Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

AA-80

(18 AN 550)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED 28 Oct. 1984

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC: Fort Nonsense

AND/OR COMMON: Fort Nonsense

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: David W. Taylor NSRDC, Annapolis Laboratory

X NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN: Annapolis n/a VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: Fourth

STATE: Maryland CODE: 24

COUNTY: Anne Arundel CODE: 003

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	X PUBLIC	__OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
__BUILDING(S)	__PRIVATE	X UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
X SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	__YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
	X not applicable	X NO	X MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 AGENCY

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable) United States Navy

STREET & NUMBER: David W. Taylor NSRDC, Annapolis Laboratory

CITY, TOWN: Annapolis n/a VICINITY OF

STATE: Maryland

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Anne Arundel County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER: 50 Cathedral Street

CITY, TOWN: Annapolis

STATE: Maryland 21401

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE: Maryland Historical Trust Historic Sites Inventory

DATE: 1983 __FEDERAL X STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Maryland Historical Trust, 21 State Circle

CITY, TOWN: Annapolis

STATE: Maryland 21401

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DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
X EXCELLENT	_DETERIORATED	X UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
_GOOD	_RUINS	_ALTERED	_MOVED DATE n/a
_FAIR	_UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Fort Nonsense is a 19th century earthen fortification consisting of two arcs of embankments and ditches separated by a gorge or gate on the west side and by a berm on the east-southeast. It is 64.9 meters in circumference (measured on the crests of the embankments). The fort is in excellent condition. Its location is a hilltop which has remained undisturbed by the surrounding Annapolis Naval Ship Research and Development Center.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Fort Nonsense is situated on a "whale-back" hilltop above the north bank of the Seyern River near its confluence with the Chesapeake Bay. It is within the boundaries of the Annapolis Laboratory, part of the Navy's David Taylor Naval Ship Research and Development Center. Most of the laboratory, at the base of the hill, is built on tidal fill. The hilltop is composed of Sassafras and Monmouth fine sandy loams which support deciduous trees such as apple, oak, sycamore, and wild black cherry, as well as cedar and holly. The maximum natural elevation is about 83 feet above sea level. Although no buildings impinge on the site, an encased underground 13,800-volt cable runs from northeast of the site, past its southeast edge and on to the southwest. The nearest building is a farmhouse, converted into officers' quarters, which lies about 60 meters south of the fort. Church Road runs within 20 meters west of the site.

The fortification consists of two arcs of embankments which are constructed entirely of earth. A 3.7-meter wide gate separates the arcs on the west side and an 11.5-meter wide berm separates them on the east-southeast. The circumference of the fort, measured on the crests of the embankments from one side of the gate clockwise to the other side is 64.9 meters. The circumference of the ditch was measured at its lowest point and at the outer edge. These measurements are 81.3 meters and 99.6 meters respectively. The ends of the two embankments, on either side of the berm, are 12.2 meters apart. Immediately north of the southern arc is a circular borrow area measuring 8.1 by meters north to south by 7.1 meters east to west. Along the northern wall there are three conspicuous depressions, possible embrasures, spaced 10, 13.9 and 18.8 meters from the north side of the gate. Thk overall maximum dimensions of the fort are: 34 meters north to south, and 30 meters east to west. The flat interior measures 16 by 14 meters and 47 meters in corcumference. The total area is 0.25 hectare. Maximum elevation is 25.62 meters a.s.l. and the minimum is 23.3 meters a.s.l. (84-76 feet).

See Continuation Sheet No. 1

Fort Nonsense
Anne Arundel County, Maryland

GENERAL DESCRIPTION (continued)

The embankment was constructed by inverting the natural stratigraphy from the borrow pit and ditches. Thus, the yellow and pale brown sandy loams of the B horizon became mixed with the underlying clay in the embankment fill and were capped by the orange, gravelly, clayey loam of the C horizon.

The fort was investigated by excavating portions of two perpendicular trenches, one meter wide, running from a datum in the center of the interior through the interior, borrow pit (trench 1), walls and ditches. A magnetometer survey of the fort was attempted, employing a five-meter grid system. The survey was not particularly useful but the grid was used subsequently for placing shovel tests. An additional, ten-meter grid was established for testing the crest of the hill beyond the ditch.

The number of artifacts recovered were few. The shovel tests extracted wire and nails of recent vintage. The trenches yielded a variety of items: an 1824 Capped Bust type dime, a 1900 Colt .38 cartridge casing, nails, late 19th century bottle and window glass and a 19th century pipestem.

Conclusions drawn from the excavation data strongly suggest that the southern arc was constructed first, in the early 19th century. The northern arc may have been built at the same time but was apparently reconstructed later in the century by moving the ditch farther out and heightening and steepening the wall.

Only two documents exist to corroborate these conclusions. Both are maps or sketches. One is an 1844 map of the Annapolis harbor and the other is an 1846 sketch of nearby Fort Madison, with an accompanying report noting that Fort Nonsense effectively deters attack from the rear on nearby Fort Madison. They demonstrate the existence of "Old Fort Nonsense" prior to 1844. Beyond that, the documents have been mute on the subject of Fort Nonsense.

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SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	X ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	__ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	X MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
X 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
__1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES prior to 1844 BUILDER/ARCHITECT unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable Criteria: A, C and D
Applicable Exceptions: none

SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The significance of Fort Nonsense lies in its possible relation to important events (Criterion A), i.e. the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War; in its distinctive characteristics (Criterion C) because it is a roughly circular and entirely earthen redoubt; and in its potential for yielding information (Criterion D) since it is the last vestige of Annapolis Harbor fortifications.

HISTORY AND SUPPORT:

The property on which Fort Nonsense was constructed was originally patented to Henry Woolchurch and Alice Durand in the 1660's. Among the subsequent ten owners through the 18th and 19th centuries were David Kerr who patented "Kerr's Prospect" in 1800 and James Hunter who leased some of the property to the Navy after 1857, About that time the Naval Academy used the land for a rifle range and an experimental station, a function that continues to the present. A land development company tried unsucessfully to establish a housing tract in the vicinity of the fort in the 1930's, but planned to set aside the area containing the fort. The laboratory began operation in 1904. As its functions increased, its area expanded and it was continually modernized through the two World Wars. The present Master Plan Update (1981) is the ultimate reason for the recent archeological work, culminating in this nomination.

