



ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE COMMITTEE

a sub-committee of Itafa Amalinde Heritage Trust
P O Box 3066, Durban 4000

**old NATAL COMMAND HQ
Rapid Heritage Survey of 16 January 2011**

for

Amafa aKwazulu-Natali and EtheKwini Municipality



1937

Defence Headquarters of the Natal Command

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REFERENCES

The Fly Papers, 1938 -1939

Journal of SA Military History, pp.16-22, 1992

Lord's Ground Military Offices

ADDENDA

Photos:

"WHITE HOUSE" - EXTERIOR
- INTERIOR

HISTORY

CHAPEL + GRAVE

BARRACKS + DRILL HALL

(PHOTOS, unedited, collated on a single CD, available on request)

SITE SURVEY ATTENDANCE REGISTER

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1. INTRODUCTION

Buildings are at their most vulnerable when they are unoccupied or ownership is changing.

A prime example of such vulnerability is the old Defence HQ of the Natal Command or "White House". Located at Battery Beach along the far end of Snell Parade / Oliver Tambo Drive, it was built before 1937 and vacated by the military in 2005. The owners, Ethekewini municipality, wish to lease out the site for new development.

An otherwise substantial structure of robust design, the "White House" has had its interiors mined and stripped of items of value since it was vacated. Holes in the roof to the North Wing threaten further decay. Gutters and downpipes are blocked with vegetation, window glass is broken with frames swinging in the wind, and birds roost in the interior.

Those parts of the exterior, particularly the fine entrance facade facing the ocean, which are in full view of the public gaze, are generally intact. The extensive grounds to the rear, with established site vegetation and high perimeter walling, offers no such defence for an unoccupied building. Security guards at the front gates offer some defence.

The Architectural Heritage Committee (AHC), a sub-committee of the Itafa Amalinde Heritage Trust, has initiated this Report on the "White House" with the co-operation of Amafa and the Strategic Projects Unit of Ethekewini Municipality. It is an unsolicited report with no proprietary claims.

Our intention is to compile a simple record of our observations of a specific place at a specific time, - with an assortment of supplementary documentation of the history of the site. The AHC hopes this can be used as an aid to informed decision making by the authorities and Interested & Affected parties. The Report is **not** intended as a substitute for more substantial reports, such as Historical Assessments or Statements of Significance, which the AHC hopes will be professionally undertaken for this site in the immediate future.

It is the express purpose of the AHC that sites and structures of heritage significance be cared for and protected for future benefit. By introducing this report into the public domain, the AHC hopes to:

- avoid instance of demolition-by-neglect, and
- support inclusive and participatory governance of our built heritage.

2. METHODOLOGY

This Report is the result of a Visual Survey conducted by ± 20 people from the AHC and the "lay-"public on the morning of Sunday, 16 January 2011.

Access to the site was jointly arranged by Amafa (as Provincial Heritage Authority) and the Ethekwini Municipality Strategic Projects Unit (as owners of the site). All participants in the Survey are listed at the end of this Report.

The Survey consists of notes and photos taken on a systematic walk-through the building, room by room. There were four or five groups of 3 to 4 people, with all groups surveying all areas for purposes of cross-referencing and checking observations. Documentary records which are included in the Report (see ADDENDUM - HISTORY for images) are intended only as a supplement to physical observation.

Emphasis in the Survey was on the interior features as access to this area is presently restricted (see ADDENDUM - INTERIOR for photos). The exterior of the building, which for the most part is publically visible, was photographed without notes being taken (see ADDENDUM - EXTERIOR). The Survey was purposely restricted to a single 2-hour session.

The Purpose of the Survey is:

1. to record conservation worthy features on the Site,
2. to note any potential historical significance for Site,
3. to comment on the physical state of Site,
4. to highlight potential threats to Site,
5. to assist informed decision making on the future of the Site.

The Survey was limited to the "White House and adjoining boundary walls, and does not refer to the barrack grounds, chapel or drill hall. A selection of Photos of these structures is included (see ADDENDUM - CHAPEL + GRAVE, and ADDENDUM - DRILL HALL + BARRACKS for photos).

3. SURVEY NOTES

An Entrance Portico with 4 monumental order Doric columns marks the central entrance to two more or less similar double-storey north and south wings. The composition of the front elevation is symmetrical in a classic revival style typical of the early 1930's. A single storey Entrance Court behind the portico has double steel gates which are not original. Above the entry is a decorative plaster relief (frieze), about 4m x 2m, in good condition. The plastered ex-RSA coat-of-arms, about 1m x 1m, is located on this central axis at the topmost roof parapet (see ADDENDUM 2.EXTERIOR photos).

This Symmetrical composition of the street facade is reinforced by the blank single-storey perimeter walls, (penetrated by two service gates) extending on either side of the formal entrance. The walls return a short distance around the corners of the site, and are vertically aligned with the window heights of the "White House".

North + South Wings

Ground floor + First floor wings are both arranged around central courtyards, north and south: the north courtyard has been roofed in between the ground and first floor with sub-standard building material. The intact south wing courtyard reveals a tall, narrow proportion with good natural lighting. Residential accommodation on the top floor overlooks the ground floor offices around these courtyards.

Both courtyards have double-story height face brick columns with brick capping details and the shaped eaves timbers to the courtyards are notable (see ADDENDUM 23. INTERIOR photos).

Central Entrance Court to wings

Both wings have a stepped entry with noteworthy matching double doors in solid timber, studded, unpainted, apparently original. They have decorative fanlights with lantern details (see ADDENDUM 23. INTERIOR photos). The foyer on the north wing has a utility concrete staircase on the west side with a solid reasonably intact plastered brick balustrade. The terrazzo floors are original.

Dining room, bar and kitchen

All the dining room and bar area windows, most likely teak, are in good condition. The dining room is in 2 sections, with sliding folding doors between in good condition. The floor is carpeted, not original – the floor underneath could not be seen. The bar counter might be a replacement. Notable items are the HW (teak) double doors - with full height glazed lights and distinctive curvilinear mullions. Skirting, dado, timber wainscot panelling, picture rail, and cornice all appear original items, as do the receiving hatch details (see ADDENDUM 3. INTERIOR photos). Water damage to ceilings and walls is noted. The kitchen beyond the dining room is commodious and well-zoned but dilapidated. The doors are original. Beyond and outside are the toilets for the staff: a one storey building.

Residential accommodation

Above the public rooms is the residential accommodation, with perimeter gallery looking down into courtyards (covered in the case of the north wing). The rooms are in a reasonable condition: they have high softboard sheet ceilings with HW skirtings, picture rails, tall door frames and fanlights mostly intact. Light fittings have been removed. All doors are functional, though few still have their handles. Floors are carpeted, but appear to be a later installation; washbasins are missing with only wall brackets remaining. Communal toilets / ablutions are to be found on the south side; wall tiling is in good condition, but all fittings have been stripped away. Doors to the rooms in the south wing are painted. The plasterwork is in good condition. In the south wing, the ensuite room over the Entry Court is not original. There is an in-situ terrazzo dado to the first floor foyer to the top of the un-noteworthy stairs.

Roofing

Rooms to both wings are monopitches behind parapet walls, falling inwards to the courtyards. The sheeting is asbestos fibre-cement "Big Six" profile. Around the outside of the building, attractive "Spanish" profile clay tiles are used as coping to wall parapets - an attribute of the distinctive local "Berea-style" favoured in the 1920's - 1930's. Water damage to the interiors - to ceilings and at high levels to walls in the north wing has already been noted. Rainwater goods to the exterior are mostly of cast iron which adds to the quality of the facades - those in the courtyards are asbestos fibre-cement.

