

**FEDERAL HERITAGE BUILDINGS REVIEW OFFICE**

**BUILDING REPORT 89-203**

**TITLE:** Signal Hill, CFB Esquimalt (10 Buildings)  
Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt  
British Columbia

**SOURCE:** Ian Doull, Architectural History Branch

Building 542 (Former Submarine Mining Establishment Magazine,  
1904)<sup>1</sup>

**HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS**

This building served as the SMME magazine, and is directly associated with the coastal defence theme. It is the last surviving building of the establishment at Signal Hill; other structures associated with the system are Dockyard buildings D31, D32, and D34 (the former searchlight test room, engine room, and oil stores). Subsequent uses of the building are unknown, but were probably limited by its isolation and inaccessibility. It was recently used for storage, but is currently unoccupied. Building 542 was one of the last structures to be added to the SMME before it was deactivated in March 1905, and therefore represents the final phase of facilities development by the Royal Engineers at Signal Hill.

**ARCHITECTURE**

Building 542 is a one-storey flat-roofed structure, rectangular in plan but with a projecting entranceway at the southwest corner of the main (northern) elevation (Figures 2, 4). It has no distinguishing features except for the brick voussoirs which define the flat-arched window and door openings. The interior was presumably designed to suit the particular needs and safety requirements for the housing of explosives used in submarine mining. It consists of a large central room, with two small rooms partitioned off at each end (Figure 4). The western rooms each have exterior doors but are not interconnected with the principal interior space (Figure 3). The large room has an exterior door and an interconnecting doorway with the eastern rooms. The building displays competent craftsmanship, and remains in good condition. It was designed by the Royal Engineers.<sup>2</sup>

