

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

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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**

David W. Taylor NSRDC, Annapolis Laboratory

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Annapolis

n/a VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Fourth

STATE

Maryland

CODE  
24

COUNTY

Anne Arundel

CODE  
003

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
	X not applicable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> 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  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Maryland Historical Trust, 21 State Circle

CITY, TOWN

Annapolis

STATE

Maryland 21401

AR-80

# DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE <u>n/a</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> 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 Severn 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. The 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 circumference. 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

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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.

# SIGNIFICANCE

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> 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 unsuccessfully 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

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Fort Nonsense  
Anne Arundel County, MarylandHISTORY 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 unknown. 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 townfolk. A review of coastal 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

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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 attack 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 log 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.

# 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

A	1,8	37,328,5	4,116,14,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
n/a			
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 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  NO  NONE

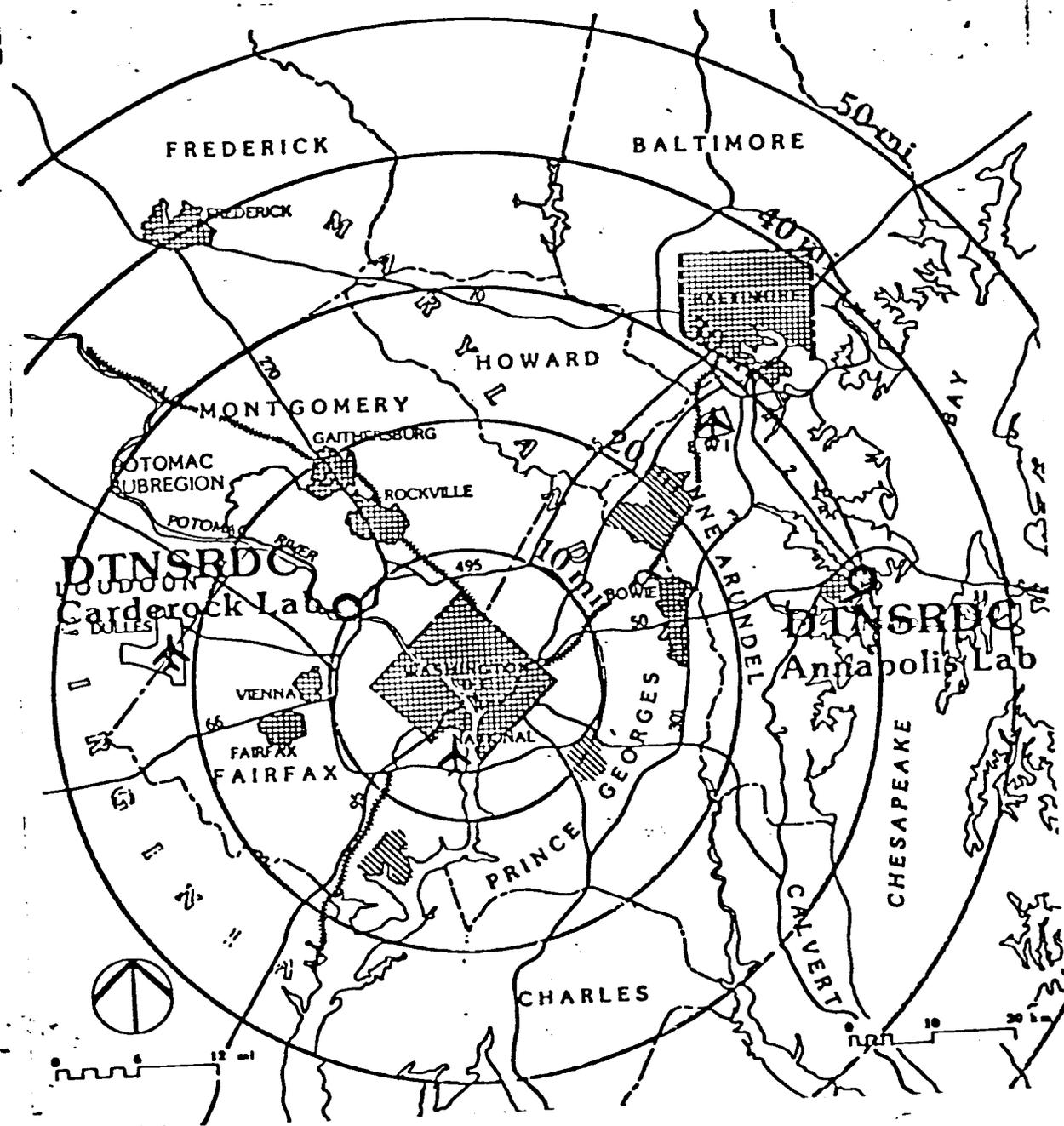
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

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.