The central tower was truncated to its current height early in the life of the building with the outbreak of World War 2 and concerns over enemy U-boat sightings (see COVER for image, this Report)

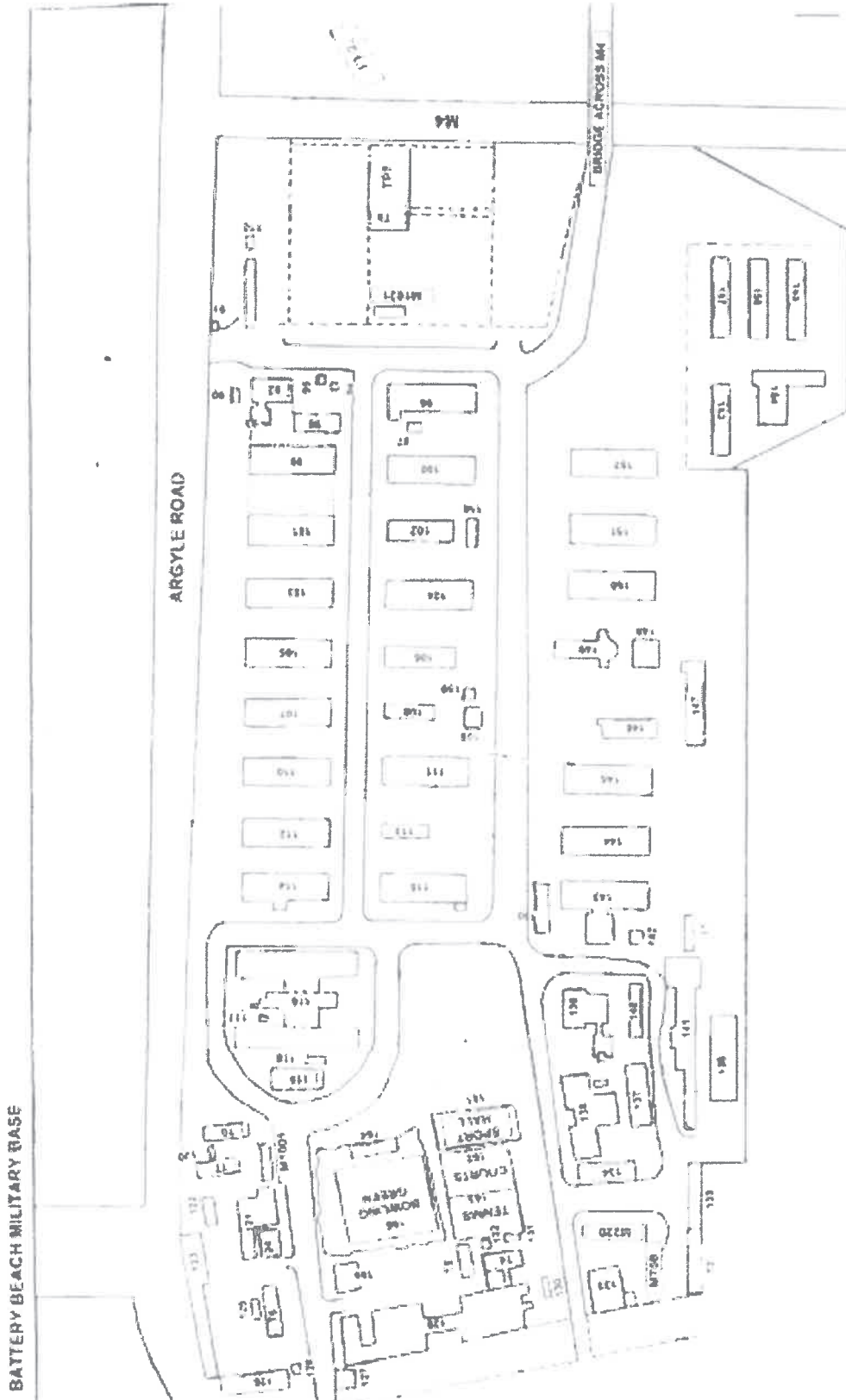
Externally the facebrick, plaster and timberwork are in good condition and restorable.

SITE SURVEY ATTENDANCE LIST

BHIKHA, Prakash	AMAFA -BEC (coastal), urban planner
DAVIES, Donald	DADS (Durban Art Deco Society), civil engineer, Group-5 Construction
DEVEREUX, Ros	AMAFA, Built Environment section
FRESCURA, Prof. Franco	itafaAHC, Architect
FRESCURA, Lesley	member of public
GILLESPIE, Monique	itafaAHC, Architect
HUGHES, David	SANS (SA National Society), Trustee of Itafa Amalinde Heritage Trust
KERR, Carolyn	itafaAHC, Ethekwini Municipality (MILE Corp Policy Unit)
LABUSCHAGNE, Helen	itafaAHC, Friends of Architectural Heritage
LAING, Prof. Mike + partner	prof. Emeritus (Organic Chemistry, UKZN), military historian
BUCHAN, Doctor John	military historian (aircraft) + member of public
NAPIER, Lindsay	itafaAHC, Architect, Amafa BEC (coastal)
SEIRLIS, Joan + sister	Amafa-BEC (coastal), Architect
WHITE, Kirk	itafaAHC, Architect
ANDREWS, Mike	Special Projects Unit, Ethekwini Municipality
HAIDEN, Lauren	Michael Todd Architects

Apologies:

Robert Brusse, Rodney Harber, Isaac Levy, Pierre Venter, Jean Powell.



S.A.N.D.F.

BLOCK PLAN of BATTERY BEACH MILITARY BASE

contemporary 2005?

MILITARY SECURITY



- MILITARY SECURITY IS YOUR SURVIVAL. BREATHE IT
DREAM IT AND LIVE IT
- DEMAND IT. IMPLEMENT IT. IT IS YOUR RIGHT AND
OBLIGATION
- DID YOU PARTICIPATE BY TURNING A BLIND EYE? YOU ARE
GUILTY. LIVES AND PROPERTY HAS BEEN LOST
- EXPOSE MILITARY SECURITY BREACHES. TALK ABOUT IT
AND REPORT IT
- SECURITY BREACHES IN OUR COMMUNITIES, OFFICES,
DUTY ROOM AND GUARD POST
- REPORT MILITARY SECURITY BREACHES TO YOUR FRIEND,
OC, MPA, SAPS AND MILITARY SECURITY OFFICER. WHO
WAS INVOLVED? WHERE AND WHAT THEREAFTER.
- TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE. DO NOT DELAY. REPORT CRIME
IMMEDIATELY
- YOUR ACTION IS A BLOW AGAINST CRIME.
- REMEMBER EVERY SECOND, MINUTE, HOUR, DAY COUNTS
SPEND YOUR TIME PREVENTING LOSS OF LIVES AND
PROPERTY.
- WHAT DID YOU DO TODAY?
- MILITARY SECURITY IS A 24 HOURS RESPONSIBILITY!

S.A.N.D.F.

POSTER IN BARRACKS

- MILITARY SECURITY

contemporary 2005?

BATTERY BEACH BASE

GENERAL SUPPORT BASE DURBAN

Oct-01

OFFICER ON DUTY				GUARD COMMANDER				DUTY DRIVER					
DATE	TIME	FORCE NO	RANK	NAME	FORCE NO	RANK	NAME	FORCE NO	RANK	NAME	FORCE NO	RANK	NAME
1/10/01		97713070PT	CAPT	M PILLAY	93747530PT	LCPL	M TEMBE	87759104PT	PTE	T P BUTHELEZI			
2/10/01		98703463PT	SGT	MATHAMALO	93747530PT	LCPL	M TEMBE	87759104PT	PTE	K G DEBEKHELU			
3/10/01		80843190PT	WO2	A GOPEY	93747530PT	LCPL	M TEMBE	87759104PT	PTE	S S NDLAWANA			
4/10/01		80178783PT	WO2	K V D MURRI	93747530PT	LCPL	M TEMBE	87759104PT	PTE	P P MATHA			
5/10/01		87030998PT	CPT	R C PILLAY	93747530PT	LCPL	M TEMBE	87759104PT	PTE	J P XULU			
6/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	84209840PT	CAPT	W E BROWN	93747530PT	LCPL	M TEMBE	87759104PT	PTE	J P XULU			
7/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	84030270PT	PO	M CHINNASAMY	93747530PT	LCPL	M TEMBE	87759104PT	PTE	J P XULU			
8/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	98025901PT	CAPT	AGGOZO	93747530PT	LCPL	M TEMBE	87759104PT	PTE	J P XULU			
9/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	78140008PT	WO1	V PERUMAI	93747530PT	LCPL	M TEMBE	87759104PT	PTE	J P XULU			
10/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	90397688PT	SGT	R SATHIYAN	93747530PT	LCPL	M TEMBE	87759104PT	PTE	J P XULU			
11/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	86714089PT	SGT	MATHISEN	92884760PT	LCPL	W Z B NDLUVO	83746364PT	RFN	M J MTHEMBU			
12/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	82726886PT	SGT	ACUBE	92884760PT	LCPL	W Z B NDLUVO	80736425PT	PTE	M M MABASO			
13/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	84031046PT	WO2	P M JEFFERIES	92884760PT	LCPL	W Z B NDLUVO	90715048PT	LCPL	S S DUMA			
14/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	95082508PT	SGT	L KRISHNA	92884760PT	LCPL	W Z B NDLUVO	90715048PT	LCPL	S S DUMA			
15/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	91030270PT	PO	V SOSIBO	92884760PT	LCPL	W Z B NDLUVO	90715048PT	LCPL	S S DUMA			
16/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	91751941PT	MAJ	R D KHAMAL	92884760PT	LCPL	W Z B NDLUVO	90715048PT	LCPL	S S DUMA			
17/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	84031046PT	WO2	R VARADAN	92884760PT	LCPL	W Z B NDLUVO	90715048PT	LCPL	S S DUMA			
18/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	78293588PT	WO1	BOSSMAN	92884760PT	LCPL	W Z B NDLUVO	90715048PT	LCPL	S S DUMA			
19/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	83719534PT	WO2	V R CHAMBER	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
20/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	94776083PT	LT	M T HENE	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
21/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	93713873PT	MAJ	S L NKABANA	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
22/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	88781002PT	SSGT	H VISPER	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
23/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	92003037PT	CAPT	H C GOETZEL	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
24/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	90462454PT	SGT	J C DRUNDLINGH	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
25/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	82001991PT	MAJ	R B GWARD	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
26/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	80730342PT	SGT	GAM	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
27/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	94675440PT	LT	ZIGURU	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
28/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	94996735PT	SGT	MAPHUMULO	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
29/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	77141765PT	MAJ	C RASHAMAN	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
30/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	96233531PT	SGT	H DGF'S	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
31/10/01	08:00 - 18:00	95462251PT	SGT	MASALA	93747530PT	LCPL	R N NGUBANE	89736912PT	CPL	S S DUMA			
1/11/01	08:00 - 18:00	94681346PT	SSGT	F R MCHURU	90708157PT	CPL	R A NYMAN	90715048PT	LCPL	S S DUMA			
2/11/01	08:00 - 18:00	87030722PT	SGT	L NAIDOO	90718297PT	CPL	A N ZULU	90715048PT	LCPL	S S DUMA			
3/11/01	08:00 - 18:00	94873809PT	LT	NTEIHA	90718297PT	CPL	A N ZULU	90715048PT	LCPL	S S DUMA			
4/11/01	08:00 - 18:00	70800414PT	WO2	SHINZA	90718297PT	CPL	A N ZULU	90715048PT	LCPL	S S DUMA			
5/11/01	08:00 - 18:00	84445378PT	WO2	MANTIZ	92684760PT	LCPL	W Z B NDLUVO	89736912PT	RFN	J S BAVOJO			
6/11/01	08:00 - 18:00	92725474PT	SGT	D SWART	92684760PT	LCPL	W Z B NDLUVO	89736912PT	RFN	M M MABASO			
7/11/01	08:00 - 18:00	83438261PT	MAJ	R S NISAR TH	92684760PT	LCPL	W Z B NDLUVO	89736912PT	PTE	K G DEBEKHELU			
8/11/01	08:00 - 18:00	83438261PT	MAJ	R S NISAR TH	92684760PT	LCPL	W Z B NDLUVO	89736912PT	PTE	T P BUTHELEZI			