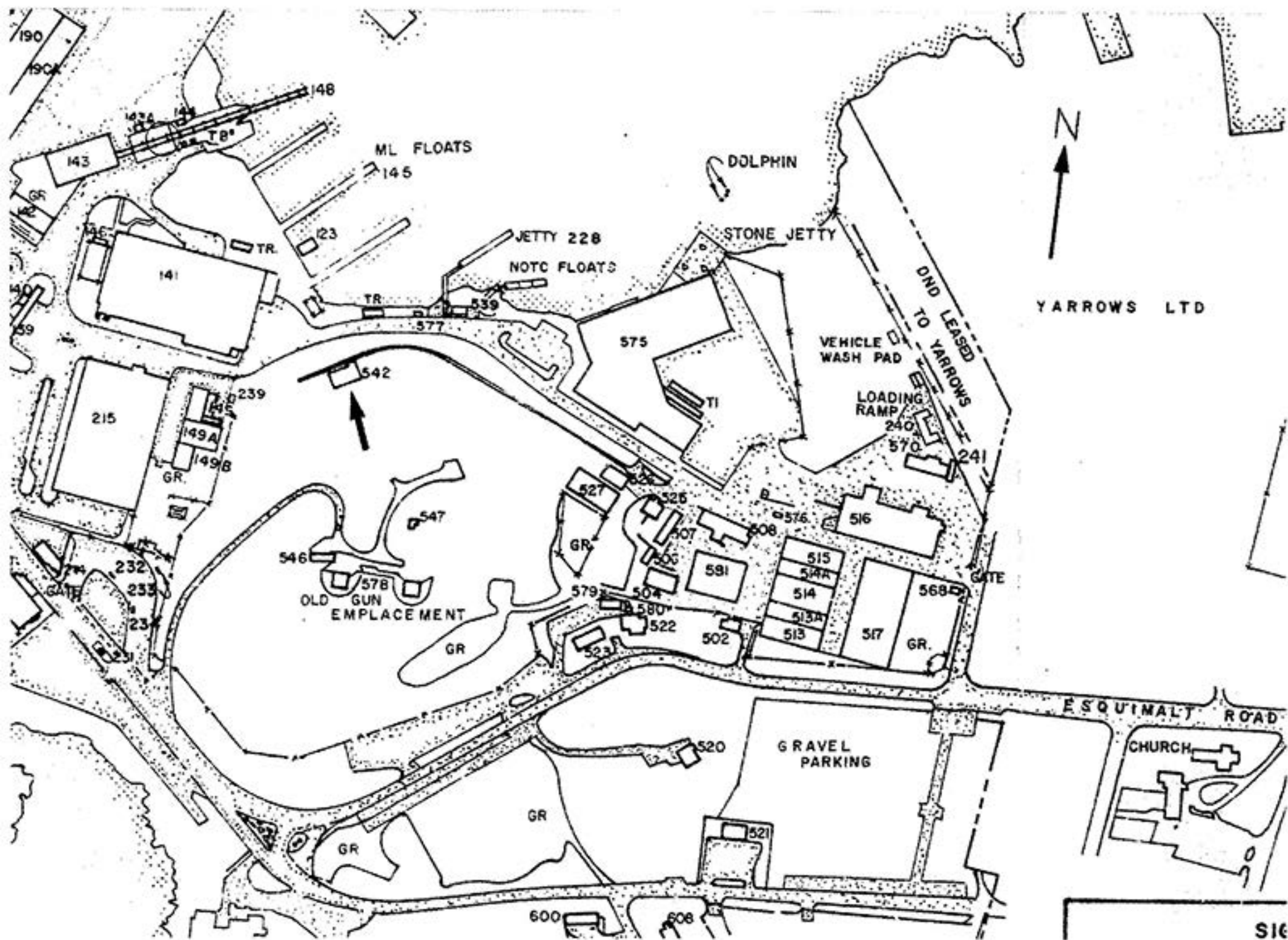
## ENVIRONMENT

When constructed, building 542 was surrounded by a spiked iron fence approximately eight feet high. A small, narrow-gauge, perhaps manually operated railway carried explosives from the northern side of the building down hill to the "connecting-up grounds" of the SMME, situated on the stone jetty.<sup>3</sup> The iron fence remains intact (Figure 5). All physical remains of the railway have vanished, but the trackbed is still visible in the undergrowth and still appears on modern base maps (Figure 1). The site is now densely overgrown with underbrush and mature trees. The building is isolated and virtually invisible on the northern slope of Signal Hill; its roof is minimally visible from the modern roadway which ascends the hill (not indicated on maps). Building 542 thus has no visible landmark qualities. It is, however, identified as a heritage structure in the 1982 survey,<sup>4</sup> and it is familiar to those knowledgeable about base history as a remnant of the SMME at Signal Hill.<sup>5</sup>

### Endnotes

- 1 Nelson and Oliver, CFB Esquimalt Military Heritage, p. 191.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 86-88.
- 3 See Figure 2, Part I; S.M. Ross, base development engineer, CFB Esquimalt, in conversation with the author, 3 May 1989.
- 4 Nelson and Oliver, CFB Esquimalt Military Heritage, pp. 90, 94.
- 5 S.M. Ross, in conversation with the author, 3 May 1989.