Fort Nonsense appears to have been part of the plan of defenses for the Annapolis Harbor. Other fortifications include Fort Madison, Fort Severn, a fort on Horn's Point and a possible fort on Bieman's Point. In 1776 the Convention of Maryland appropriated 5900 lbs. to fortify Annapolis. In the following year a committee was appointed to study the harbor and it requested and received more funds. Forts were built at Horn's Point,

See Continuation Sheet No. 2

Fort Nonsense
Anne Arundel County, Maryland

HISTORY AND SUPPORT (continued)

Windmill Point (Fort Severn where the Naval Academy now stands), Bieman's Hill, plus breastworks elsewhere. The fort on Bieman's point was probably on "Kerr's Prospect." Congress appropriated funds in 1794 to fortify 20 East Coast harbors but Annapolis was deleted from the 1798 list. Yet $268.50 had been sent to Annapolis in 1795; its purpose is inknown. In 1808, Congress reappropriated seacoast defense monies and Forts Madison and Severn and the fort on Horn's Point were begun. Additions, modifications, plans and requests for funds for these forts continued through 1862. By 1811, the deficiencies of Fort Madison were evident and its commander had his hands full with disorderly troops and unsupportive townsfolk. A review of costal defenses by the newly created War Department's Board of Engineers in 1816 resulted in a bias toward Fort Severn in terms of attention and funds. It remained the only garrisoned fort in Annapolis between 1821 and 1830. Fort Nonsense first appears in 1844 on a map of the harbor prepared by the Navy's U. S. Coast Survey (U.S Coast and Geodetic Survey, now National Ocean Survey). The map also indicates Fort Madison and "Old Fort Bieman." An 1846 Harbor and Roads map, probably taken from the 1844 map shows Fort Nonsense and an 1846 sketch of Fort Madison and an accompanying report indicate the location of Fort Nonsense. Interest in Fort Madison revived after 1845 when Fort Severn was incorporated into the new U.S. Naval Academy. Repairs were underway by 1853 and continued until 1856. More repairs were made in 1858 and appropriations were still being requested in 1862. During the Civil War, General Butler stationed Union troops in Annapolis but local sentiment forced the placement of the camps outside the town limits. Confederate General Early had placed entrenchments along Spa Creek. Following the war, Madison's garrison was removed by 1867 and in 1873 the Academy leased the surrounding land. The subsequent history of Fort Madison is unknown but examination of air photos taken during construction of the Naval Air Station during World War II reveals no trace of the fort and it is presumed to be completely destroyed. Eventually the fort on Horn's Point was lost to development and Fort Severn was torn down in 1900. Fort Nonsense remains intact.

Fort Nonsense may be one of the "other breastworks" constructed in 1777. It may be ancillary to Fort Madison; a redoubt, battery or lookout placed on the highest vantage in the area. The fort certainly existed before 1844. Excavation reveals a probable period of rebuilding, either post-1845 when attention shifted from Fort Severn to Fort Madison or during the Civil War when Butler's troops were stationed in Annapolis.

See Continuation Sheet No. 3

Fort Nonsense
Anne Arundel County, Maryland

HISTORY AND SUPPORT (continued)

The size, shape and manner of construction of Fort Nonsense make it interesting because it does not quite conform to the pattern of various types of fortifications. Earthen fortifications were recognized as being temporary and impermanent as early as the 16th century although the use of various types of earth and of logs and brush was suggested by French and English engineers to overcome some of the problems associated with use of earth. Fort Nonsense has survived due to the nature of the subsoil which provided a gravelly and clayey "cap" for the walls which has withstood weathering. Despite the claims that some early forts in the United States were crude and poorly engineered, Americans were not ignorant of French and English treatises on the subject. Among the lessons learned in the French and Indian War was the vulnerability of a fort from attach from a higher elevation. Many English forts built after the war had redoubts built in positions overlooking passes and other key positions to strengthen the forts' defensive postures. Redoubts are small, independent works, not always defensible, that can function in a variety of ways. At Crown Point and Niagra, in New York, redoubts were masonry and built to follow natural contours, and square, respectively. Redoubts built after the Revolution at Fort Putman in New York were irregularly shaped, built of logs and earth, and finished with masonry. Several redoubts constructed of earth were excavated at Yorktown Battlefield. These were expedient and intended to be temporary. Certain features of Fort Nonsense do not correspond well to the features described above. By definition a redoubt is supposed to be enclosed. Fort Nonsense is not entirely enclosed; it is two arcs separated by openings. Its shape is roughly circular rather than square or polygonal but Fort Wood near Fort McHenry in Baltimore was circular. However, it was masonry. While Fort Nonsense does not entirely fit the pattern of redoubts, it is clearly not a battery and may have served some other military function. It is too far back and above the Severn River and the Chesapeake Bay for artillery of the period from the late 18th to early 19th centuries to be effective. Some redoubts are called "forts" and "for" often refers, in general terms, to any small, independent, defensive fortification or position. As such, Fort Nonsense may have been a lookout or signal station or a position intended to cover the rear of Fort Madison.

Finally, there is the fort's integrity and potential to yield data. It is in excellent condition, well protected from erosion and vandalism. Recent excavations have not entirely answered the questions of its age and function. Expanded excavations in and around the fort may clarify some of the ambiguities that testing exposed.

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9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Weinland, M. & C. Weber. 1983. A Study of Ft. Nonsense and other Cultural Resources at the David W. Taylor NSRD Centers in Maryland. Report prepared by the Maryland Historical Trust for the U. S. Navy.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	18	372850	4316140
B			
C			
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
n/a			

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE: Marcia Weinland, Project Archeologist & Carmen Weber Ass't Archeologist

ORGANIZATION: Maryland Historical Trust

DATE: 1983

STREET & NUMBER: 21 State Circle

TELEPHONE: 301-269-2438

CITY OR TOWN: Annapolis

STATE: Maryland 21401

12 CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION

YES X NO ____ NONE ____

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is ____National ____State ____Local.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