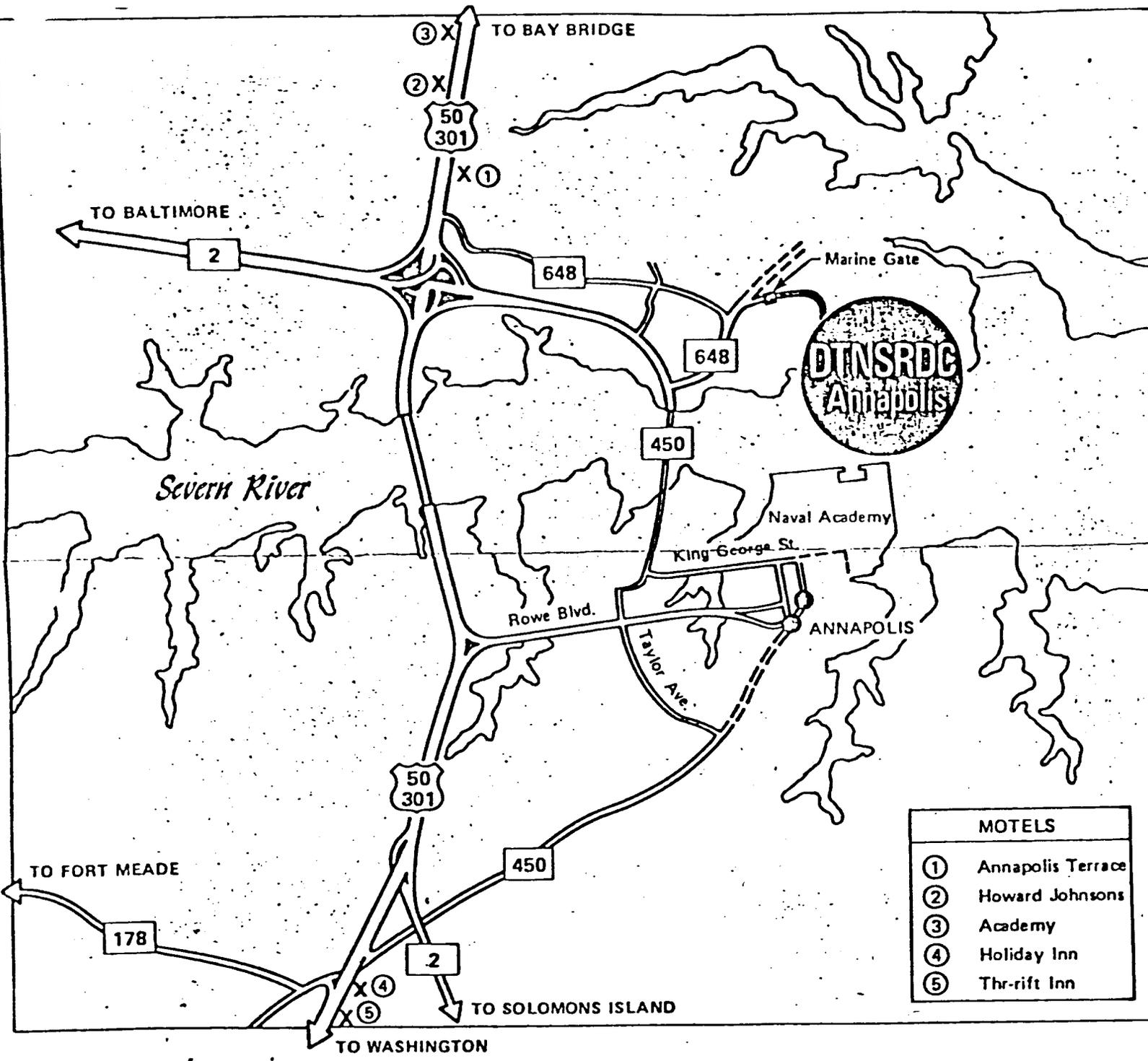
FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

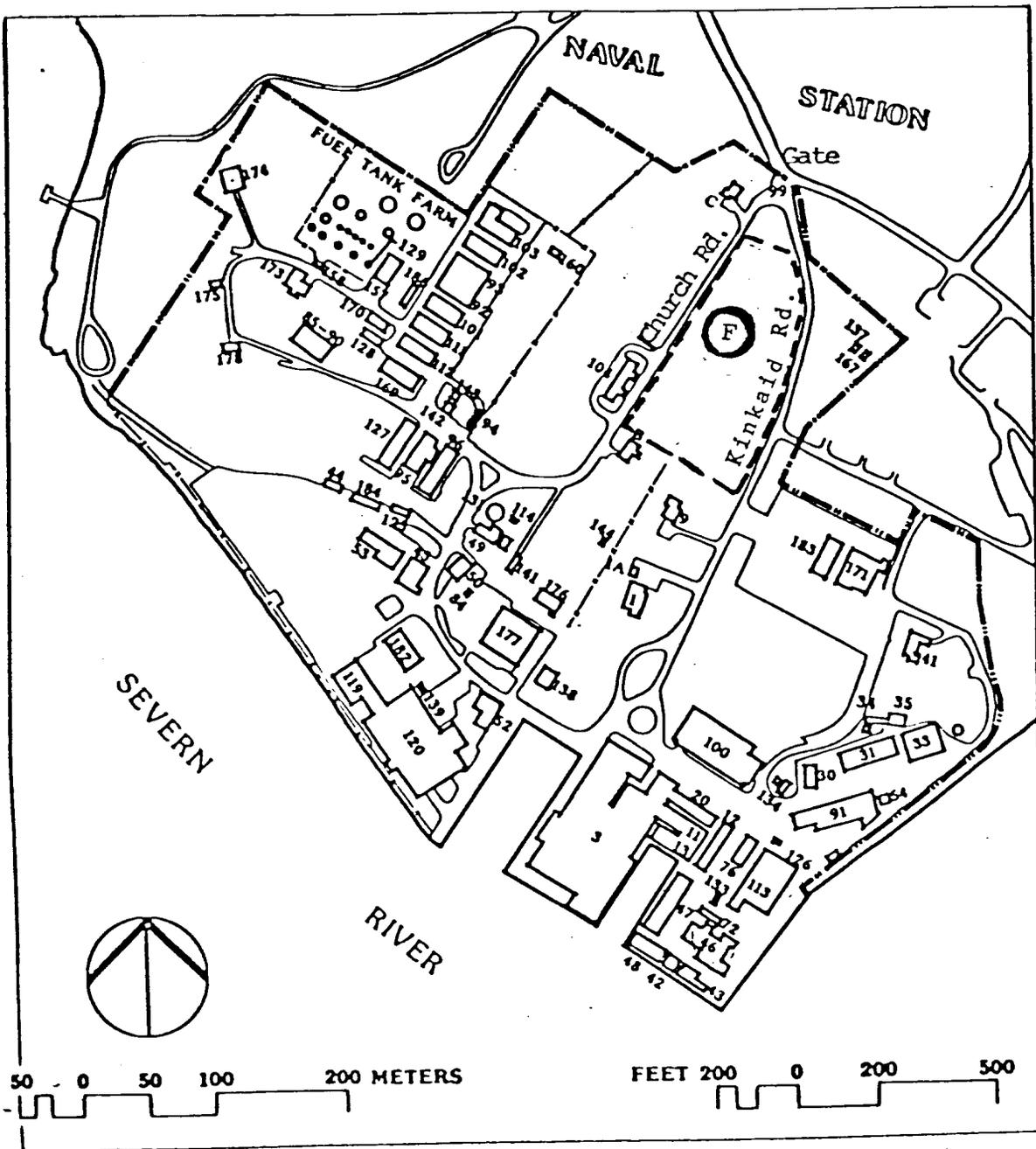
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	DATE _____
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	DATE _____
ATTEST: _____	
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	