S.A.N.D.F.

ROSTER IN OFFICE - GUARD DUTIES

contemporary 2005?

THE PLACE OF NATAL COMMAND IN THE HISTORY OF WORLD SCIENCE

by
W Bergh, W Smith, W Botha, and M Laing

Natal Command important in the history of science? Why should this be? it may be asked. The ensuing account will provide the answer.

Portuguese, English and French, which offered a reward of £100 for a live coelacanth.¹ (At that time £100 was an enormous sum, equivalent to a year's salary for most people in Africa!)



Figure 1

On 22 December 1938 a strange blue fish was taken by a trawler off East London. On returning to harbour its skipper, Hendrik Goosen, contacted Miss Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, curator of the East London Museum, who came down to the harbour to examine it.² She immediately sensed that something about that fish was unusual and wrote a brief note, including a sketch of the fish, to Dr J. L. B. Smith of Rhodes University in nearby Grahamstown, asking for him to help identify it.

J.L.B. as Dr Smith was known, was a lecturer in organic chemistry at the university but was also an acknowledged expert on the fishes of the Southern African seas. Unfortunately he was on holiday at Knysna at the time, over 500 km away, and the letter only reached him on 5 January 1939, eleven days later!³ There followed a frantic series of letters and telegrams between Knysna and East London,⁴ but it was only on 16 February 1939, after being delayed by rain and impassable muddy roads, that J.L.B. finally arrived at the East London Museum to look at the specimen. On seeing it he said: "that first sight hit me like a white-hot blast and made me feel shaky and queer, my body tingled, I stood as if struck by stone."⁵ He had identified the first living coelacanth ever known to mankind. Alive! A fish that was supposed to have become extinct 200 million years ago. Fate had tapped him on the shoulder and he had to listen.

Then began J. L. B. Smith's passion phase. For four years he systematically searched the coasts of South and East Africa for further specimens. Finding a second live coelacanth became an obsession. In 1945 he discovered a new distribution hundreds of seafish in

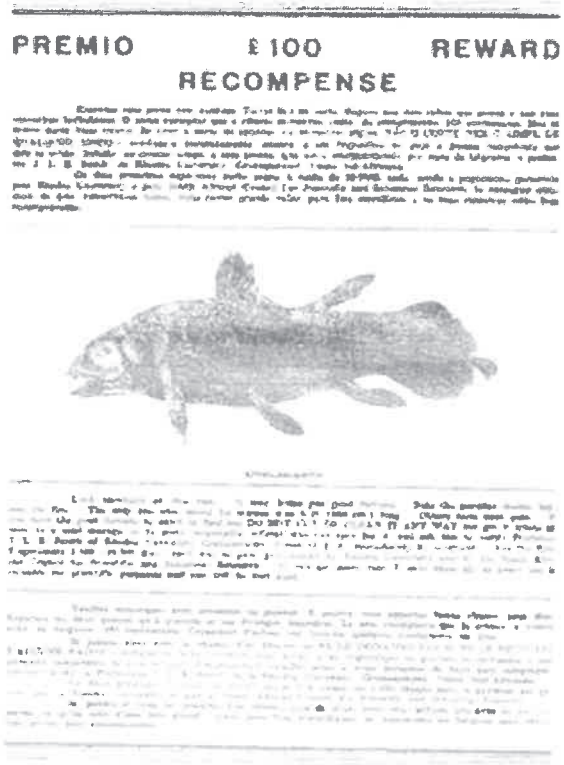
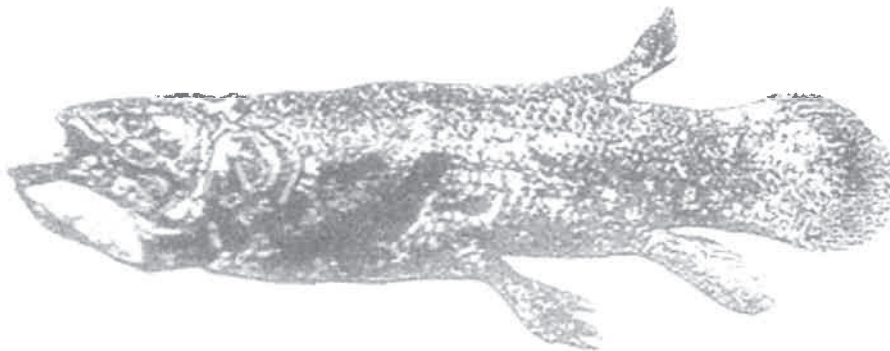


Figure 2

Then it came – a telegram from out of the blue!⁶ It was midday Christmas Eve, 21 December 1952, and J.L.B. and his wife were passengers on the *Debonair* Lamb that had just docked in Durban Harbour. The ship was en route to East London from Mombasa where the Smalls had spent five months collecting specimens for the newly Department of Ichthyology in Grahamstown. The message came from Captain Eric Hunt, master of a schooner that plied the East African coast. J.L.B. had met him in Zanzibar in September 1952, and Captain Hunt had agreed to distribute the marlin on the coast of the Islands. The message, it so happened, read: "Have I the FISH SPECIMEN COELACANTH IN FISH STORE?"



This plaque commemorates
Professor J.L.B. Smith who stayed
the night of 29 December 1952 in
Room 47 of this Headquarters Building
with the Coelacanth *Malania anjouanae*,
after they had been flown from the
island of Pamanzi in the Comores
by S.A.A.F. Dakota 6832.