GPO 899-214

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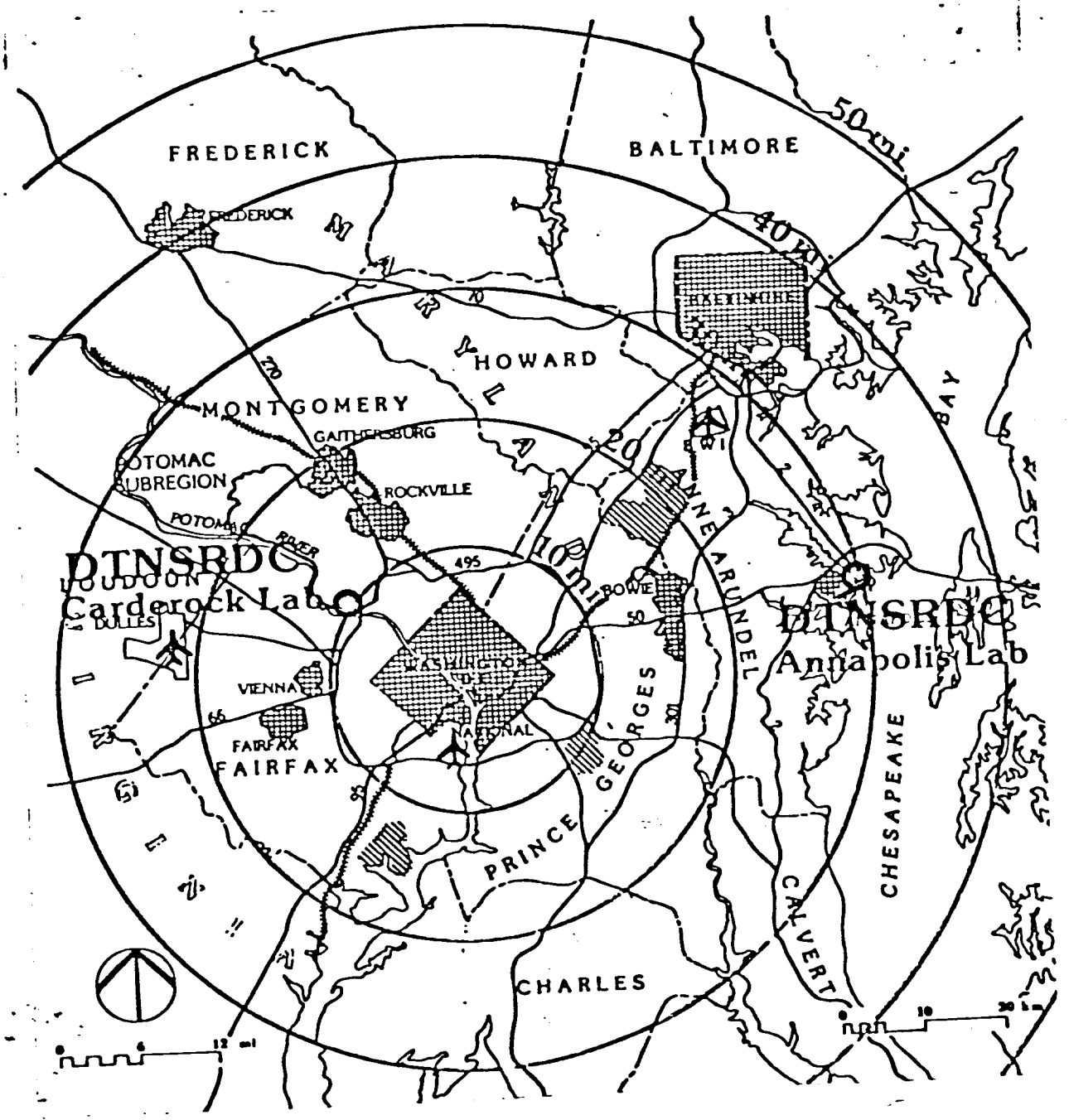
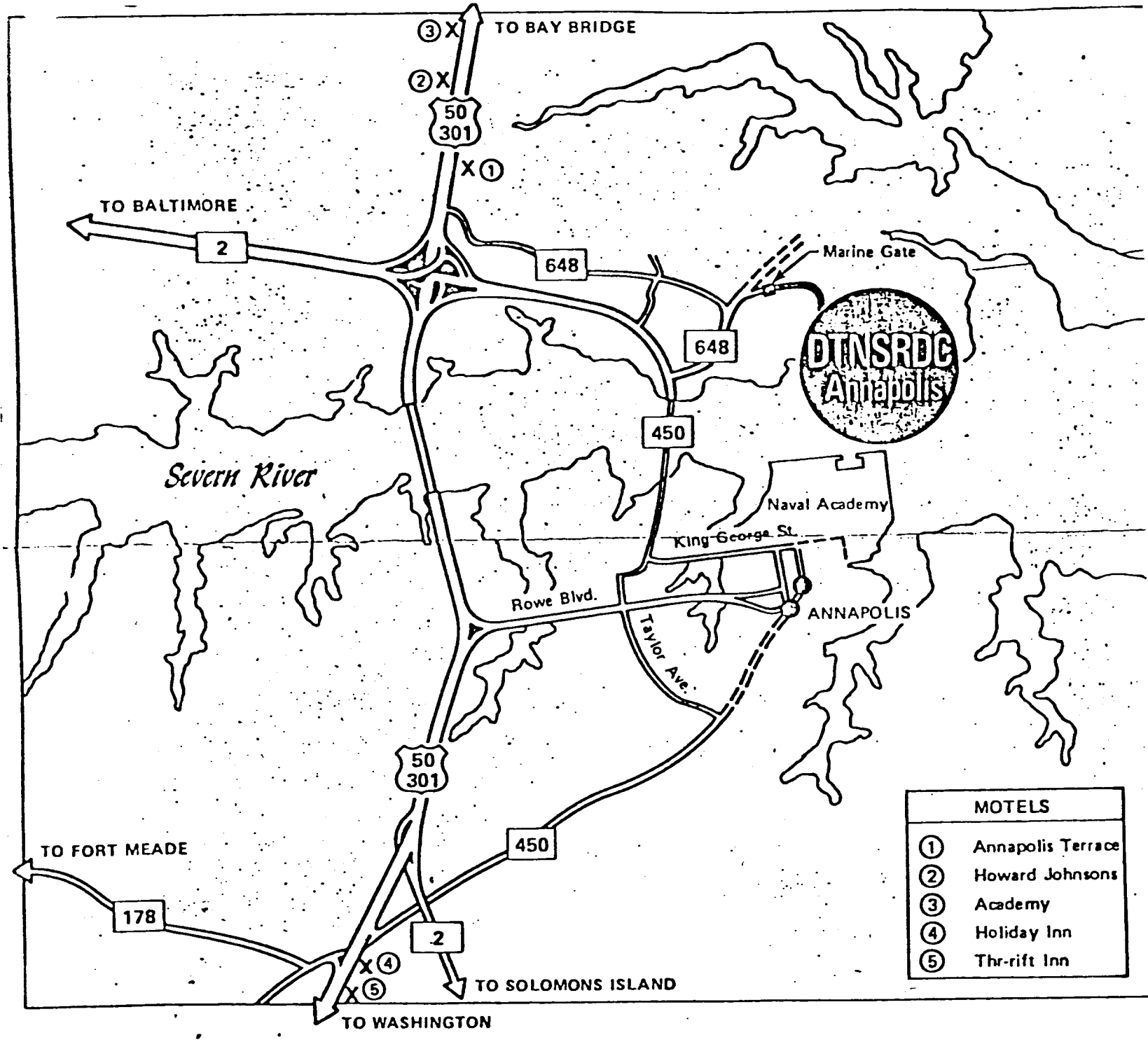


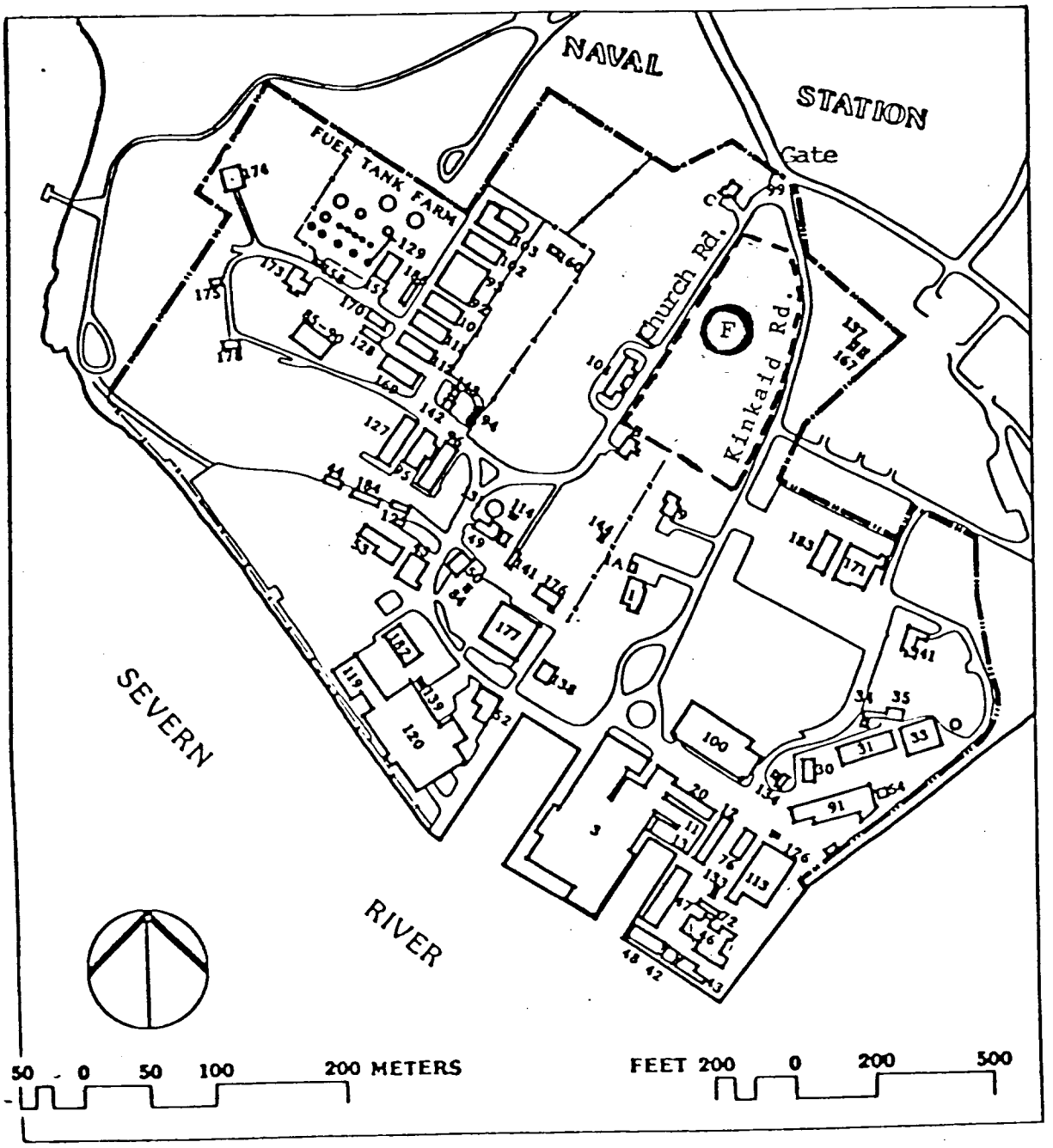
Regional Map Showing the Location of the David Taylor Naval Ship Research and Development Center (DTNSRDC) -Annapolis Lab