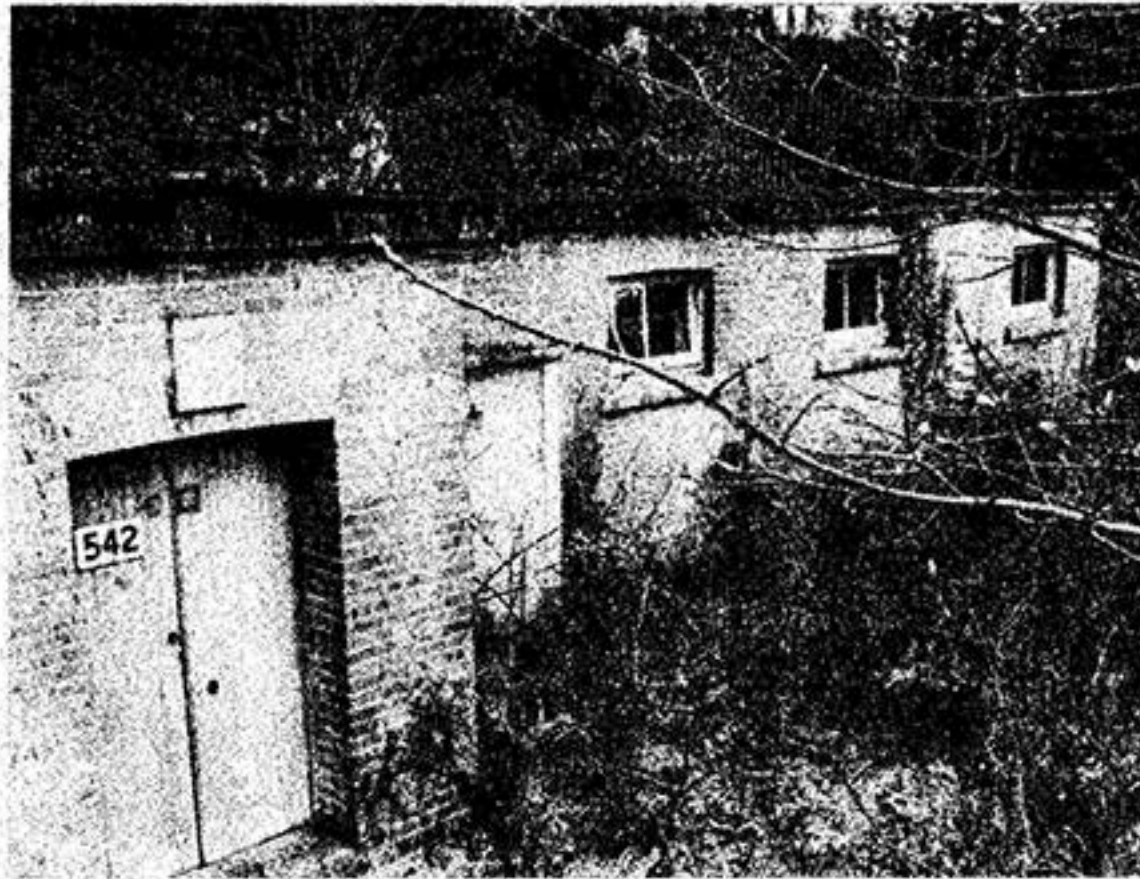
# SIGNAL HILL BUILDINGS, CFB ESQUIMALT, B.C.



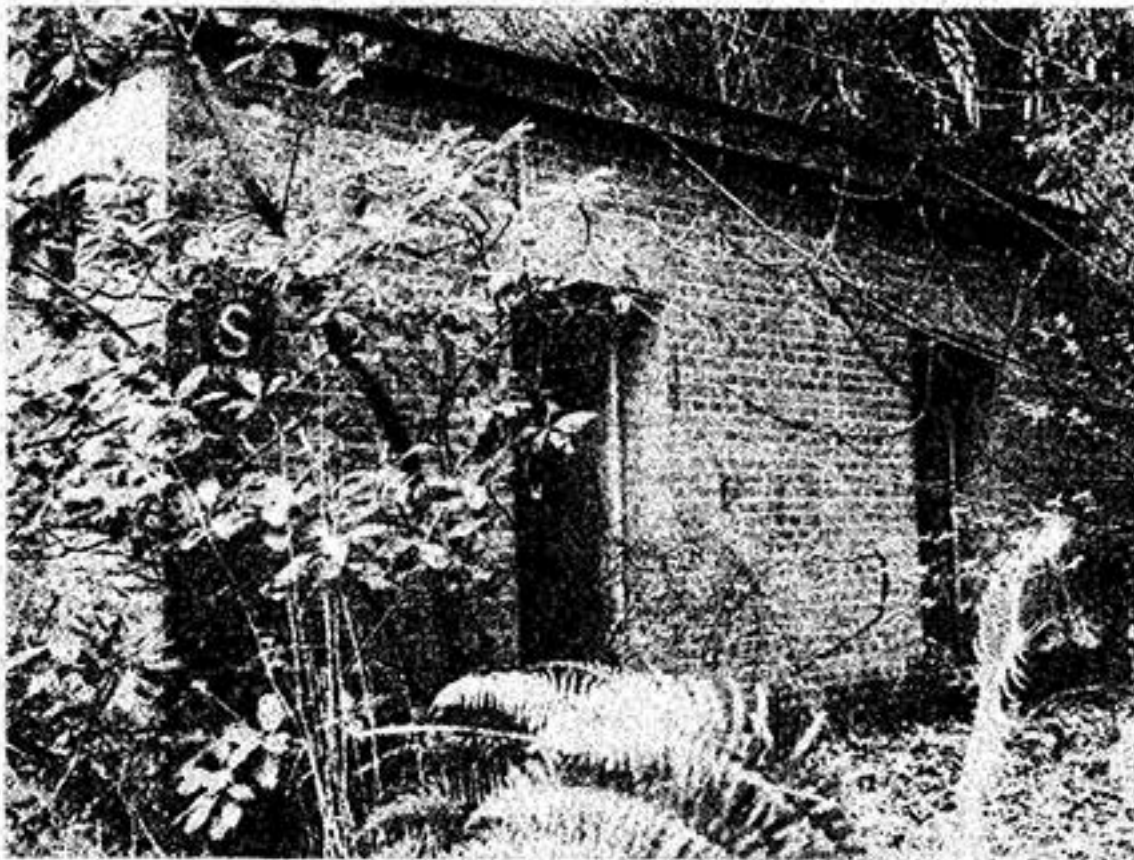
1 Building 542, former Submarine Mining Establishment magazine, location.  
(CFB Esquimalt, 1986.)