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



Location of DTNSRDC - Annapolis Lab



Boundaries of the Fort Nonsense National Register site.

- KEY:  National Register Site Boundary
-  Approximate Location of Earthwork Embankment
-  Boundary of Annapolis Laboratory

AA-80

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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

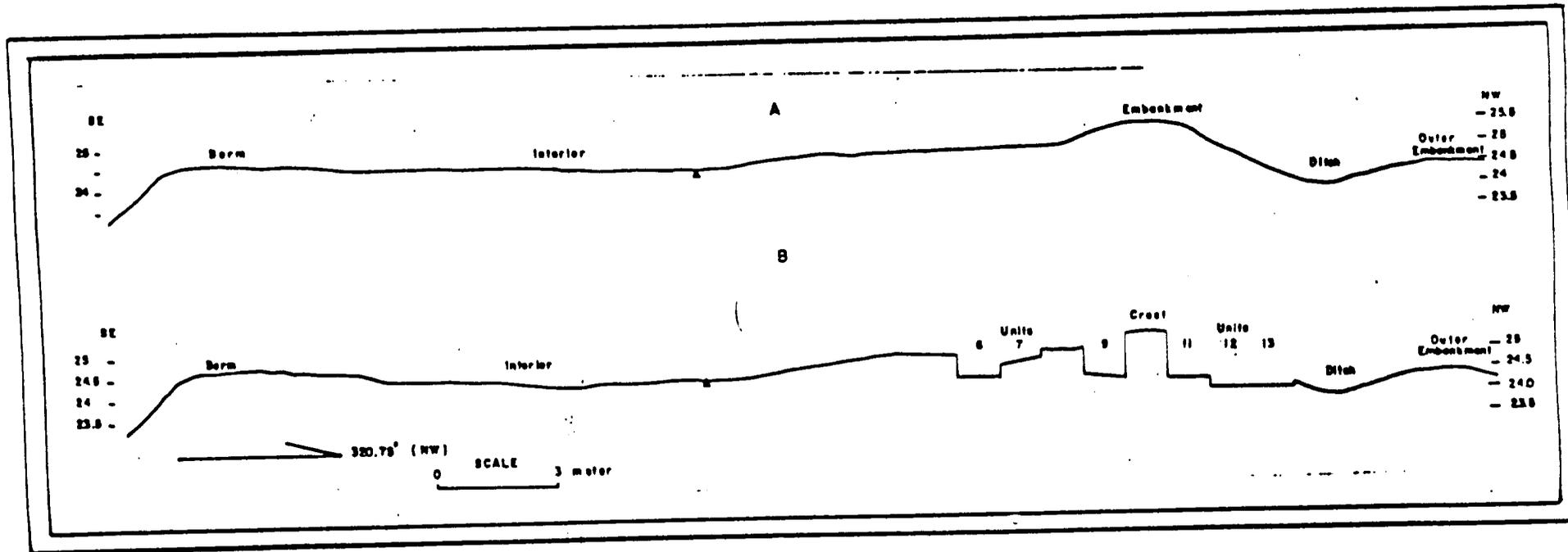
Fort Nonsense  
Anne Arundel County  
Maryland