AA-80



Location of DTNSRDC - Annapolis Lab

AA-80



Boundaries of the Fort Nonsense National Register site.

KEY: — — — — — National Register Site Boundary

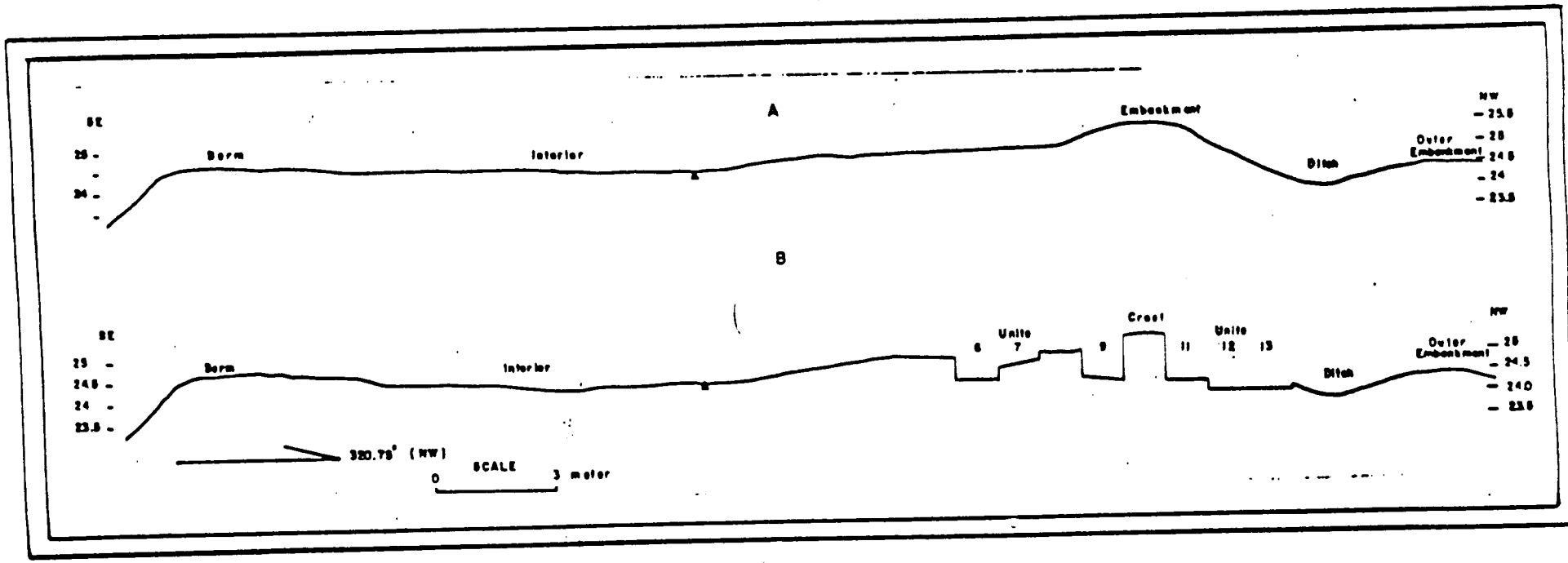
(F) Approximate Location of Earthwork Embankment

—"—"— Boundary of Annapolis Laboratory

Fort Nonsense Boundary Description and Justification

As illustrated on the enclosed map, the boundaries for Fort Nonsense are defined on the east by Kinkaid Road and on the west by Church Road. The junction of Kinkaid and Church Roads forms the northern boundary. The roadways form a clear man-made boundary and serve to delimit the undistrubed area immediately surrounding the earthwork. The southern boundary is defined by a line running roughly east-west at the north wall of building "Quarters B." This area includes the largely undisturbed open area to the south of the earthwork (Fort Nonsense). This area was subjected to low-level archeological testing with inconclusive results. The undisturbed areas surrounding Fort Nonsense have either received minimal or no archeological testing. Archeological features such as encampments may be present in the areas around the earthwork itself. Future more intensive archeological investigations could alter the currently defined N.R. boundaries.

