



# NAURU PHOSPHATE CORPORATION

## MEMORANDUM

To : Operations Manager  
From : Ag. Curator Nauru Museum  
File : Nauru Museum  
Date : 3rd October 1996

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### PRESERVING HISTORIC SITES

The existing Pacific War era defences and earthworks found on Nauru are the among the most original and complete structures of their kind to be found in the Pacific region.

The true extent of these installations has not been fully appreciated until the continuing drought has caused the usual heavy undergrowth to die off and reveal the extensive networks of bunkers, gun positions and inter-connecting trenches.

These unique relics of the Japanese occupation of Nauru and of general WW2 Japanese defence doctrine should be preserved and eventually restored.

Once these installations are ready for show, tourists and sightseers will want to visit and explore these remnants of the past. As such these sites are valuable to Nauru as an exploitable resource and must not be destroyed.

Gradual deterioration continues however, for example, the recent fire above the airfield around the two six inch gun positions has caused some damage by burning away some of the supporting timbers and causing some stonework to collapse.

Any proposal to restore or rehabilitate certain wartime sites would need the approval of the Government. The need for work of this kind has not received recognition in the past. (see attachment “ A Broad Proposal for Development of Wartime Sites” forwarded in 1993)

It may be necessary to provide the incentive by embarking upon a small demonstration so that highly placed officials after seeing this work will then give their support towards the historic site preservation scheme.

I believe that the time is right to expend a little of NPC’s labour resources and materials and restore the northern-most six inch gun position above the airport. This will then illustrate the potential worth of this kind of work and possibly open the way for wholesome approval for the preservation of other historical sites around the island.

It is understood that the Government already has prohibitions in place to prevent the export and removal of historical material from Nauru. Such a ban and the apparent moratorium on disturbing historic sites is not enough to ensure the retention of these things for the future.

Already, pre-WW2 articles and artefacts are extremely scarce because no thought was given to keeping some of these things during the hectic hurried days of peak production prevailing in Nauru in the early post-war years.

Remaining evidence suggests that the BPC carried out an extensive destruction program of all Japanese installations and buildings during the immediate post-war reconstruction period. Indeed, some of the destroyed sites visible today would have required the operators to go out of their way in order to carry out their work of demolition.

Documentation does not exist for any of these sites that is detailed enough to allow replication in the future. Remaining sites are still sufficiently intact today to enable reasonably accurate restoration.

Therefore it is only reasonable to suggest that work commences as soon as possible while the areas under discussion are in their most exposed condition such as now.

If nothing is done and the next big drought (years later) again reveals the remaining installations, further weathering and damage may just be too advanced to provide the necessary guides for authenticity.

It may be appropriate at this point to illustrate some of the problems still facing sites and items on Nauru:

### DAMAGE INCURRED IN RECENT YEARS

#### 1) THE TOPSIDE HOSPITAL CAVE

This site about one kilometre from the Fields workshops was the celebrated natural sink-hole which extended some sixty feet down and was about 15 feet in diameter which led to a large underground cavern and many subsidiary tunnels. This cave had been fortified by walls and bunkers around the hilltop locality and had been ventilated by a large engine-driven fan. The cave floors and tunnels had been covered with timber planks and there were still remnants of hospital gear about. In about 1988, the then acting Mining Supervisor for obscure reasons, had ordered the sealing of this cave by pushing rocks and rubble into the sink-hole shaft with a bulldozer and filling it to ground level. This site will now require a tremendous amount of effort for restoration. It was one of the natural wonders of Nauru and was a feature of early visitor's itineraries.

#### 2) THE BUADA HOSPITAL BUNKER

This all concrete bunker comprised of an underground tunnel with an unknown number of rooms leading off from the main passage. It too contained old beds and other hospital equipment like the hospital cave. About 1980, the NPC authorities of the time decided that this bunker had to be closed. Explosives were used to demolish the tunnel immediately past the first room. Visible today are the steps leading down into the remaining short passage and the remaining single room left accessible. It would not be very difficult to excavate the damage and reconstruct the damaged section and to re-open the bunker for visitors again. Private land ownership would be an issue here but past contact with the land-owners did not show up any difficulties with regard to access.

### 3) COMMAND RIDGE

In the mid-eighties and again this year many large significant Tomano trees have been indiscriminately chopped down with chain saws for the very short-term effect of depriving returning Noddy birds of their roosts, this enabling the “Sportsman Bird Catchers” to easily snare their prey. The stupendous damage done to the environment by some people in pursuit of their activities is almost permanent.

This destruction of Nauru’s prime tree especially during prolonged droughts is extreme vandalism which is unfortunately right in the visiting public’s eye because whenever people go up to Command Ridge for a look at the guns they have to climb around all the fallen timber and then wonder at the logic of this destruction. This activity of cutting down trees in this way gives a bad image of Nauru overseas.

When the Telecom tower was being erected, one of the support footings for the stay wires was to be sited right on top of one of the bunkers that comprised part of the command bunker network. Work had proceeded to demolish this bunker in order to replace it with an equal-sized block of concrete. Last minute intervention at high level saved the bunker from destruction and the concrete block was put alongside.

There is a tremendous tourist potential for Command Ridge if organised development of this site goes ahead.

### 4) THE B-25 BOMBER WRECK

The remains of this aircraft have been more or less away from public view and therefore safe from vandalism until recently. The most significant large sections of this aircraft were in a fairly inaccessible area in the pinnacles but somehow the way in to this area has become known to people who had no interest in this historical material except to wreak as much damage as possible. This year vandals have wrenched one of the wings apart, rolled one of the engines onto the other wing causing more damage to both the wing and engine and then sprayed everything with bright yellow paint.

## PROPOSAL OF WORKS FOR NTH 6" AIRPORT GUN

- 1) Clear a defined area around this site.
- 2) Create detailed drawings of existing works and immediate surrounds.
- 3) Clear collapsed areas and areas of deliberate earth fill.
- 4) Reconstruct and restore stone-work and trenches.
- 5) Reconstruct and restore the gun itself.
- 6) Re-instate missing earth fill and carry out landscaping.
- 7) Improve access road in from Fields road.
- 8) Create and install proper signage.
- 9) Opening inspection of finished site by high officials for appraisal and comment.

A suggested work-force of about ten men with some skilled in concrete work would be able to carry out the bulk of the labouring work required. Gun restoration requirements would be met by the Machine Shop and if necessary the Boilermakers Shop. A crane will also be required occasionally for lifting, moving and positioning items. The Austin and Western crane should be appropriate. If this proposed task force is applied to this project full-time, then good progress should be apparent within a month of commencement and the whole job should be ready for opening for inspection within two months. The acting curator, that is myself will direct this work full-time for its duration.

I would welcome any comments you may have regarding this memo, especially if the proposed demo restoration project is given approval to proceed.

Stan Gajda  
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