CONTINUATION SHEET ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE

## Fort Nonsense Boundary Description and Justification

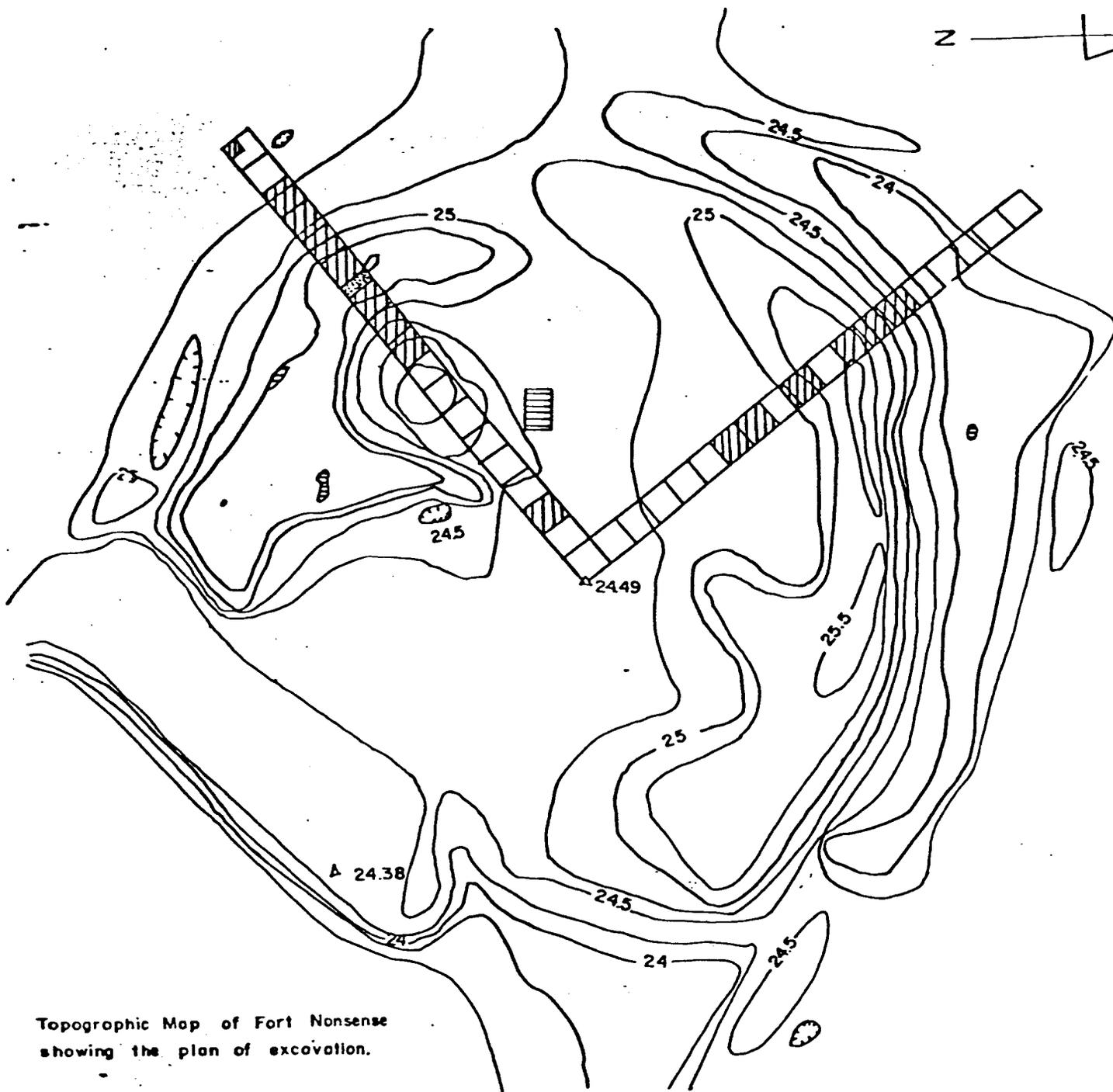
As illustrated on the enclosed map, the boundaries for Fort Nonsense are defined on the east by Kinkaid Road and on the west by Church Road. The junction of Kinkaid and Church Roads forms the northern boundary. The roadways form a clear man-made boundary and serve to delimit the undisturbed area immediately 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