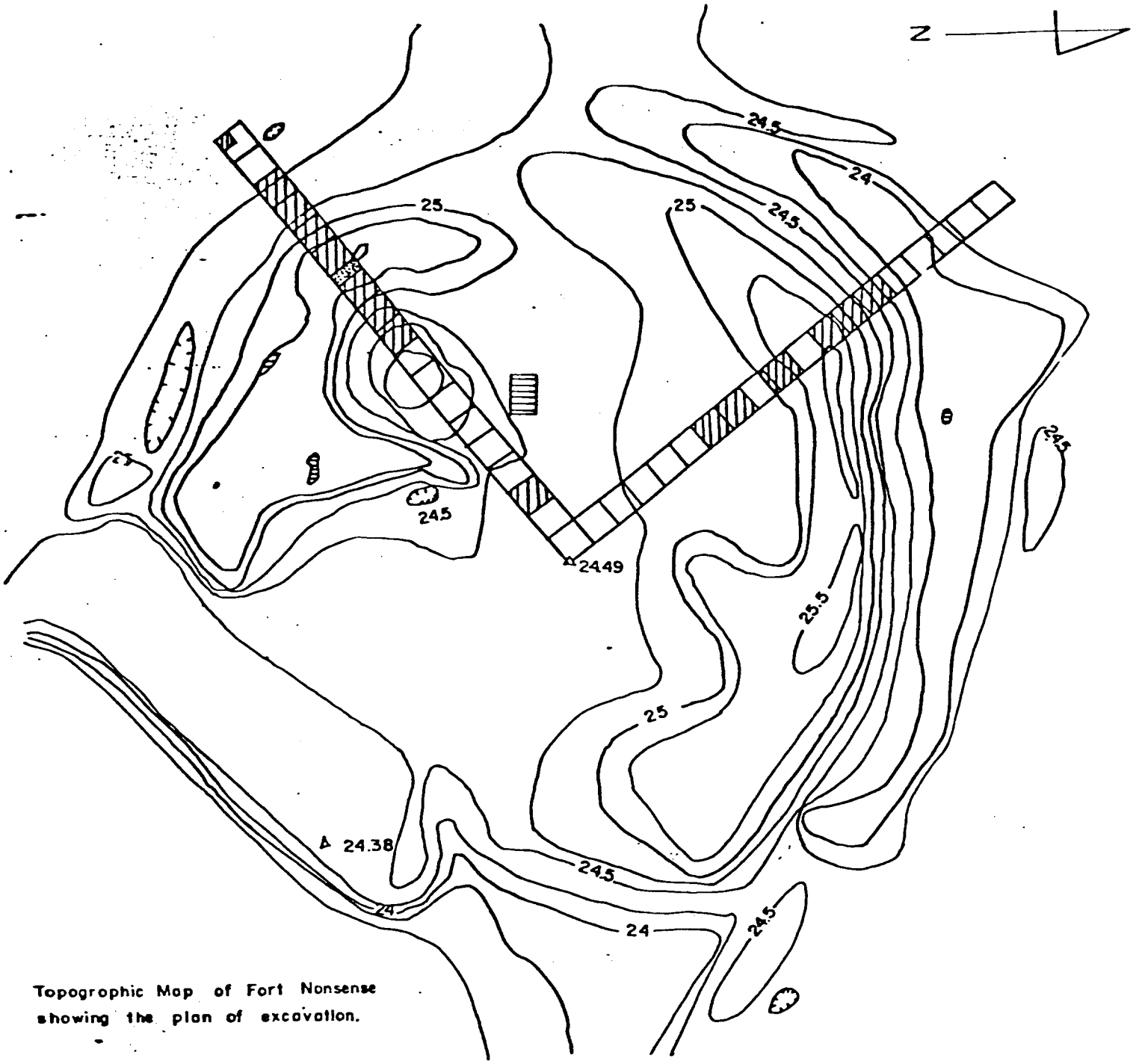
ACREAGE: less than one acre



Fort Nonsense, NW to SE Cross-Section depicting NE Wall of Trench 2.
A = Without Excavation Units Depicted
B = With Excavation Units Depicted

AA-80

AA-80



Topographic Map of Fort Nonsense showing the plan of excavation.

Datums

'Potholes'

Balk

Excavation unit

SCALE

0 5 meter

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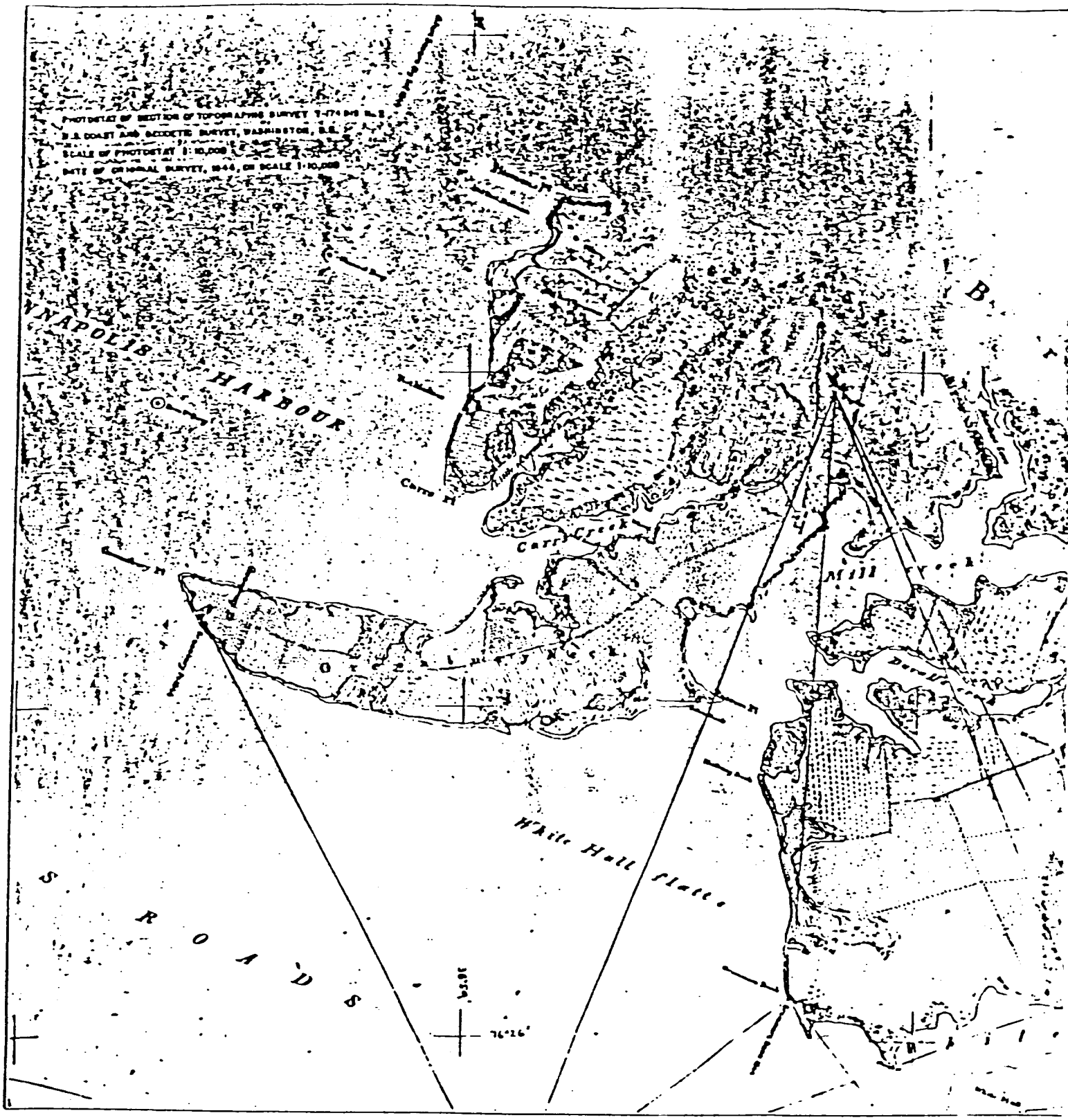

