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Port Royal Sound Survey: Results from the 2004 Field Season

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Maritime Research Division

Port Royal Sound Survey: Results from the 2004 Field Season

By James D. Spirek and Christopher F. Amer

The search continued in 2004 to discover the remains of *Le Prince*, a 16th-century French corsair, and other shipwrecks in Port Royal Sound. Funds to continue the project were obtained by a Robert L. Stephenson Archaeological Research Fund grant (RLSARF), a SCIAA in-house grant honoring a past director. The grant was slated to support three weeks of remote sensing survey operations and one week of ground-truthing. Problems with the boat engines, however, caused us to cancel dive operations for the foreseeable future. Instead, we diverted the remainder of the grant balance to retain the services of two researchers to transcribe and translate Spanish and French documents related to *Le Prince*. An additional influx of funds from the grant also allowed us to conduct a non-disturbance site investigation of the Station Creek Wreck (38BU2080).

Marine Remote Sensing Operations

For three weeks in August the MRD surveyed for the remains of *Le Prince* and other shipwrecks in the main offshore priority block. A couple of secondary areas were also surveyed due to inclement or deteriorating weather conditions (Fig. 1). In the offshore area, we covered another 3.2 square miles of bottomland. Currently, we have completed about three-quarters of the 26-square mile priority block. Several anomalies were detected and prioritized for diving, but engine problems caused us to cancel dive operations for the season. Providentially, we resolved this issue in early 2005 with the purchase of two 115-hp Mercury four-stroke engines. We look forward to years of reliability and fuel efficiency with our two new "employees" as we continue our remote sensing ventures in Port Royal Sound and around the state.

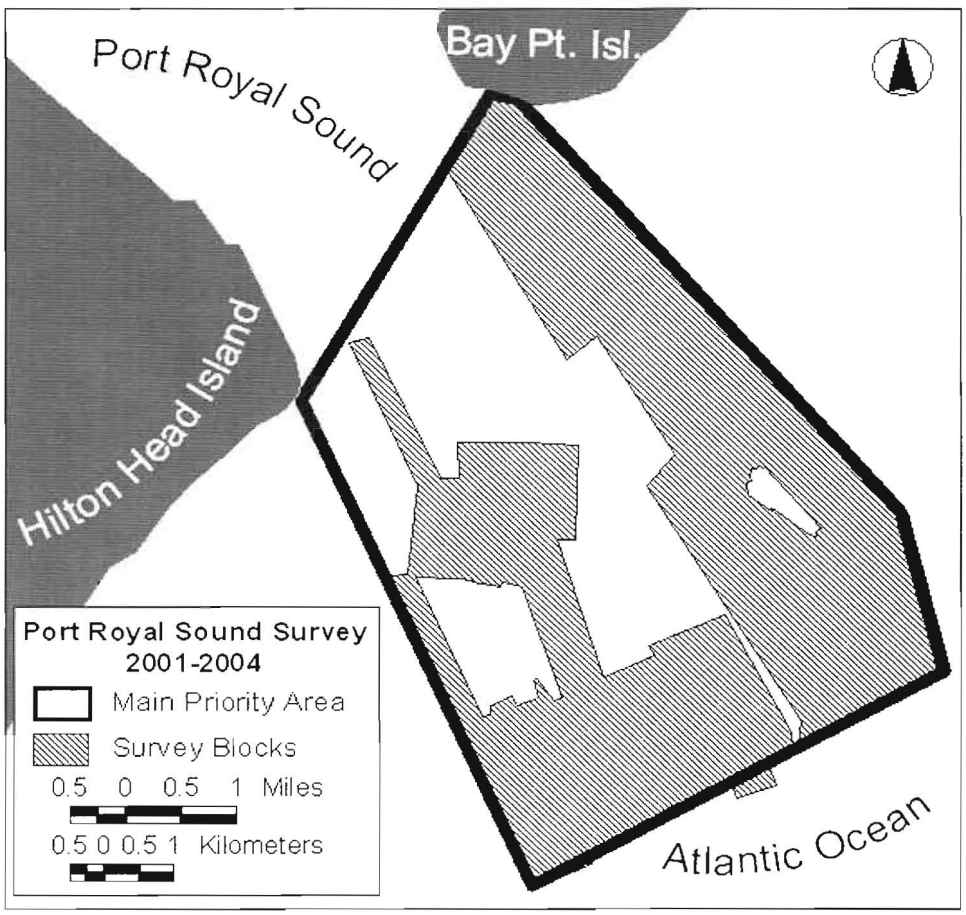

Fig. 1: Map of main priority survey block and area covered as of 2004 (*SCIAA graphic*).