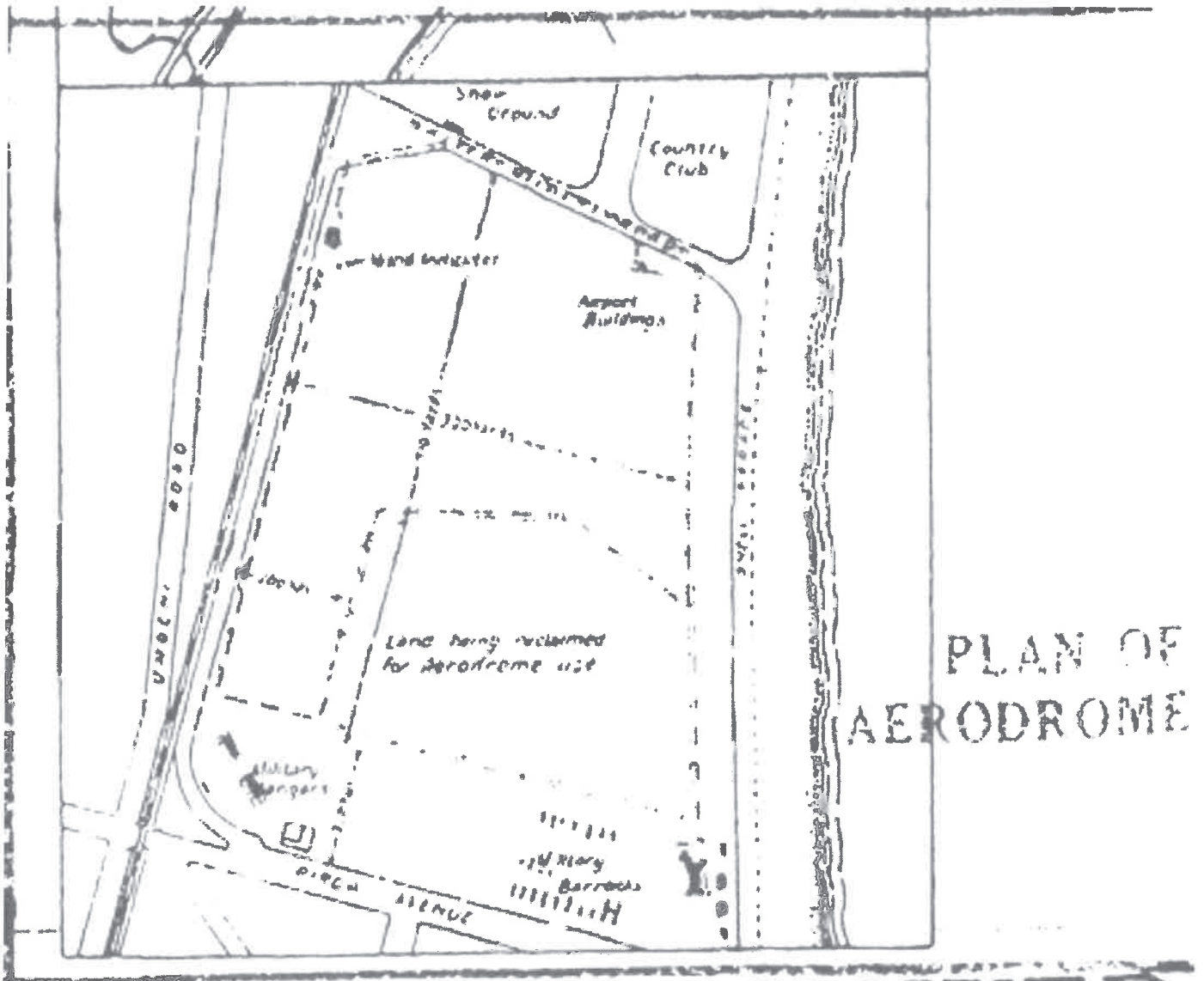


LOCAL HISTORY

FETCHING THE COELOCANTH in 1952

Commemorative Plaque, now removed, located on left wall of Canteen Entrance.

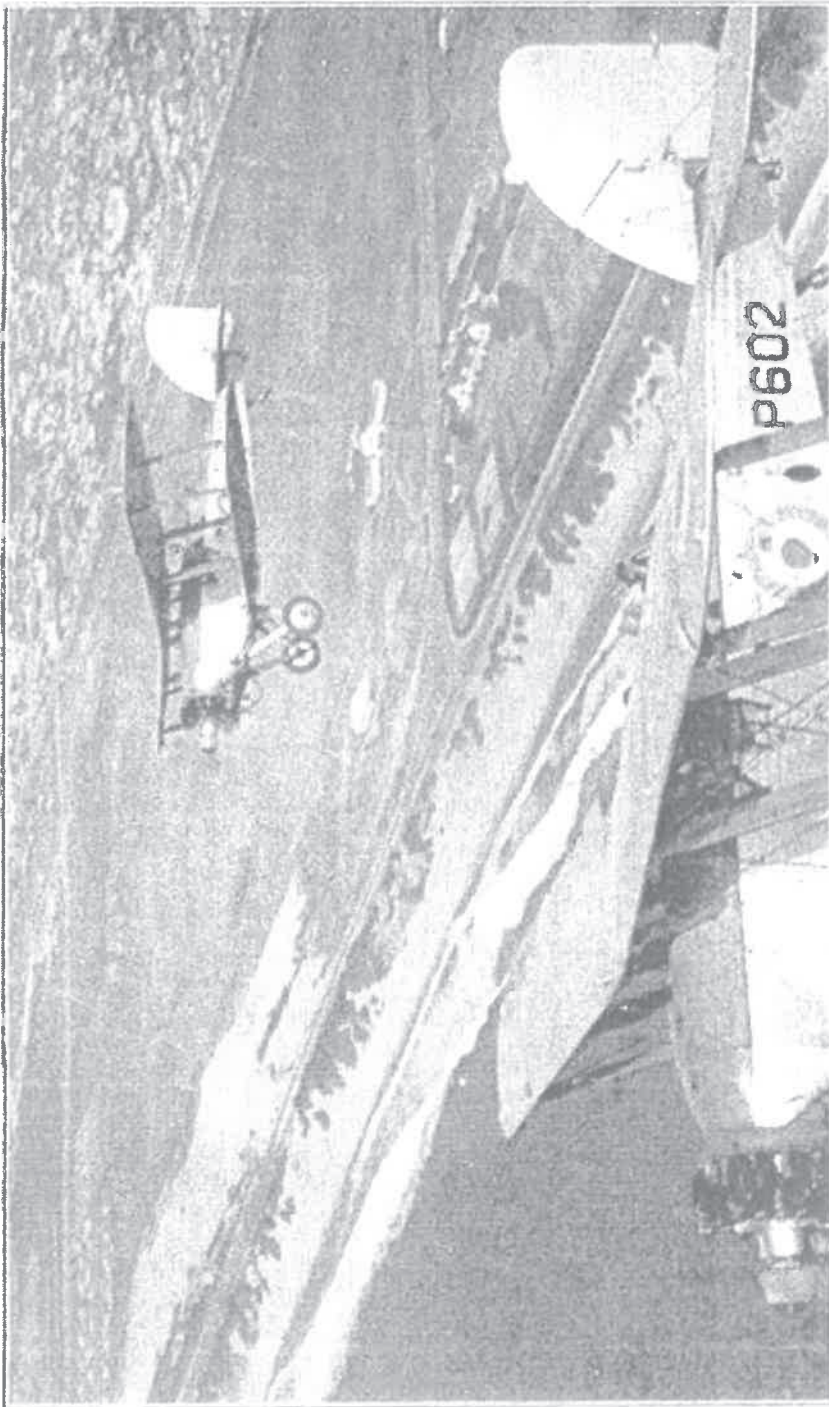
Article, Journal of SA Military History, 1992



HISTORICAL - PLAN OF STAMFORD HILL AERODROME

with Natal Command at bottom right,

The FLY PAPER, p42, vol. 2.8 November 1938



WITH THE NATAL AIR TRAINING SQUADRON.—In Durban as in several other centres, training squadrons of the South African Air Force are extremely busy just now. Above, two Wapiti general-purpose aircraft can be seen flying out to sea. The wide expanse in the background is Stamford Hill aerodrome, with the air station building clearly visible on the near side. (Photo by "The Fly Paper.")

HISTORICAL - THE NATAL AIR TRAINING SQUADRON

bi-planes fly over Aerodrome;

with Natal Command JUST cut out of picture at bottom left corner!

THE FLYPAPER, p26, vol. 3.2 May1939.