Annapolis Harbor, 1844

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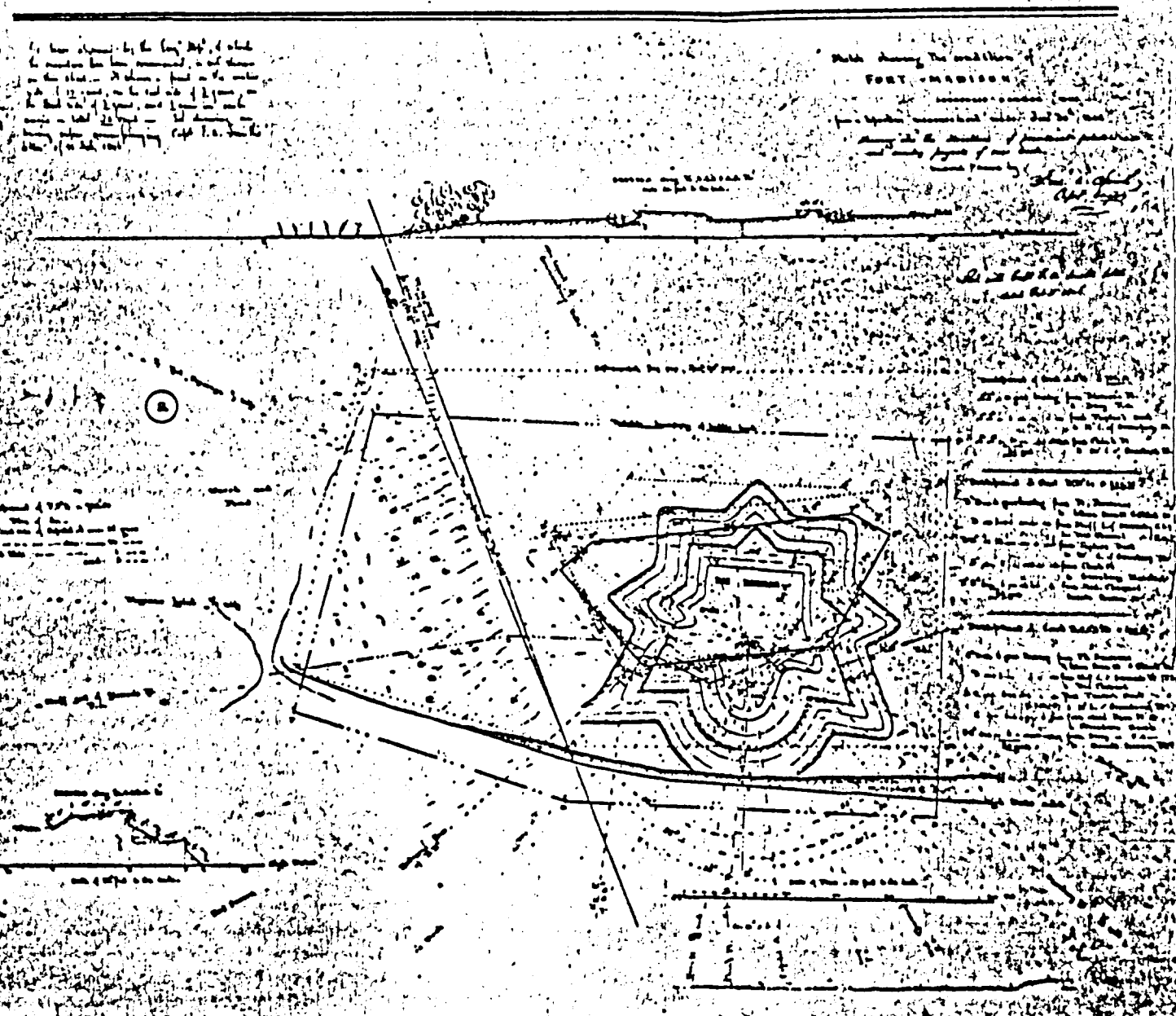

1846 Sketch of Ft. Madison with a Reference to Ft. Nonsense

(a) = Reference: "To Fort Nonsense 3/8 mile"

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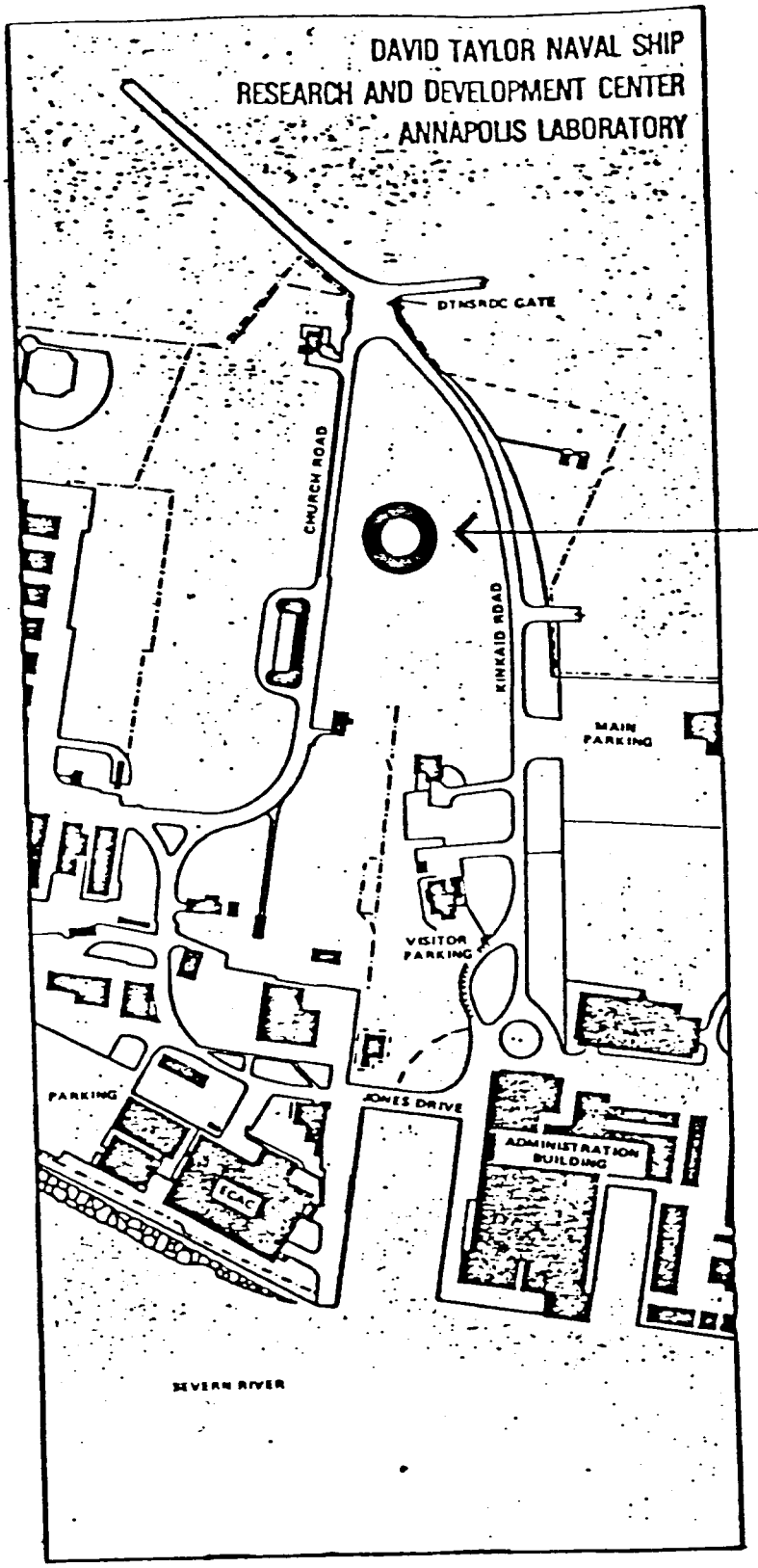
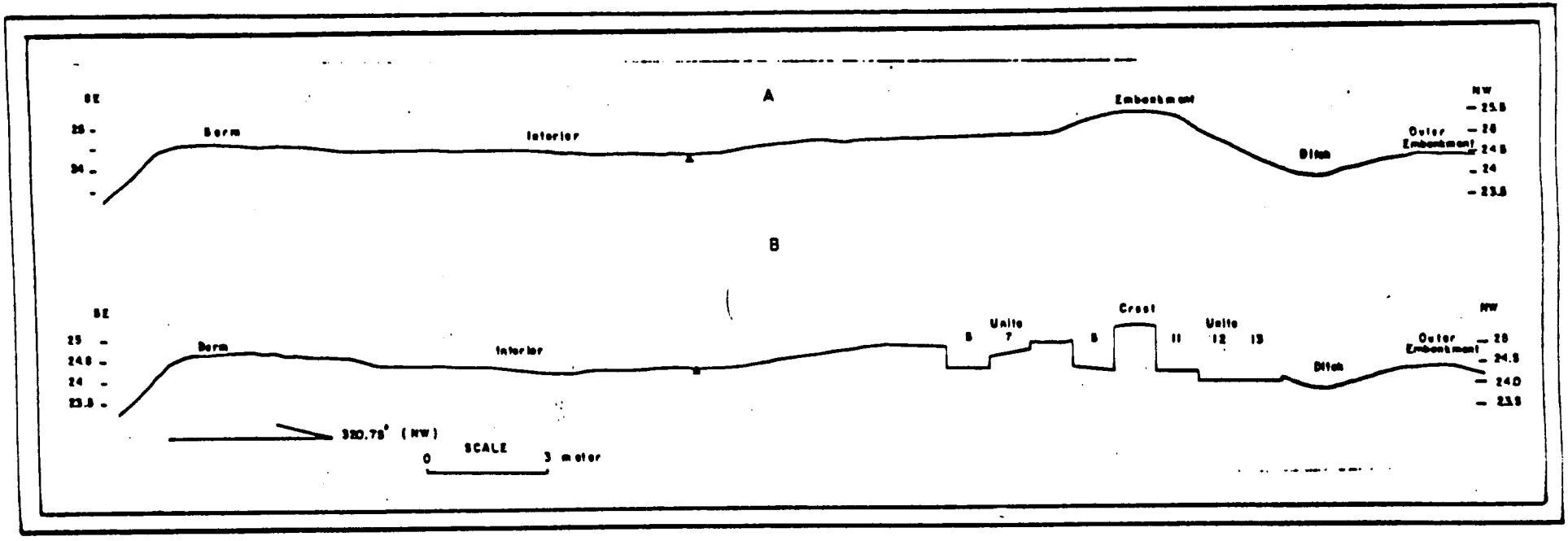


