

## Architectural Heritage Consultant

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20 September 2023

## THE NATAL COMMAND BUILDING AT 191 SNELL PARADE, NORTH BEACH DURBAN HERITAGE ASSESSMENT AND PERMIT APPLICATION

Prepared for LDM Project Managers and Rinaldo Investments (Pty)Ltd

The site has one existing building that was the Natal Command Defence Headquarters until the year 2000. The site is protected by the Provincial Heritage Act. Therefore, any alteration, demolition or addition to the existing structure will require a permit from the KZN Amafa & Research Institute.

The building is located on the East end of the site, portion 2 of erf 12696. Immediate neighbours are the Suncoast Casino to the North and the Blue Waters Hotel to the South.  
The address is 191 Snell Parade, Battery Beach.







East elevation



South elevation



North elevation

### Legislation :

The buildings are “Generally protected” by clause 37 of the KZN Amafa and Research Institute Act No.5 2018. All buildings over 60years old in South Africa are “Generally protected” by the National and Provincial Acts. This was put in place as a filter for screening of potential Heritage Resources.

### A brief history :

In 1933 the Union Government required that the Stamford Hill Aerodrome facilities be upgraded for defence purposes and “a modern air station” was envisaged by the Borough architects. This was combined with the need to fill in a portion of the Eastern Vlei to eradicate mosquitos. The Airport building was built in 1936 on the North Western corner of the original military site ie. on NMR Avenue. The rest of the site was to be used for military purposes and most buildings were of a transitory nature. In 1937 the Natal Command headquarters was built on the Eastern boundary facing the Ocean. The design of the headquarters was austere and dominant, taking architectural elements from the International and Art Deco Styles. It was a symmetrical building with a central tower, sadly the tower had to be dismantled during World War 2 to avoid sightings by U-boats. It was never rebuilt.

The building served as the military headquarters for the National Defence Force Groups in Natal from 1937 until 2000.

It became famous after Dr.D.F.Malan authorised the military to assist Dr.JLB.Smith of Rhodes University to collect the Ceolocanth specimen discovered in the Comores and the Natal Command Headquarters was used as an overnight stop. The specimen was transported from Durban to Cape Town by the Defence Force.

(Refer to article attached)

The building was designed by William Murray-Jones, and built in 1937.

Murray-Jones worked for the Brazilian Government as well as in London and Spain before coming to SA in 1924 and was appointed Chief architect of the Durban Corporation in 1929. He designed the Beachfront Amphitheatre, Dbn Traffic Depot, Warriors Gate, The port Natal Administration Board offices and the KwaMuhle Museum.





## ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Rapid Survey of January 2011 describes the composition of the building as “symmetrical in a classic revival style”. The arrangement of rooms in the building display a military hierarchy. Certain spaces are more highly detailed and decorated than others.

Architecturally important details specific to this property include:

1. External plaster detailing and decoration : rusticated corner quoining, window cills and trims
2. Stucco plaster frieze above the entrance (by artist Mary Steinbank) and the old RSA Coat-of-arms on the pediment wall
3. Portico with Doric columns
4. Spanish-profile roof tile parapet copings
5. Teak doors and windows, decorative fanlights with lantern detail.
6. Internal timber panels, details and skirtings
7. Terrazzo floors
8. Boundary wall structure (remains of adjacent buildings).
9. Original ceilings and cornices

All details are to be surveyed and assessed for their structural and material integrity.



## HERITAGE GRADING :

The site was reviewed by the Heritage authority in 2011 and a demolition permit was issued for all structures except the Headquarters building, boundary walls, guard huts and the Church (at the rear site). At the time the structures were identified as “protected” but not Graded.

The Headquarters building is assessed according to the following criteria under the current Act :

### LOCAL INTRINSIC VALUE

- Historic fabric mostly intact or reversible
- Fabric possesses very strong evidence of historical layering
- Most elements of construction are authentic
- Fabric dates to early origins of the place
- Rare or excellent examples of its type or form
- Illustrates an historical period in the evolution of a place
- Illustrates the uses and roles of a place over time

The structures score HIGH in the above criteria.

### PROVINCIAL INTRINSIC VALUE

- significant within the context of the province or region (NHRA s.7(b)), but not of outstanding national significance
- rare examples of their kind or representative of a type that transcends the local context.
- connected to an event or figure of provincial or regional significance.

The structures score HIGH in the above criteria.

### ASSOCIATIONAL VALUE

- association with a person or group
- association with historic events or activities
- association with key uses or roles of a place
- value in the public memory
- value in association with living heritage

The structures score HIGH in the above criteria.

### CONTEXTUAL SIGNIFICANCE

- Historical and/ or visual/ spatial landmark within a place

The structures score HIGH in the above criteria.

**The building is currently Graded as Grade 3A, the highest grade of local significance.**

The scientific and social/ historical associations can be viewed as highly significant in the Provincial and National context, but could also be viewed as “negative heritage” by the role the building played in the history of Apartheid.

The following table is a summary of the significance statements, measured on Local, regional, national and international importance :

Natal Command Headquarters			Grade	3A
Significance	Importance			
	Local	Regional	National	International
Architectural	High	low	low	low
Historical	High	medium	low	low
Technical	medium	low	low	low
Scientific	medium	medium	medium	low
Contextual	high	low	low	low
Social	high	medium	low	low

#### PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT :

The building is solidly built and restorable. The courtyard structure and finishes have been damaged by water and plant growth. A full assessment is not possible without the building being cleared of all rubbish and fallen building material. Trees and plants embedded in the structure are to be cut and poisoned and all plant matter removed before further assessment.

The owner wishes to develop the larger site as Durban's Film City (refer to attached presentation). The existing headquarters building is the first phase of the development and the aim is to restore and refurbish the building to make it useable as offices and meeting spaces for the developers and consultants working on the future phases. The proposed alterations include demolishing non-load bearing walls between rooms, upgrading ablutions, stairways and services and enclosing the central courtyards with translucent sheeting.

The central main entrance portico will be restored. Existing openings and detailing on the East, North and South elevations will be restored to the original design.

Changes to materials and interventions may be necessary on the West elevation, in the courtyards and internally to comply with current National Building Regulations.

Associated parking, security and access will be provided as necessary for the number of employees.

The proposed upgrade will be an asset to the beachfront and bring life back to the empty site.

#### References :

[www.artefacts.co.za](http://www.artefacts.co.za)

Durban Art Deco Society "Durban Art Deco- Heritage of a sub-tropical African City" 2021

White K "Aspects of Heritage Conservation in KwaZulu Natal : Natal Command Headquarters building" KZNIA Journal 2/2012

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