ADDENDUM - building exterior



SNELL PARADE, EAST ELEVATION (Front)

January 2011

Stucco plaster high-relief ex-RSA coat-of-arms to entrance pediment;

Spanish-profile, triple course clay tiled parapet coping;

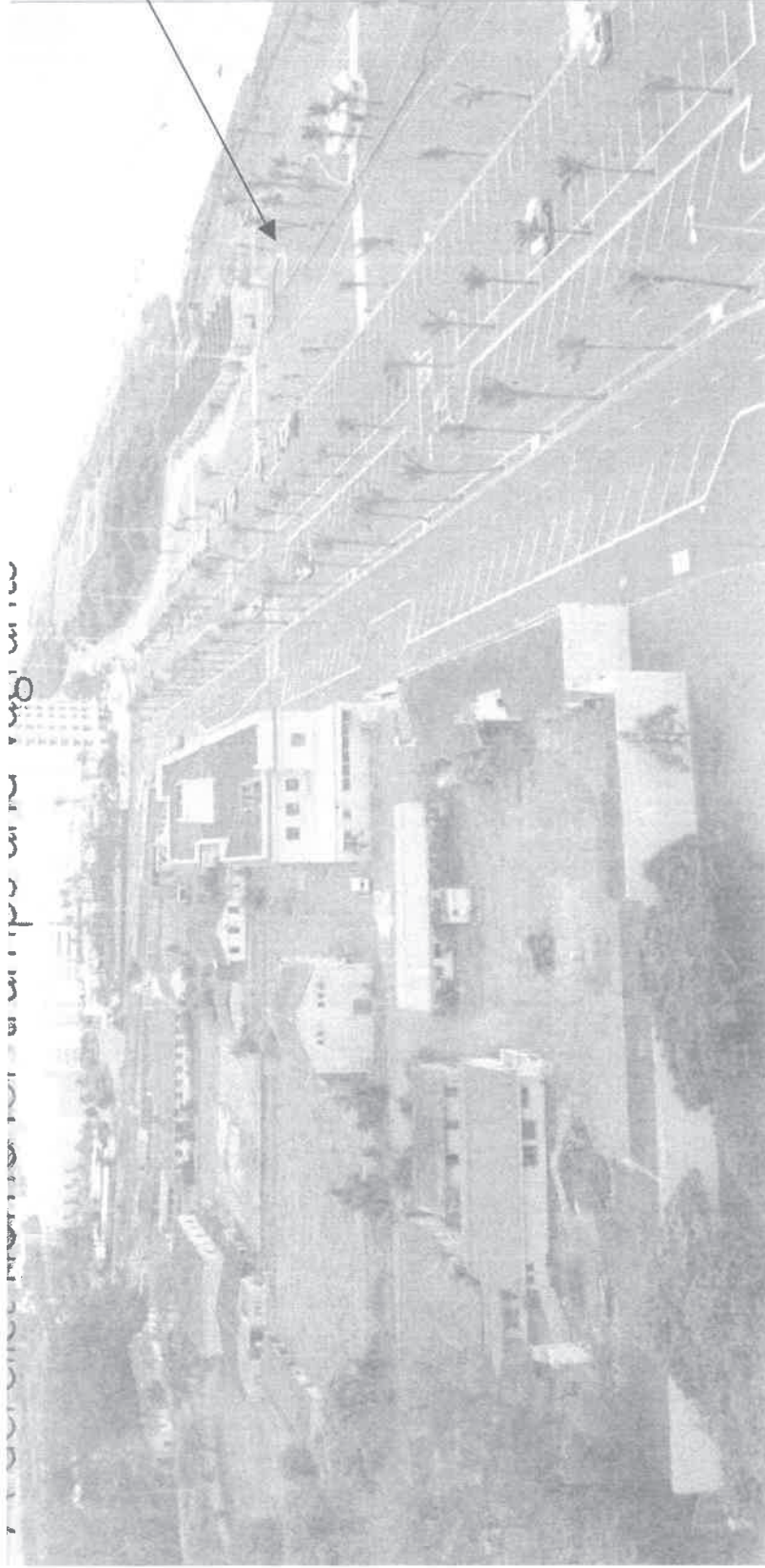
Portico with monumental order, plastered Doric columns;

Stucco plaster bas-relief frieze of "old Natal wildebeest", aeroplanes, lighthouse, and ocean liner;

Rusticated plaster corners (Quoins), full height, to portico ends; Teak frame quarter-pane casement windows above, 6-pane casements below;

Paired Flagposts + plinths to sidewalk, removed to Lord's Military ground in 2010.

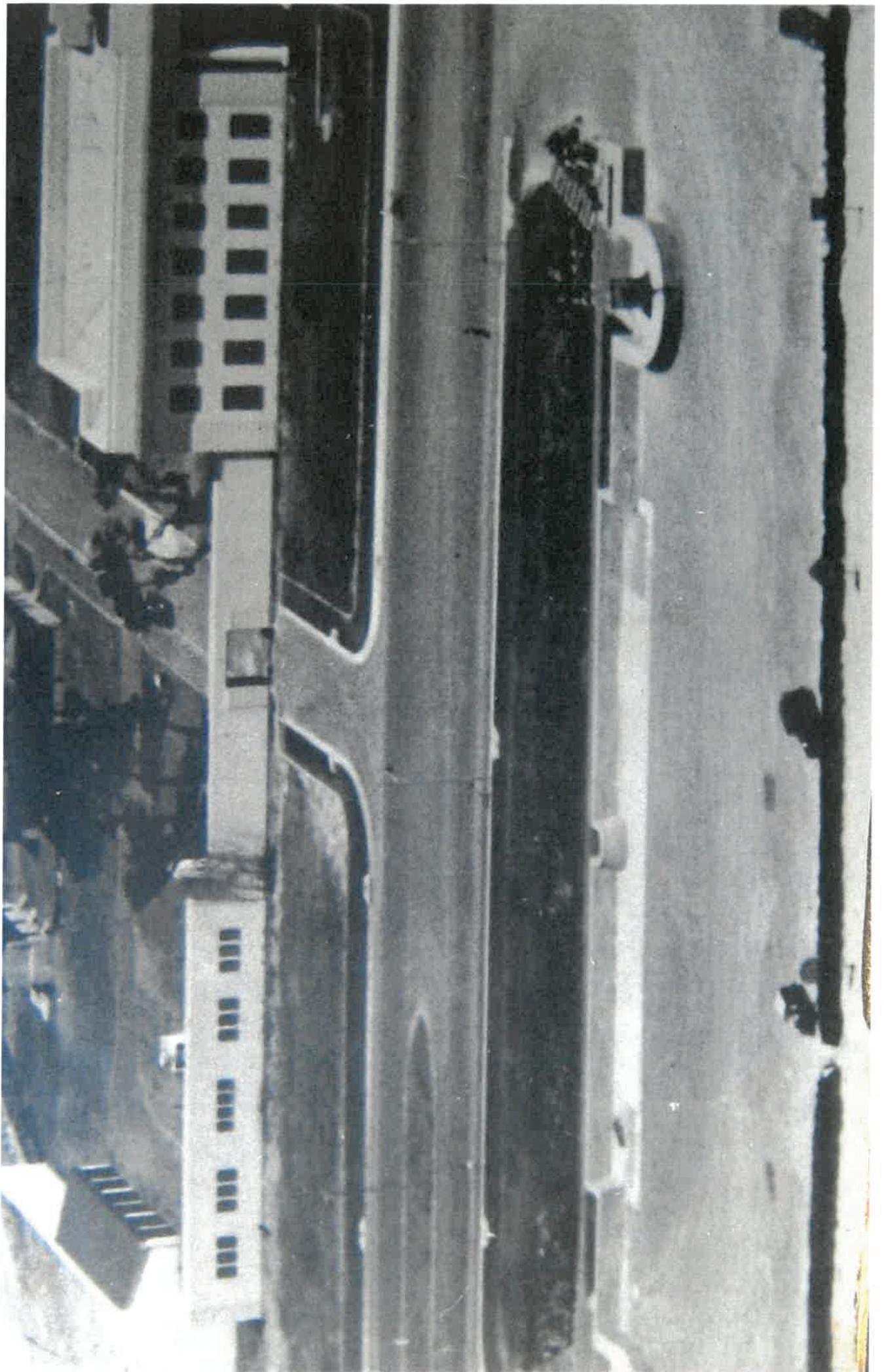
ADDENDUM - building exterior



SNELL PARADE, birds-eye view from south

January 2011

Truncated tower to main roof c.1939; Asbestos fibre-cement roof sheets to courtyard; Perimeter wall intact, with lean-to structure; Gun-battery emplacement, remnant, seen as half-circle kerb line only to southern end of bathing club house; Twin gun-battery emplacement no longer visible at mid-right edge of photo (see arrows)



TOWER

ADDENDUM - building exterior



WEST ELEVATION, barrack side

Invasive vegetation to balcony and rain pipes,
Truncated Tower seen above entrance.

January 2011

ADDENDUM - building exterior



FLAGPOSTS,
removed

original
YARD GATE

SNELL PARADE, bird's-eye view from North

Perimeter wall with "Casino-end" return intact;

Position of original paired Flagpoles + plinths, now removed, seen mid-left of photo;

Original Yard gate to Northern Entrance intact.

January 2011



SNELL PARADE, FRIEZE TO PORTICO

Stucco plaster bas-relief frieze of "old Natal wildebeest", aeroplanes, lighthouse, cityscape, and ocean liner;

Circular Electrical wallbox, exposed, seen at bottom.