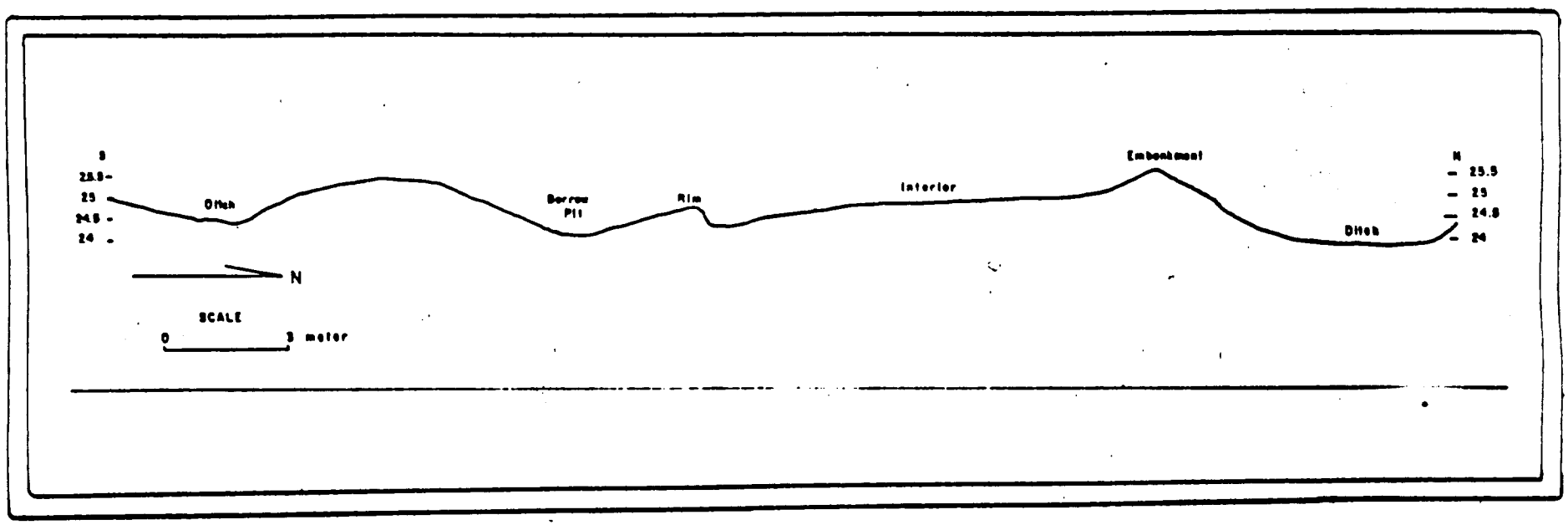
Fort Nonsense

Location of Fort Nonsense within the David Taylor Naval Ship Research and Development Center-Annapolis Lab



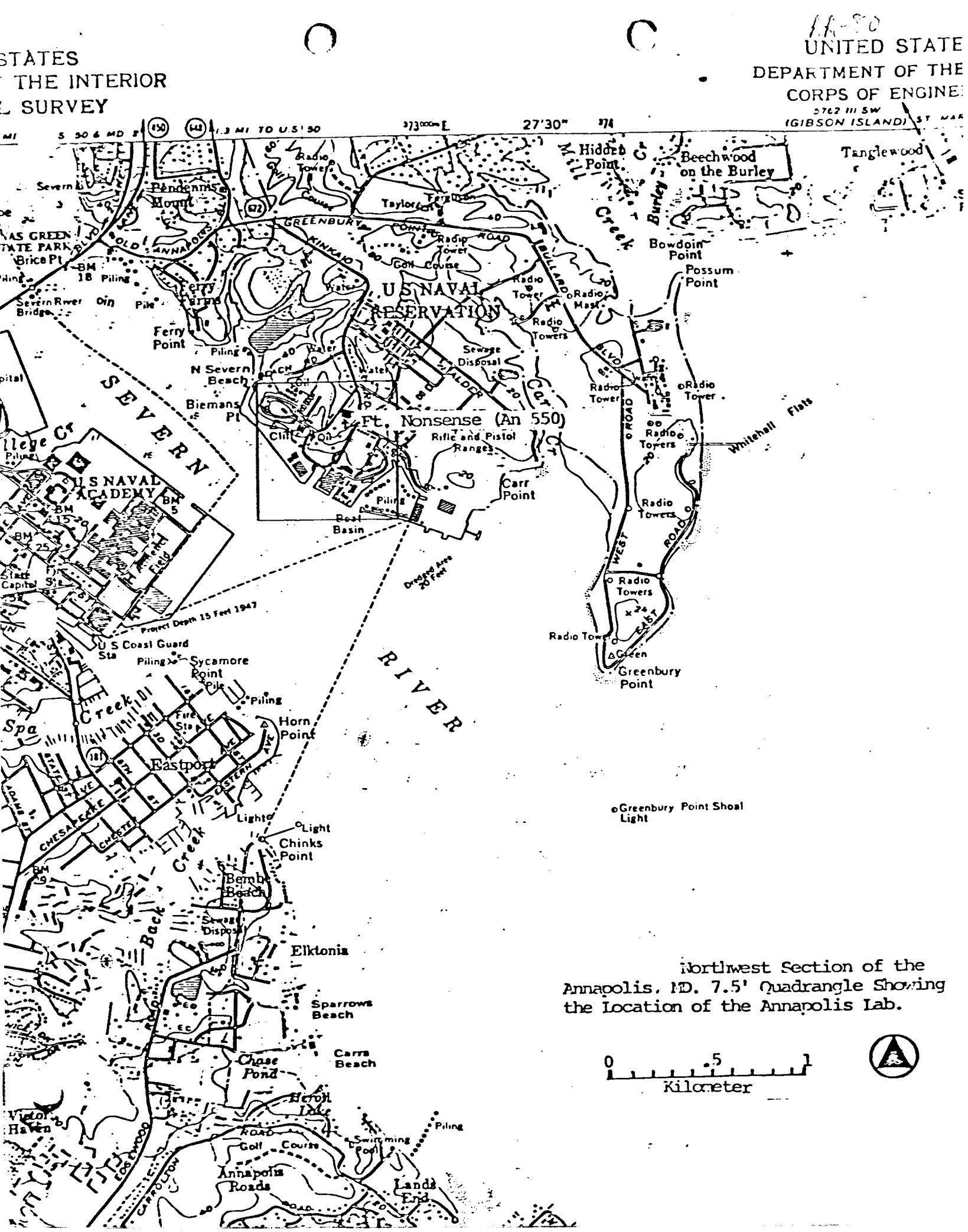
Fort Nonsense, NW to SE Cross-Section depicting NE Wall of Trench 2.
A = Without Excavation Units Depicted
B = With Excavation Units Depicted