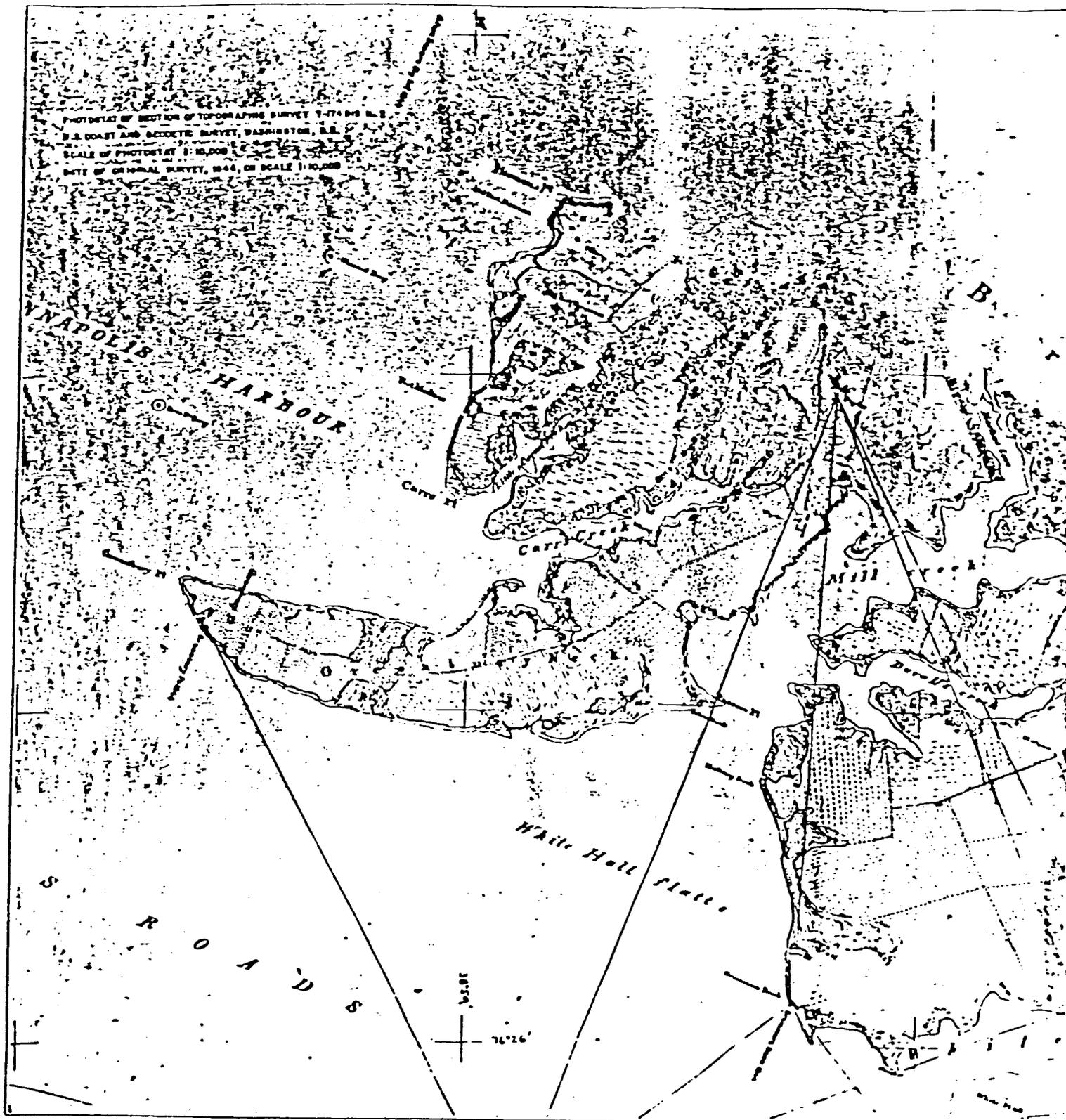
AA-80



Topographic Map of Fort Nonsense showing the plan of excavation.

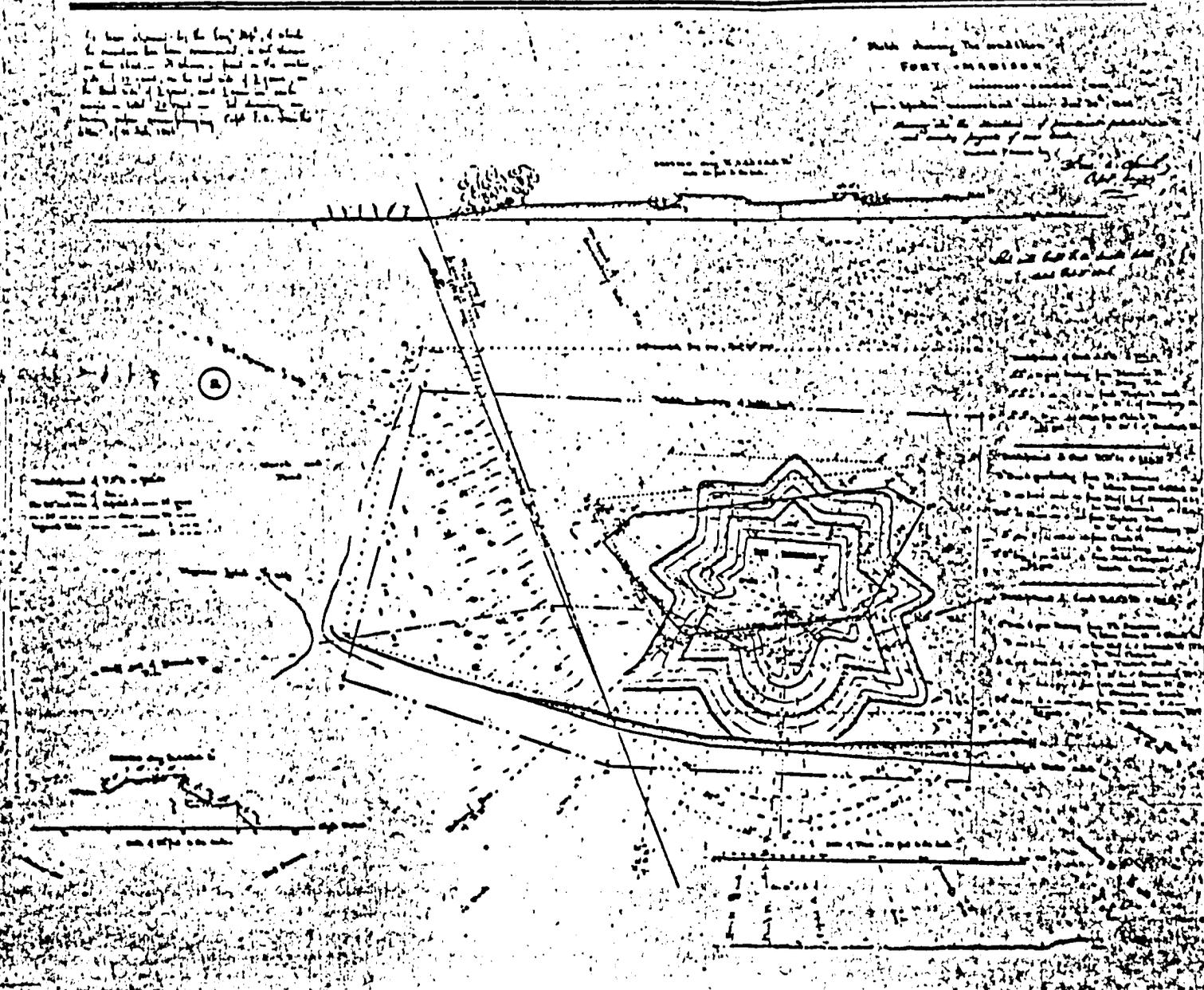
-  Datums
-  'Potholes'
-  Bulk
-  Excavation unit

