated its 60th anniversary, and US Army Chief of Staff General William C Westmoreland, commander of US forces in Vietnam, visited the US Army Jungle Operations Training Center at Fort Clayton in September. During the Vietnam War, many US forces trained in Panama before deploying to South-east Asia.²⁵

Postwar, Fort Clayton had become headquarters for Southern Command in 1963²⁶, and was among the very last properties to be transferred to the Republic of Panama, having also served as the senior Army command headquarters in Panama in 1979, which had been reorganised as US Army South in 1986.²⁷ It was turned over to Panama in 1999, with all remaining facilities handed over on 30 November.



²⁴ https://issuu.com/ciudadelsaber/docs/cok_building_a_legacy_2012

²⁵ <https://www.southcom.mil/MEDIA/IMAGERY/igphoto/2003231914/>

²⁶ <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00022175/00001/pageturner#page/37>

²⁷ http://william_h_ormsbee.tripod.com/bases_summ_p01.htm

Panamanian Law Decree No 6 of 1998 had already provided for the transfer of part of Fort Clayton for development of what became the City of Knowledge, with 120 hectares (296.5 acres) transferred in 1999. The 120 hectares would be transferred to the City of Knowledge Foundation, a private entity created in 1995, with a plan to become a technology park with a legal framework that promotes scientific and academic research activities.²⁸

Alongside the offices of companies, and organisations like the UN High Commission for Refugees and the Spanish Embassy, there remained still recognisable buildings created during its US military period²⁹, with houses and barracks and Lake Park, the latter created in 1943 and now a picnic area (with a lake having a notice warning of crocodiles in the lake). Twenty-six houses for officers and NCOs built from 1919 to 1922 survive from the time of the original Fort Clayton all of which have been adapted for office use.



Cuidad del Saber in 2010



The former Fort Clayton cinema, originally built in 1935, now converted into the City of Knowledge Athenaeum, a 700-seat theatre³⁰

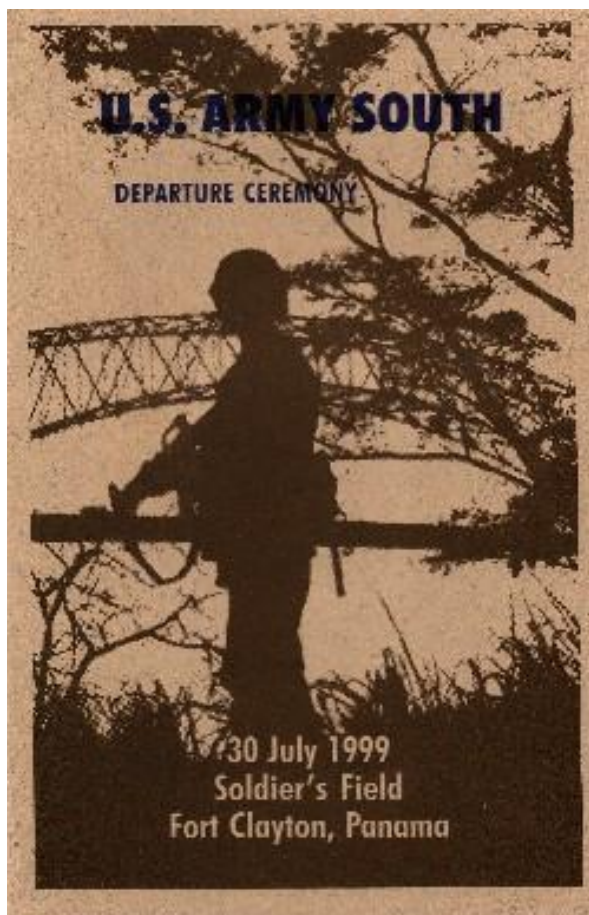
²⁸ <https://www.laestrella.com.pa/panama/nacional/fort-clayton-procesos-cambio-urbano-PILE459512>

²⁹ A style that is called *Bellavistino* in Panama.