January 2011



SNELL PARADE, COAT OF ARMS

January 2011

Stucco plaster high-relief ex-RSA coat-of-arms to entrance pediment;
Spanish-profile, triple course, clay tiled parapet coping.

ADDENDUM - building exterior



CAST IRON DOWNPIPE, 1937 to hopper+head, with vegetation.

January 2011



EAVES, SCALLOPED ENDS to Asbestos Fibre- cement gutters.



ENTRANCE COURT

Teak batten double-doors, decorative "Batavian-style" studding, to both North and South wing Entrances;

Fanlight + lantern, obscure glass (birds nesting in lantern);

Threshold, double-step, screeded, leading onto quarry tile lobby beyond to South wing, and to Terrazzo floor to North wing + staircase.



January 2011

ADDENDUM - building interior



NORTH WING ENCLOSED COURT

Alteration - with Asbestos and fibreglass roof sheets;

Canteen double-doors with Curvilinear mullions to full length glazing, 4 no.off;

Brass handles removed;

Floor level of original courtyard raised with screeding and carpet.



January 2011

ADDENDUM - building interior



OFFICE DOORS

Teak frame+ledged, with fanlight over;

Brass furniture mostly removed, all hinges and timber in good condition.



CANTEEN CABINET

January 2011

Built-in unit, with timber veneer wall panelling (wainscot) all sides.

ADDENDUM - building interior



OFFICE WINDOWS

Teak frames, vertical casements with deadlights and fanlights;
Stained timber wall panelling (wainscot) to lower floors.



January 2011

Quarry tile cills to upper floors;
Timber picture rail all round.

ADDENDUM - building interior



CORRIDOR TO NORTH WING

High ceilings;
Water damage to overhead slab.



COURTYARD TO SOUTH WING

Quarry tile paving to upper floor;
Floor channel to Cast Iron RWP outlets cemented up.

January 2011

ADDENDUM - chapel + grave



CHAPEL, January 2011

Timber kingpost-truss with "Mazista" shingle roof; Bagwash brickwork with horizontal pointing, painted.

ADDENDUM - chapel + grave



Granite tombstone;



" Francoise Pape, 1893 - 1962 "

GRAVE, January 2011

Chapel's saving grace is its history

BUILT during World War II, the charming no-name chapel met the spiritual needs of soldiers of all denominations until Natal Command closed in the mid-2000s.

It met other needs as well. It witnessed rushed marriages between soldiers stationed at the army barracks and their fiancées before the bridegrooms set off to war; offered a sacred space to troubled soldiers, and comforted families mourning the loss of loved ones killed in the line of duty.

Considering this rich history, it is only fitting that it has stood the test of time.

While most of the other buildings on the Natal Command site were demolished to prepare the prime Durban beachfront property for development, the chapel survived, with the main building known as the "White House".

Mike Andrews, project executive of eThekweni's Strategic Projects Unit, said a road extension running through the property was under way.

It will run from Sylvester Ntuli (Brickhill) Road to Sun-

If walls could talk, the chapel in the heart of Natal Command would have riveting tales to tell, writes Charmel Bowman

coast Boulevard. The road will be opened to traffic at the end of October and as an extension of Sylvester Ntuli Road, did not need to be renamed, he said.

The 21ha property was returned to the city's portfolio after movie mogul Anant Singh had his R15 million purchase in 2003 challenged by businessman Haramchand "Sunny" Gayadin.

The market value of the property was reported to be R100m at the time, and could be more than R200m now.

The Pietermaritzburg High Court declared the deal null and void late last year.

Singh's decision to appeal against the judgment failed as the earlier high court ruling – declaring the deal one-dimensional and contaminated – was

upheld. In April the Supreme Court of Appeals granted Singh leave to appeal against the decision that overturned the sale of the land.

No date for the hearing was set.

Singh had plans to build a R700m movie studio on the site.

Singh said, "We have completed the preliminary procedures for the appeal and hope it will be heard early in the new year.

"The legal process over almost seven years has impeded the development of a film studio complex that would have enabled Durban to benefit from the South African film industry's growth of the past few years.

"We were not consulted about the roads or demolition

of buildings on the property, but our agreement did take into account certain roadworks and presumably these are being done in compliance with the requirements of the agreement that is in force unless a court rules otherwise."

A discarded shoe at the entrance of the chapel and a heap of shattered glass tell of the neglect of the once-regal chapel over the years.

The windows and door frames have been boarded up because of vagrancy, and the pews and altar have long been removed.

Rose Devereux, head of the built environment section of the KwaZulu-Natal heritage council, Amafa, believes the "empty shell" can be restored to its former glory.

She said Amafa prohibited the city from demolishing the chapel and main building until there was a developer for the site.

"Whoever owns the land will have to send a new proposal to Amafa to demolish any buildings, but we are hoping that they (the new developer) retains the chapel.



The chapel at Natal Command on Durban beachfront where some soldiers were married before going to war. It and the main Natal Command headquarters building are all that remain – the rest have been demolished. Picture: JACQUES NAUDE

“Before the demolition process began we opened it to public participation, asking the public to come forward with any history of the chapel, for instance if any of their relatives were married there.

“We received a big response from the public to keep the White House. We hope still to receive responses in favour of the chapel, which has a rich history.”

Devereux said the White

House was built around 1937 or 1938, and the chapel sometime during 1941 or 1942.

Devereux said while there were no official records of weddings held at the chapel, she believes a number of soldiers were married there. “It is also likely that funerals for officers stationed at the site were held in the chapel,” she said.

Devereux said the demolished buildings had no significant historical value. “Our

hope is that the new developer doesn’t demolish the chapel, but finds a use for it.

“If a hotel is going to be built on the land, perhaps the chapel can be renovated to serve as a wedding chapel. Couples married there will be part of history.”

Andrews confirmed that the city had applied to Amafa to demolish buildings that were dilapidated and had little historical value.

“This was undertaken to clean up the site and reduce the city’s management and maintenance costs of the property as a whole. No proposals have been put to our council at this time for the future development of the site,” he said.

● Representations to Amafa about the White House and chapel can be submitted to Box 2685, Pietermaritzburg, 3200 or built.environment@amafapmb.co.za

FROM THIS

A derelict home for tramps and vagrants



TO THIS

OR THIS
A film studio

STUDIO TOUR

To: AMAFA <built.enviro@amafapmb.co.za>
Subject: old NATAL COMMANDsitevisit?_27oct2010.kw

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE COMMITTEE

a sub-committee of Itafa Amalinde Heritage Trust
P O Box 3066
Durban 4000

dear ros,
old NATAL COMMAND site visit?
27 oct.2010

as previously mentioned, the ITAFA AMALINDE AHC requests the co-operation of AMAFA in undertaking a "Rapid Heritage Survey" of the above stated building + its site.

the AHC notes recent legal judgements regarding withdrawal of lease and review of tender processes for redevelopment of the old Natal Command site.

we note with concern that any building left vacant for an extended period of time is rendered vulnerable to vandalism and theft, and suffers maintenance neglect. with reference to the heritage value of the old Natal Command building, the AHC fears early action to safeguard against any such loss is needed. as a first step, a 2-hour site visit to compile an inventory and visual record of features of heritage merit is proposed.

the AHC is prepared to collaborate with other organizations or individuals for the purposes of promoting our built heritage in general, and the old Natal Command building in particular. we would particularly wish for the support of the property owner and feel this could best be achieved if the visit and survey are conducted under the auspices of Amafa.

the AHC awaits your response.

sincerely, kirk, (chairperson)

To: AMAFA <built.enviro@amafapmb.co.za>

Subject: oldNATAL COMMAND HQ 1.report_03march2011.kw

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE COMMITTEE

a sub-committee of Itafa Amalinde Heritage Trust

P O Box 3066

Durban 4000

ATTACHED please find:

1.REPORT.pdf

The Architectural Heritage Committee (AHC), a sub-committee of the Itafa Amalinde Heritage Trust, submits this Report on the old Defence Headquarters of the Natal Command or "White House". We thank Amafa and the Strategic Projects Unit of Ethekewini Municipality for their co-operation with the Report. The Report is an unsolicited submission with no proprietary claims.

Our intention with the Report is to compile a simple record of our observations of a specific place at a specific time, - with some supplementary documentation on the history of the site. The AHC hopes our submission can be used as an aid to informed decision making by the authorities and Interested & Affected parties.

The Report is not intended as a substitute for more substantial reports, such as an Historical Assessment or a Statement of Significance. The AHC hopes these will be professionally undertaken for this site in the immediate future.