SCALE  
0 ————— 5 meter



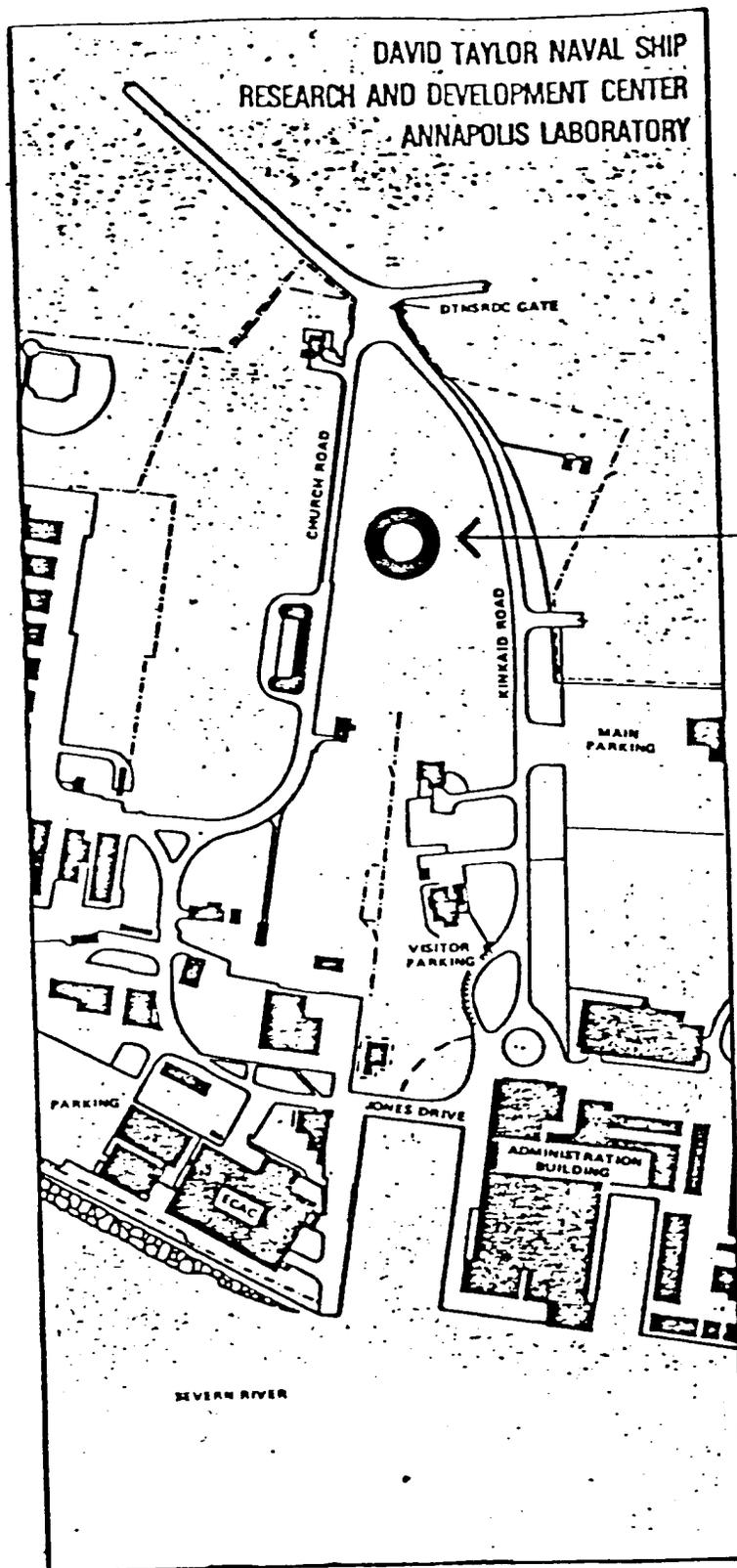
Annapolis Harbor, 1844

AA-80

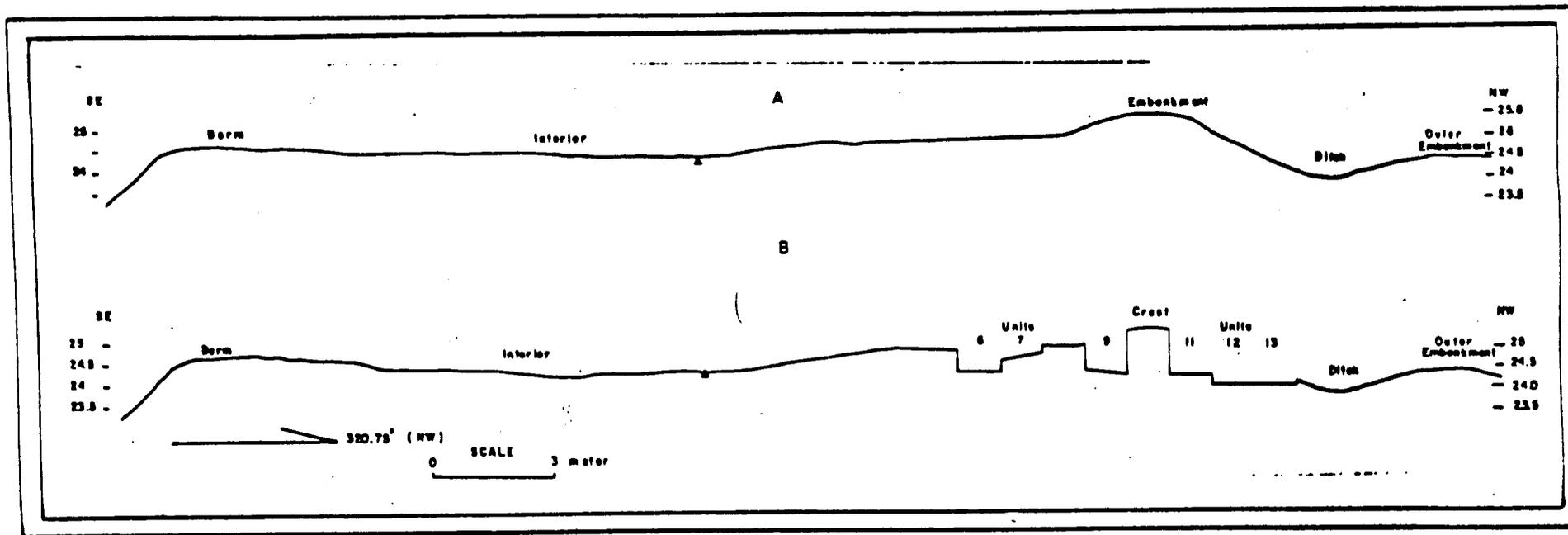