A change in survey protocols relating to the deployment of the magnetometer sensor occurred in this portion of the main survey block. Typically, when working in shallower waters, that is, from 25 feet to "do you think we can scrape by" depths, we operate at speeds between six to seven knots and float the magnetometer about 50 feet behind the boat. Working along the western edge of the Great North Breakers out to the dredged shipping channel, the water is deeper, ranging around 30 to 50 feet. Working in deeper water, we added a 10-pound weight to the magnetometer sensor and dropped our speed to

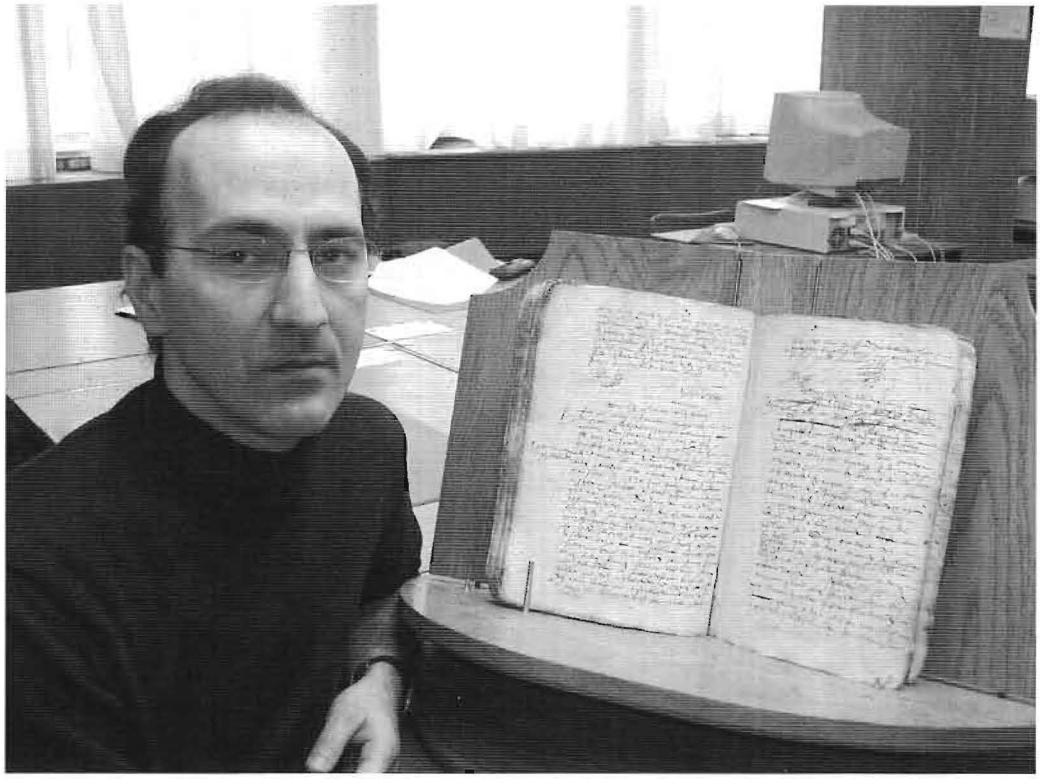

Fig. 2: Dr. Bernard Allaire with a notarial ledger containing *Le Prince* related entries (*Photo by B. Allaire*).

between four to five knots and let out a substantial amount of cable. Decreased speed, increased weight, and lengthened cable permitted the magnetometer sensor to sink deeper in the water and closer to the bottom. Thereby allowing the sensor to better detect smaller magnetic anomalies possibly missed if floating the device on the surface and subsequently further from the magnetic source. The decrease in speed consequently affected the amount of survey coverage for the season, but the desire to leave no magnetic beacon undetected necessitated this change in survey parameters. We do have a theoretical magnetic signature in mind for *Le Prince* and other wooden shipwrecks, but there are too many cases of anomalous magnetic deviations to simply ignore anomalies that do not appear at first light to fit our preconceived notions.