³⁰ <https://izi.travel/en/91de-athenaeum/en>

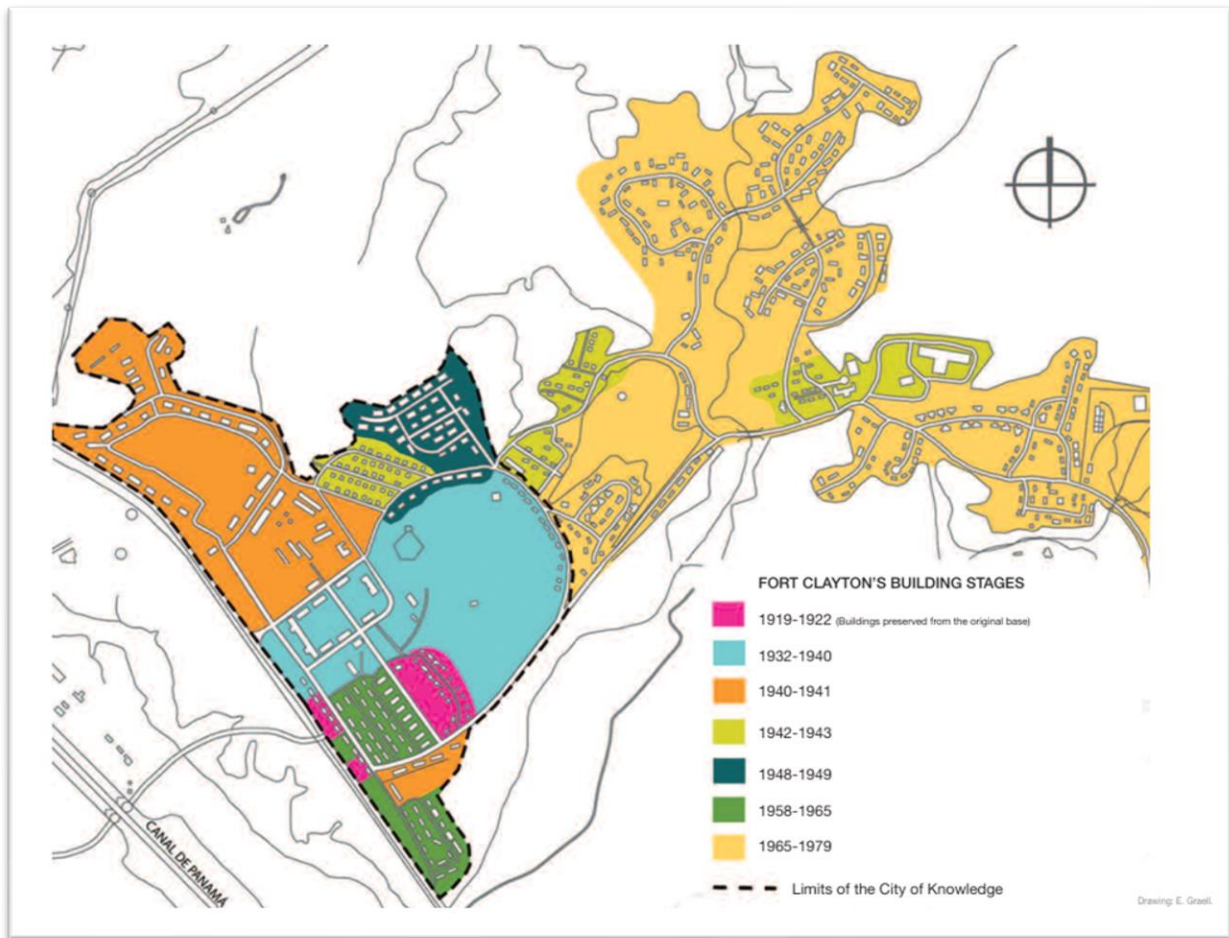


Several buildings have explanatory signs explaining their history



Programme cover for the official closure of Fort Clayton in 1999

It was originally a large, open, rectangular room, with mosquito netting instead of side walls, and no air conditioning (this was added in 1954, when changes were also made to the main facade and the lobby in 1957). At its peak, it had space for 1,090 seats. A second cinema was built in 1940 in the same style. In its new form it has hosted events such as Panama's International Film Festival, the Panama Jazz Festival, and the Prisma Contemporary Dance Festival.



The process that led to the idea of creating the City of Knowledge took several years. The project was originally promoted in 1993 by a group of Panamanian businessmen who had the idea of creating a “*Socratic agora*” within the facilities of the reverted areas, under the name of “University of the Americas”. Originally this was planned for the site of the Panama Canal College. In 1994, the proposal was presented to the Government of Panama, which indicated its support. Subsequently, alongside a higher education entity, other centres for complementary purposes should be established within an international complex, with the name of the “City of Knowledge”. It was felt that the project should be carried out in one of the former US military bases rather than at the Panama Canal College, and at the time, the idea was to take advantage of Albrook Air Force Base, which would soon be transferred to Panama.

In July 1995, the non-profit foundation, *Fundación Ciudad del Saber*, that was to manage the City of Knowledge was created.