SIGNAL HILL BUILDINGS, CFB ESQUIMALT, B.C.

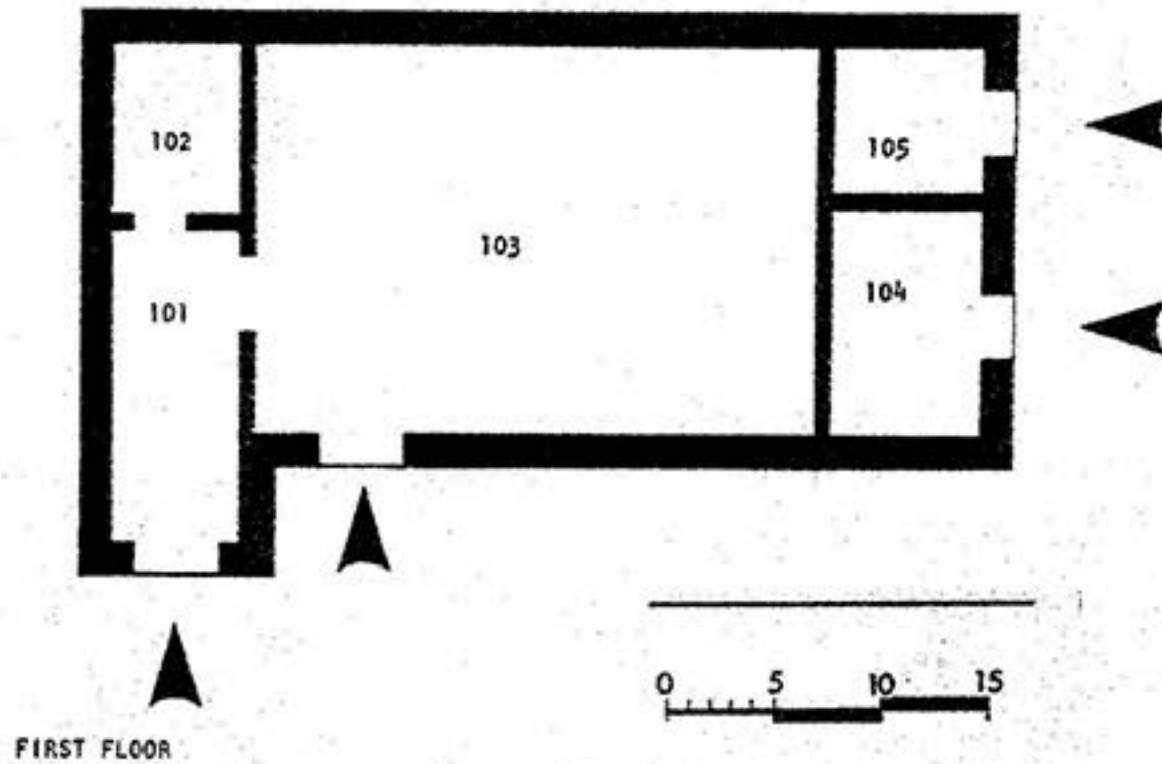


2 Building 542, main (north) elevation.  
(CIHB, Parks, 1974.)



3 Building 542, end (west) elevation.  
(CIHB, Parks, 1974.)

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4 Building 542, plan. (Stevenson Kellogg Report, Vol. 1, p. 679.)



5 Building 542, site features. (Ian Doull, AHB, Parks, 1989.)