The Report is submitted electronically in a series of 6 consecutively numbered messages:

- 1. REPORT**
- 2. EXTERIOR**
- 3. INTERIOR**
- 4. HISTORY**
- 5. CHAPEL + GRAVE – photos only**
- 6. DRILL HALL + BARRACKS – photos only.**

sincerely, kirk
chairperson, itafaAHC

ASPECTS OF HERITAGE CONSERVATION IN KWAZULU-NATAL

Natal Command Headquarters building: Slouching* along Oliver Tambo Drive (Snell Parade), Durban

Conserving old buildings faced a conceptual shift with the adoption of post-apartheid legislation in 1999 when the *National Heritage Resources Act* replaced the *National Monuments Act*, 1985. Replacing "Monument" with "Heritage Resource" encapsulated this shift. Regrettably, this shift is frequently dismissed or poorly considered by many architectural practitioners and the public. In this article, the fate of the long vacant Natal Command headquarters building on Durban's Battery Beach (Fig.1) is explored through the lens of the new Act.

The site and its structure/s are identified for their cultural, and not just their material, significance. Overtly, Natal Command embodies both a military history and the visual imagery of western neo-classicism implanted on sub-tropical shores. In retaining such sites, do we conserve to guard memory against forgetting? To what purpose? And further, how helpful is the new Act to progressively determine the value of such sites of contestation and contradiction within our post-apartheid cities? Accepting that the mural of the Province of Natal (Fig.2) is of some material significance, what then of its social and political significance?



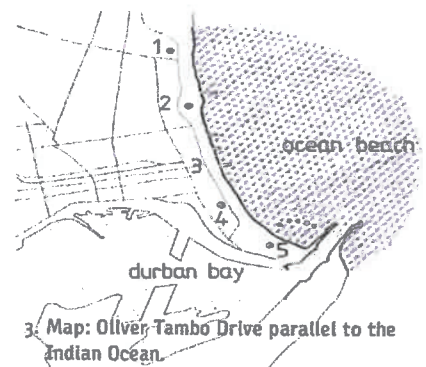
2. Province of Natal, Mural. Stucco panel in bas-relief in entrance portico.

As practitioners, sticking our toes over the line of the strictly technical does, however, expose us to these contested social and political domains. With reference to current debate, there is certain merit in the cautionary by Jo Noero, to "understand the limits of architectural action" upon the world. But, as Jo explains, this should be counter-posed by the professional ethics we espouse in determining the "nature of the brief we accept and act upon" (Noero, 2012:6). Recognising both the limits and consequences of our actions is the decidedly social and political step we all must take.

Ascertaining these limits and consequences is not helped by the "extraordinary claims" (Shepherd &

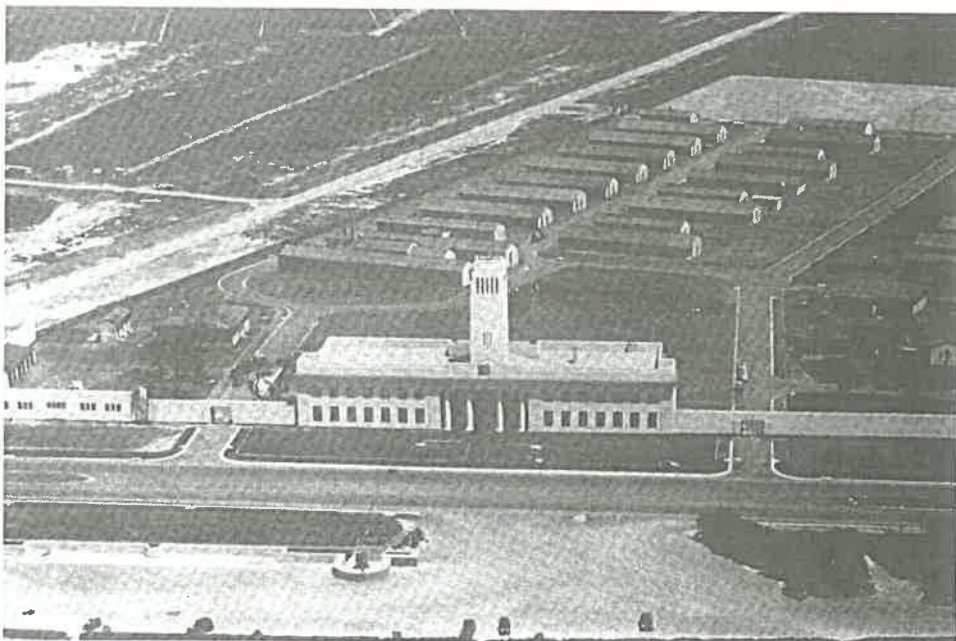
Robins, 2008:117) that form the two short paragraphs of the Preamble to the new Act. Paragraph one asserts that "Our heritage ... lies at the heart of our spiritual well-being and has the power to build our nation. It has the potential to affirm our diverse cultures, and in so doing shape our national character". Paragraph two asserts that "Our heritage ... educates, it deepens our understanding of society and encourages us to empathise with the experience of others". Below the surface of such an instrumentalist declaration, lies a less strident and more nuanced call, namely to negotiate, rather than to authorise, significance. This is another significant departure from the old Act.

Establishing the heritage resource value of the Natal Command site with its structures would be a way of negotiating the "nature of the brief to accept and act upon". This negotiation would be informed by, if not necessarily start with, an evaluation of the urban context.



1. Natal Command HQ, c.1937.
2. Sunken Gardens, 1932, and relocated 'Festival of Britain' pylon, c.1965.
3. Dr Pixley Ka Seme (West) St.
4. Addington Children's Hospital, 1926.
5. The Point, 1880s onwards, and Vetch's Pier, 1862.

The consolidation of Durban's beachfront as a leisure facility followed upon the loss of the city's premier beach in the bay in the early the 1930s. Up till then, south and north beaches were the back-beaches, a strip of mostly service facilities (Fig.3) with Natal Command occupying the northern end of this strip. The twin-gun emplacements in front of the building (Fig.1) have now become part of the Battery Beach car park. Only the plinth of a single gun can be seen on today's promenade (Fig.4) with



1. Natal Command, 1937. Demolition of the Central Tower was undertaken in WWII to avert U-boat surveillance.



4. Portico: Tuscan-in-the-Tropics. Medallion between a lobby and a courtyard.

the underground inter-leading communication tunnel blocked up. Little else of historical fabric, particularly of a civic nature, exists along this section of the city's beach. The site and structure/s of the Natal Command building are considered a heritage resource of some significance in the cityscape of Durban.

Whilst evaluating urban context appears generally unproblematic, this is not the case for some of the imagery associated with the building. The old South African coat-of-arms, axially aligned with the (now demolished) central tower, can be seen in Fig. 4. The stucco of the emblem is robustly contoured and catches the sun in a lively and bold manner (Fig.5).

As a conscientious objector to the apartheid army, and to millions of South African citizens, it stands as a reminder of the horror of the recent past. Its presence tests my capacity "to empathise with the experience of others" and to have any wish to "affirm our diverse cultures", as cited in the Preamble to the Act. But would its removal allow me to understand the sweep of history over the site, to know the building for what it was, and would removal strengthen my resolve to believe "never, never, and never again...?"

Of lesser gravity, is the loss of the brass plaque commemorating the overnight stay, en-route from the Comores to the East London Museum, of a fresh coelacanth specimen, which was housed in room 47 of the north wing (Bergh *et al.*, 1992:20). The plaque (Fig.6) was removed when the military vacated the premises in 2001, and now most likely adorns a knotty-pine bar in Durban North. Unlike the mural, the plaque has no intrinsic value, but it documented a layer of the history of the building, a layer now 'scrubbed away'.



5. Old South African coat-of-arms. The stucco bas-relief emblem over the entrance pediment contains the state emblem *ex unitate vires* (Strength comes from Unity) which served South Africa from the formation of Union in 1910 until it was replaced in 2000.



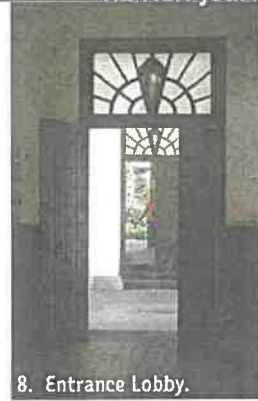
6. Commemorative Coelacanth plaque, 1952, on north wing stairwell.

During the tenure of the military, the building was much altered. The north courtyard was closed-in although the south courtyard was retained (Fig.7). All the major entrance gates were replaced and lean-to structures were added over time. None of the alterations from this period were of architectural merit. Some fine Dept. of Public Works detailing is apparent in the timber work (Figs.8 & 9). Upon the military vacating the 21 hectare premises of barracks, drill halls, and mess rooms, most but not all of the brass ironmongery and service fittings were illegally removed, whilst most timber casement windows remain intact.