Choosing Clayton over Albrook was a recommendation of the Washington-based the Academy for Educational Development (AED) in its *Feasibility Study for the City of Knowledge*, which had been commissioned in 1996, and published in August 1996. It also recommended that the site should form a consortium with already established US and European universities, offering “*facilities for research, a supportive infrastructure and attractive residential areas*”, among other things. The only problem was that Clayton would not be reverting to Panama until three years later, at the end of 1999.

Nevertheless, in September 1997, a plan was ready for the development.³¹ Then, in July 1998, Decree Law No 6 of 1998 saw the Government provide for the transfer of the 120 hectares to the Foundation.

The formal transfer of the base to Panama took place on 30 November 1999, one of the last elements of US military presence in the country to transfer to Panamanian ownership.

On 1 December 1, at a ceremony attended by President Mireya Moscoso, US Ambassador Simon Ferro, the outgoing US Army Commander Colonel Shuman, and other high-ranking Panamanian officials, Colonel Shuman presented President Moscoso a large ceremonial key along with the two flags (US and Panamanian) that had flown jointly the previous day.³²

An early development in 2002 saw the UNICEF Regional Headquarters for Latin America and the Caribbean move into Building 102, a former barracks on the Central Quadrangle. Great care was taken in the adaptation of the building, and only the windows and the attic redone. Originally just a loft, the attic was transformed into a new floor with a well-lighted terrace that was integrated in to the roof’s slant.

New buildings were also constructed during the initial period, including the COPA Airlines’ Training Center.

³¹ *Micro plan de uso de Clayton para la Fundación Ciudad del Saber* (“Micro-Plan for the Use of Clayton for the City of Knowledge”).

³² A video of the handover is available online at <https://reuters.screenocean.com/record/4128>

FORMER NAME	CURRENT NAME
Dwyer Street	Calle Rosa Elena Landecho
Stevens Street	Calle Ricardo Murgas Villamonte
Coiner Street	Calle Jacinto Palacios Cobos
Gerrard Street	Calle Ovidio Saldaña
Winthrop Street	Calle Victor Iglesias
Morse Avenue	Calle Alberto Oriol Tejada
Craig Avenue	Calle José A. Gil
-----	Calle Victor Manuel Garibaldo
Caples Street	Calle Etanislao Orobio William
Muir Avenue	Calle Arnoldo Cano Arosemena
Gaillard Avenue	Calle Vicente Bonilla
Hawkins Avenue	Calle Carlos Renato Lara
Hamilton Place	Calle Renato Lara
Landrich Place	Calle Evelio Lara
Stewart Loop	Calle Gonzalo Crance
Saltzman Place	Calle Alberto Nichols Constance
Boyles Place	Calle Teófilo Belisario de la Torre
Johnson Loop	Calle José del Cid Cobos
Romero Place	Calle Celestino Villarreta
Davis Loop	Calle Ezequiel González Meneses
Pullen Street	Pullen Street
Anderson Street	Anderson Street
Henry Place	Henry Place
Wells Place	Wells Place
Riche Loop	Riche Loop

Chart showing some of the former and current names of streets within the City of Knowledge

Latterly, buildings that followed UNICEF regional headquarters, included the Red Cross, the US Peace Corps, the UN Development Program regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean, the World Food Program, and Plan International. The headquarters of the World Organization of the Scout Movement's InterAmerican Region also relocated there in 2010. Among the members of the academic section were the Balboa Academy, ILISA (a Spanish language school), Isthmus University of architecture, and international programs of Georgia Institute of Technology, McGill University, University of Pennsylvania, Florida State University, Saint Louis University, Iowa State University.