1846 Sketch of Ft. Madison with a Reference to Ft. Nonsense

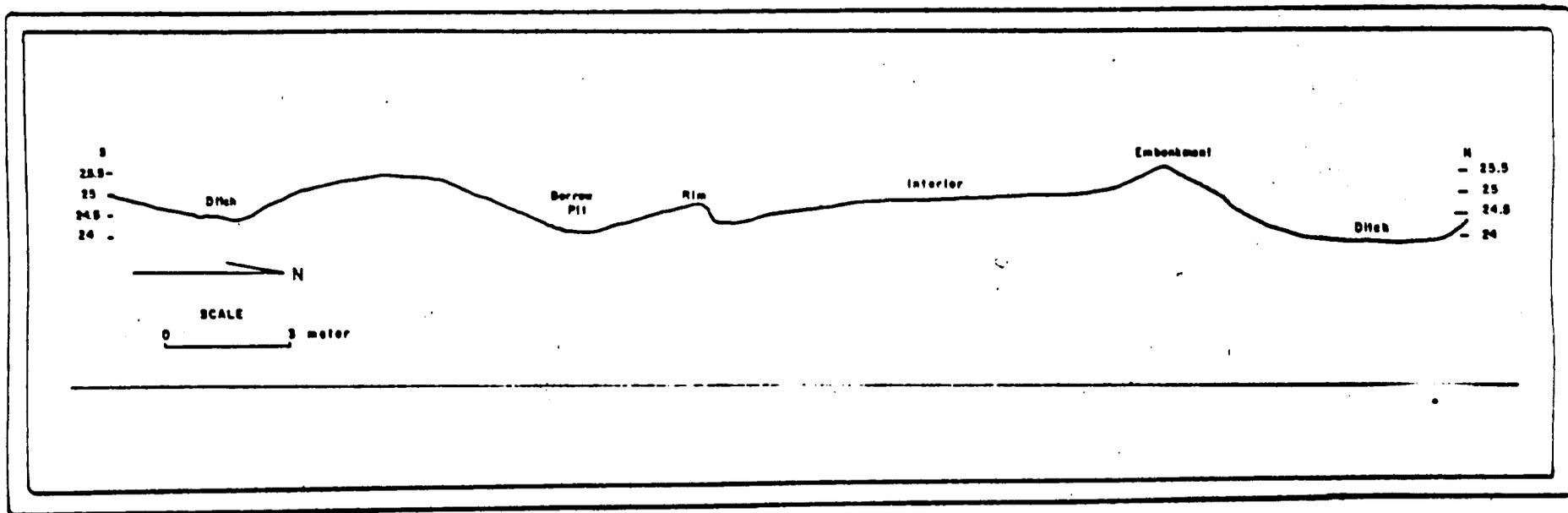
(a) = Reference: "To Fort Nonsense 3/8 mile"



