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# ***From Naval Hospital to Research Lab***

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At the fag end of World War II, the British decided to construct a hospital at Mandapam Camp for Naval personnel injured in action. Due to the proximity to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) this area was a scene of action. They located a huge area adjacent to the Ceylon (Sri Lanka) government Quarantine Camp where passengers bound for Ceylon (Sri Lanka) were detained if not inoculated till they were cleared to take the ferry service between Dhanushkodi and Talaimannar (that existed till Dhanushkodi and adjacent areas were washed away after a tidal wave in December 1964).

The British constructed the Naval Hospital on a war footing. It was built of coral stone, the only local material available. All the old buildings along the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay were constructed with coral stone, including the famous Rameswaram Temple and the church built by the Dutch at Tuticorin in 1750. Now, construction of buildings with coral stone is banned to conserve coral reefs.

The Labourers worked day and night with the help of petromax lights to

complete the building in time. The hospital consisted of four long wards connected in the middle by a passage. A portion of the third ward was used as an operation theatre. There were separate cubicles for the doctors and nurses. It was used as a hospital only for a very short time, when some injured persons were brought for treatment. Fortunately, World War II ended in 1945 after the surrender of the Japanese. After World War II ended, the buildings were vacated and abandoned and taken over by the CPWD.

The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute came into existence in the Zoology Department of Madras University in 1947. Based on the recommendationns of Dr.Seymore Sewell, who was the Director of the Zoological Survey of India at the time, Mandapam Camp was selected as the headquarters of CMFRI. The naval buildings were renovated and remodelled to suit the needs of a research laboratory. Later, when the Institute became a permanent

establishment, staff quarters were constructed.

The research laboratory, which was under the control of Ministry of Agriculture, was shifted to Mandapam Camp sometime in 1948. The research institute came under the administrative control of Indian Council of Agricultural Research for better co-ordination and greater autonomy, in 1967.

The headquarters of the institute was finally shifted to Cochin in 1971 since Mandapam camp was found to be too remote for a headquarters. Centre of the institute is located in the same buildings at Mandapam Camp. One of the wards was converted as a museum and a new building was running seawater for the aquarium was constructed. Because of the coral reefs and the rich fauna and flora associated with them, Mandapam camp is considered one of the best places for marine research.

Sadly there is no plaque to indicate the history of these buildings.