AA-80



Fort Nonsense, North to South Cross-Section From 5.5 Meters West of Datum 2.

AA-80


STATES
THE INTERIOR
L SURVEY
UNITED STATE
DEPARTMENT OF THE
CORPS OF ENGINE
5762 III SW
(GIBSON ISLAND)
27'30"
Hidden Point
Beechwood on the Burley
Tanglewood
Mill Creek
Burley Cr
Bowdoin Point
Possum Point
Pendennis Mount
Taylor
Ferguson
GREENBURY POINT ROAD
KINKAIO
Golf Course
Radio Tower
Radio Mast
Radio Towers
U S NAVAL RESERVATION
Ferry Farms
Ferry Point
Piling
N Severn Beach
Biemans Pt
Sewage Disposal
Ft. Nonsense (An 550)
Rifle and Pistol Ranges
Carr Point
Boat Basin
Car Cr
Whitehall Flats
SEVERN
RIVER
U S NAVAL ACADEMY
Dredged Area 20 Feet
Project Depth 15 Feet 1947
U S Coast Guard Sta
Sycamore Point
Horn Point
Eastport
Creek
Spa
Greenbury Point
Greenbury Point Shoal Light
Light
Chinks Point
Bembe Beach
Back Creek
Elktonia
Sparrows Beach
Carrs Beach
Chase Pond
Heron Lake
Golf Course
Swimming Pool
Annapolis Roads
Lands End
Victor Haven
Severn River Bridge
Brice Pt
Severn
Northwest Section of the Annapolis, MD. 7.5' Quadrangle Showing the Location of the Annapolis Lab.
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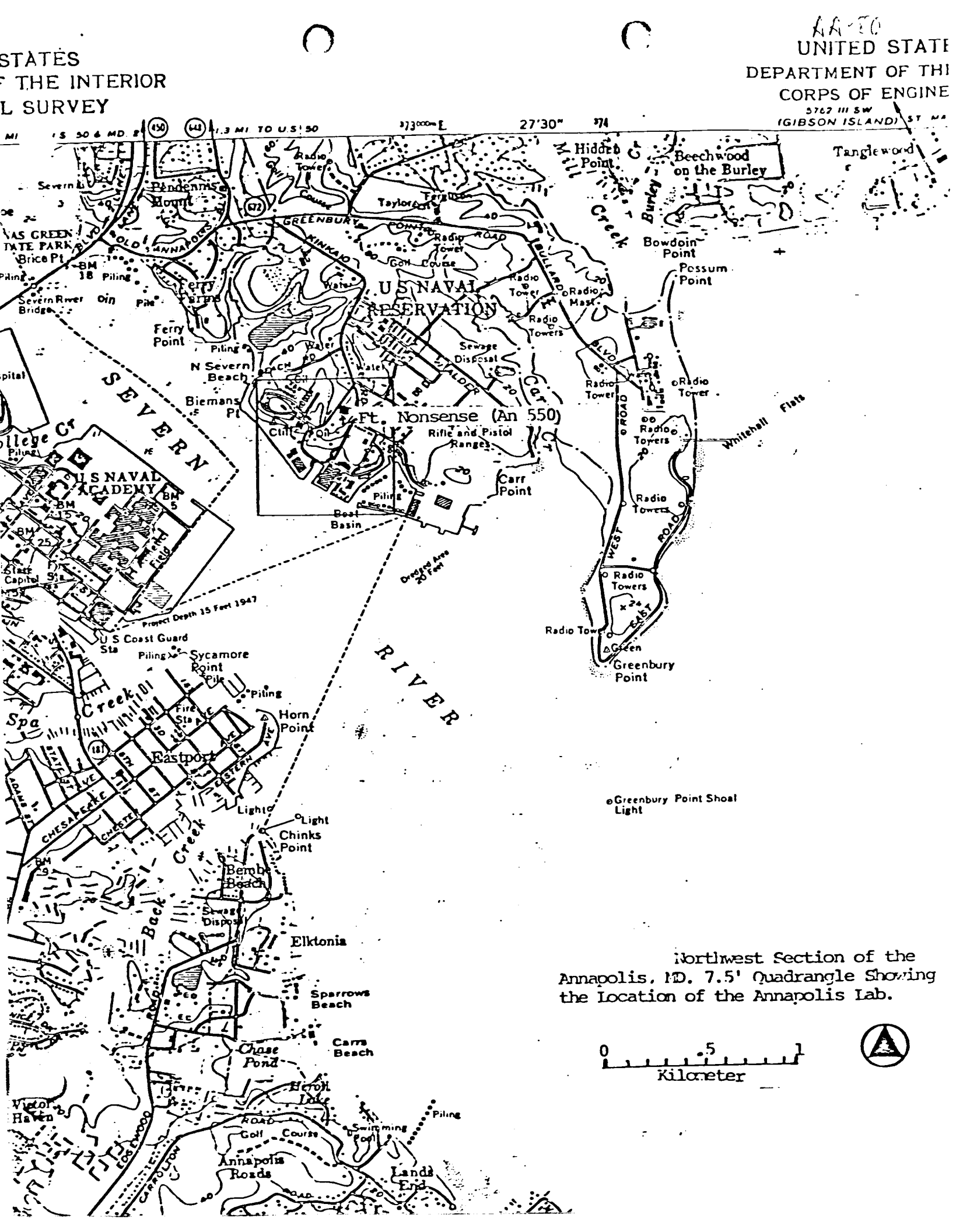
Kilometer



Northwest Section of the Annapolis, MD. 7.5' Quadrangle Showing the Location of the Annapolis Lab.