7. South courtyard.

As most of the old material and the defining attributes of the original are intact, and as strong expressions of public support had been received, the provincial authorities deemed the site to be a heritage resource of architectural significance. The Natal Command building,



8. Entrance Lobby.



9. Mess.

together with its attached perimeter walls, was declared to be protected. With the exception of the chapel at the far end of the grounds, the city authorities who own the land were permitted to clear the site of all other structures. Some of these structures can be seen in Fig. 10.

From the account described above, it is apparent that the determining administrative interventions on heritage resources continue to be based largely on material, not cultural, evidence as projected in the new Act. Countervailing voices, articulating positions other than the merits or demerits of material significance, were never heard in the debate over the future of the Natal Command site. For the heritage resource practitioner, the issue to hand was not whether to demolish or to retain structures; the issue was one of cultural interpretation of a site and its structure/s saturated in political symbolism contradicting everything that means being a South African today. That is what the new Act clumsily espouses, and it is something the architectural profession is reluctant to face.

Kirk White

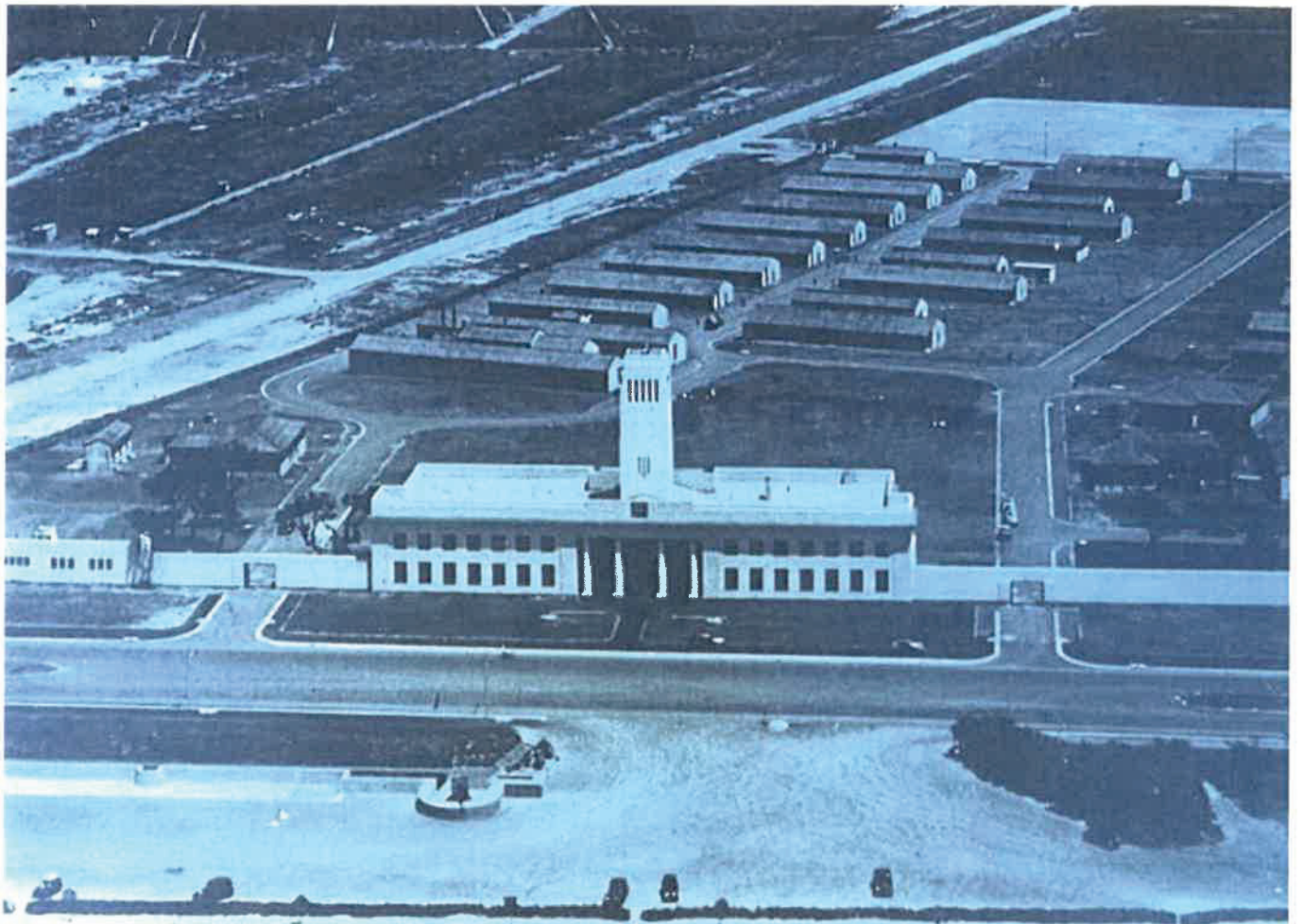
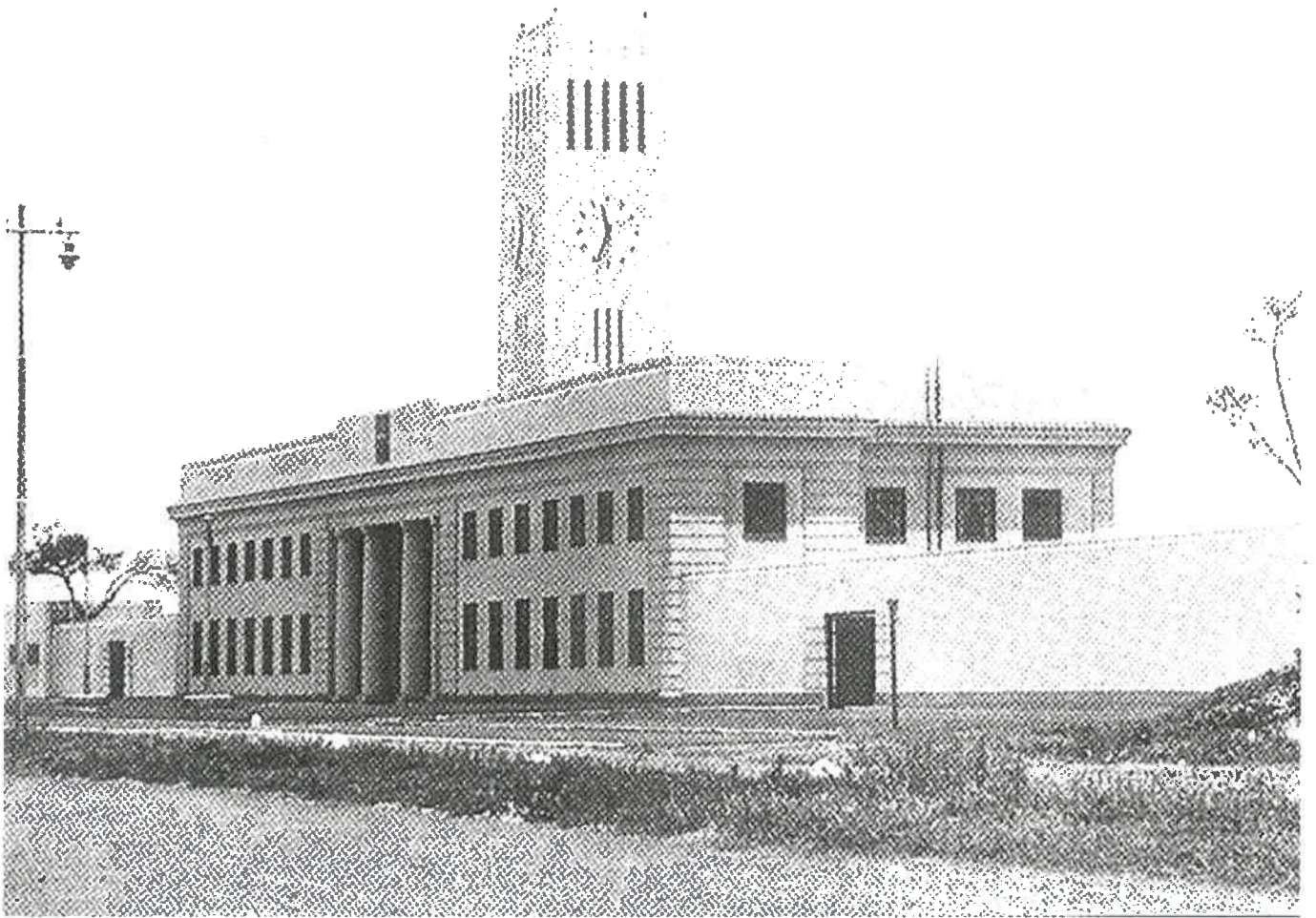


10. Aerial view from the south, 2011, before demolition of secondary structures.

*The title was inspired by the words concluding the third stanza of Yeats, W (1919) *The Second Coming*: "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?"

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