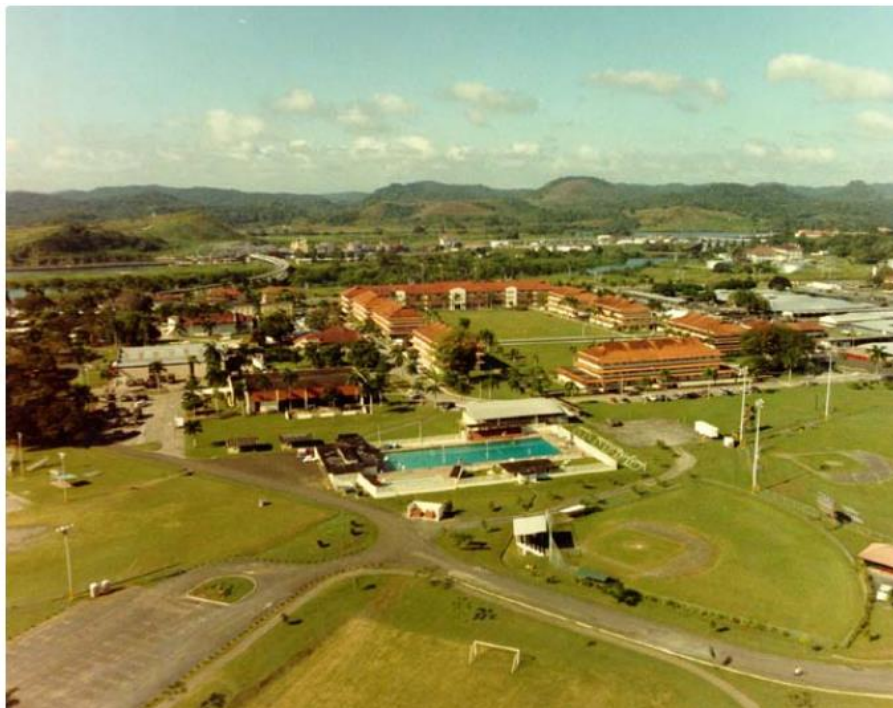
Of the 120-hectare site, 21 hectares were given over to green spaces (including the picnic area and lake with its "beware of the crocodiles" sign), and 22 hectares for sports and recreation (which sees baseball, and even cricket³³, played there). There were over 200 buildings that included institutions and companies specialising in technology and science. There was also a centre with shops and restaurants, with other shops and even a brewery following.³⁴

³³ Played and watched chiefly by Indian and Pakistani ex-pats, so far as could tell when I attended one match.

³⁴ <https://kraemerlaw.com/en/articles/panama-city-of-knowledge-guide/>



Aerial views in 2010



The centre core of the complex remained Building 104, originally a large barracks³⁵, which became the base's Community Services Center in 1961³⁶, then the SOUTHCOM headquarters from 1986³⁷, and now the main administration building. Alongside it is the quadrangle formerly known as Soldier's Field.

³⁵ Having, on the ground floor, dining rooms, day rooms, barber shops, a few offices and the service areas—kitchens, storerooms and refrigeration rooms. The two upper stories were occupied mainly by large dormitories, each of which had sixty beds.

³⁶ With a PX store, post office, library, and classrooms.

³⁷ Being then converted to mainly offices.



Looking to Building 104 across a corner of Soldier's Field

OPERATION JUST CAUSE

In December 1989, the US mounted an invasion of Panama and deposed the ruling dictator, Manuel Noriega, who was arrested by the DEA and taken to Florida to face charges of involvement in drug trafficking and money laundering.

In October 1989, four US military personnel from Fort Clayton had been stopped at a Panama Defense Forces (PDF) checkpoint while on their way for dinner in Panama City. The Pentagon reported that they unarmed, were in a private vehicle and attempted to flee only after their vehicle was surrounded by an angry crowd of civilians and PDF troops. The PDF claimed later that they had been armed and had been on a reconnaissance mission. The PDF opened fire and two of the Americans were hit, one later dying of his wounds. This incident was one of the factors contributing to heightened tension, resulting in President Bush ordering the US invasion in December.

At the time of the invasion, one of the task forces operating within Panama City and its environs would secure Fort Clayton (as well as Quarry Heights and the Gorgas Military

Hospital), and counter Panama Defense Forces.³⁸ The tactical headquarters for Operation *Just Cause* – known as the JTFSO (Forward)³⁹ - was established at Fort Clayton, where an in-country infantry brigade had its headquarters. The chief role of Fort Clayton was in control and support, with no fighting taking place there.

Just before H-hour, three infantry battalions moved out from Fort Clayton through Panama City to seize the *Comandancia* command centre, the Panama Defense Forces base at Fort Amador and to protect the US Embassy.⁴⁰

A few hours after the invasion actually began, Guillermo Endara, who had been the "presumed winner" of the scheduled presidential election earlier in 1989, was sworn in at Fort Clayton. An opponent of dictator Manuel Noriega, he had headed the opposition coalition in the election, only for the results to be annulled, and Endara and his running mates attacked in the streets. He would remain as President until 1994.