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

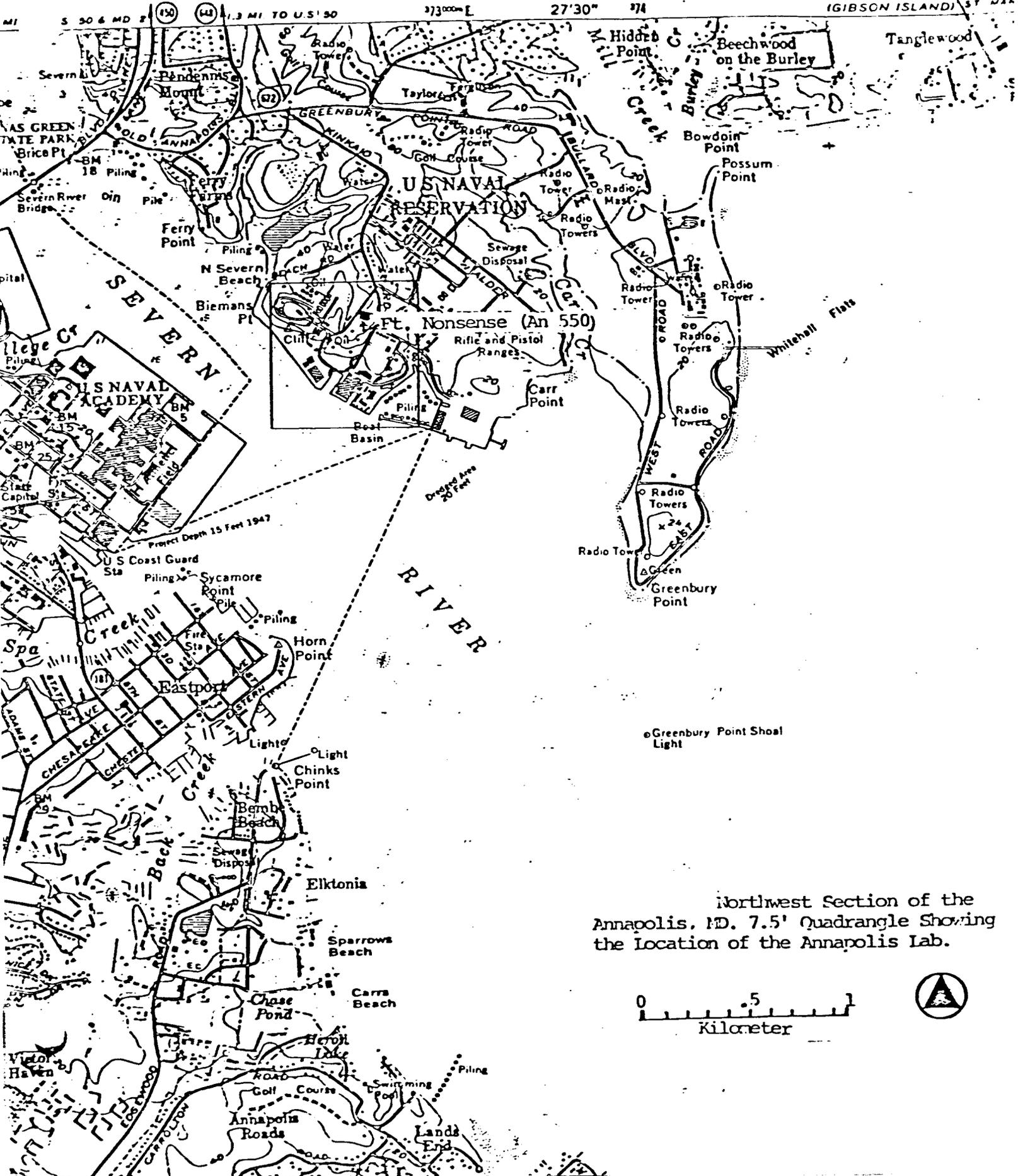


Fort Nonsense, NW to SE Cross-Section depicting NE Wall of Trench 2.  
 A = Without Excavation Units Depicted  
 B = With Excavation Units Depicted



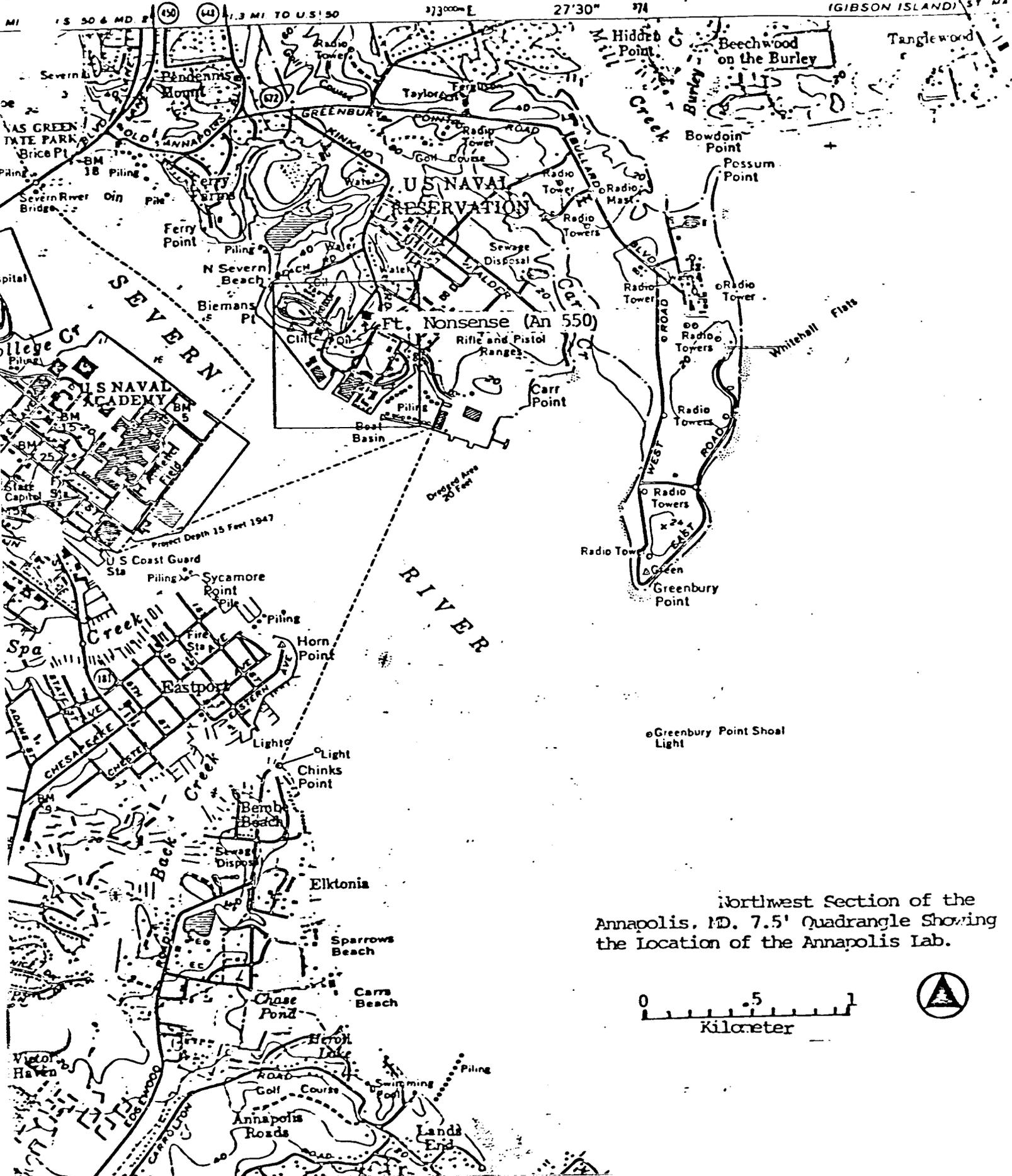
Fort Nonsense, North to South Cross-Section From 5.5 Meters West of Datum 2.

AA-80



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





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