Also taken to Clayton were 11 employees of the Smithsonian Institute who had been kidnapped by the PDF (deserted by their captors, they had been found unharmed). After the fighting, the media pool organised by the Department of Defense was taken to Fort Clayton, and then ferried by helicopter to the sites where fighting had taken place.⁴¹

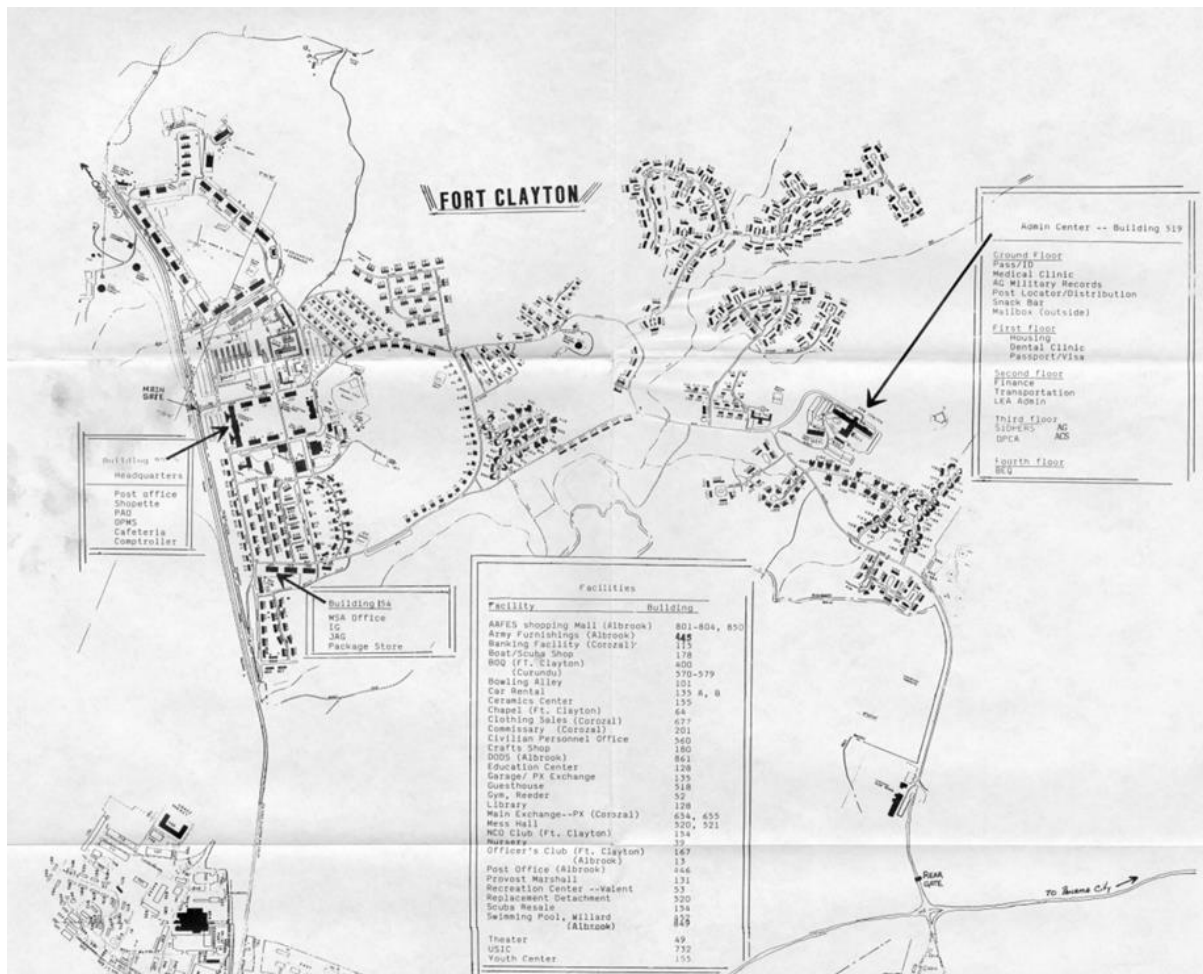
³⁸ https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/History/Monographs/Just_Cause.pdf

³⁹ JTFSO stood for Joint Task Force South.

⁴⁰ <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/PDF/MagazineArchive/Documents/2009/December%202009/1209panama.pdf>

⁴¹ But, to answer media queries, SOUTHCOM had set up a Joint Information Bureau at the Quarry Heights Officers' Club.

https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/History/Monographs/Just_Cause.pdf



Map of Fort Clayton and the surrounding area at the time of Operation Just Cause in 1989⁴²

Ray Todd
Panama City
Republic of Panama
13 September 2024

⁴² https://arsof-history.org/arsof_in_panama/pdf/maps/ft_clayton_and_area.pdf