Regarding work in the secondary survey areas, one block was simply prospecting along a navigational hazard Parris Island Spit, while the other one was related to a Civil War usage area. The Civil War survey block was centered around the location of Seabrook Landing on Hilton Head Island. During the war, the Army Quartermaster's office operated a number of vessels from this landing. We hoped to detect the remains of several Army chartered vessels that are known to have been abandoned in the general vicinity due to their unsound hulls or worn-out machinery. Located on Skull Creek, the area was difficult to negotiate due to the presence of modern docks and shallow waters. Several anomalies were detected in this area and await future visual inspection by archaeologists.

Le Prince Document Translations

As mentioned above, due to our boat engine problems lasting into the foreseeable future, we opted to expend the remainder of the RLSARF grant award to translate French and Spanish documents related to *Le Prince* already in our possession. Dr. Karen Paar, a SCIAA Research Affiliate, translated several Spanish documents detailing *Le Prince* actions in the Caribbean and operations to hunt down the survivors around Santa Elena. One document, a detailed report by Don Cristóbal de Eraso, captain-general of the Indies Armada in 1576, mentions encountering *Le Prince* several times and chasing after the corsair, apparently to no avail. He also noted an unusually high number of powerful and well-armed corsairs of various nationalities in the Caribbean that year.

Using RLSARF, augmented with funds from the Underwater Archaeology Research Fund, we contracted with Dr. Bernard Allaire to photograph notarial documents related to *Le Prince* at the Archives départementales de Seine Maritime located in Rouen, France. (Fig. 2). These documents were ones that he had previously located for us four years ago on a previous RLSARF grant. Besides photographing the 28 documents, he also transcribed and translated them into modern French and English. The majority of the documents record the two principals of the voyage, Matteo Fapoco, owner of *Le Prince*, and Oratio Roux, captain of the corsair, as they assembled the funds necessary to embark on the 1575 voyage from Le Havre to Africa and the New World. Funds were

used to supply the vessel with food, drink, trade merchandise, and other necessities. In return for their loans, the investors, ranging from hotel keepers to the Queen's secretary, received a percentage of the voyage's profit based on their investment. Currently, the main strategy of the research project is to find the remains of the corsair. The opportunity, however, to translate the documents at hand and learn more about *Le Prince*, both from French and Spanish archival resources, will prove beneficial in the future by helping to interpret the archaeological remains once found, and by serving as a spur to look for other *Le Prince* related documents in Spain, France, and elsewhere.

Investigation of Station Creek Wreck (38BU2080)

In September 2004, we returned to the Station Creek Wreck with the objective of preparing a non-disturbance site plan of the vessel's remains. A graduate of the Sport Diver Archaeological Management Program's Field Training Course, Bill Floyd, also volunteered to assist us in our work for the week. Basically, we wanted to determine the length and breadth of the wreck site, amount and type of exposed structure, and associated artifact assemblage. Strong currents, especially noticeable during the low to high tide cycle, and poor visibility hampered recording operations, but did not thwart the objective of creating a preliminary site plan.

The longitudinal axis of the vessel is oriented along the creek shoreline, with the presumed bow pointed out towards Port Royal Sound. Resting on the slope of the creek bottom, the starboard side of the wreck near the marsh lies in approximately one meter of water, while the port side toward the channel is in about six meters of water, at low tide. The stem post of the vessel, i.e., the bow, was exposed at the forward edge of the ballast pile, but aft, the stern post was not located under the ballast or mud. The measured distance between the exposed forward structural element and end of the ballast mound was 27.4 meters (90 feet). Several exposed areas of the frames helped to determine the widest exposed breadth of the vessel at approximately 9.1 meters (30 feet). A number of artifacts were encountered on the site including a pulley sheave, several glass and ginger beer bottles, copper and iron fasteners, and some copper stripping. We also located a couple of large, amorphous iron concretions that most likely account for the magnetic anomalies detected by the magnetometer during the initial survey of the creek.

We believe the remains in the creek represent one of the vessel's used as a floating machine shop by Federal naval forces during the Civil War. As a U.S. navy shipwreck, the site is protected by Federal law which prohibits the disturbance or removal of artifacts from the site. Hopefully, with these preliminary measurements and the identification of wood species of different elements of the hull, we can determine through archival research whether the Station Creek Wreck remains represent the old New England whaler, *Edward* or *India*. We hope to continue our investigations at the site by locating the stern section of the vessel and by ground-truthing other nearby anomalies in the creek.

We wish to thank the trustees of the RLSARF grant for the funds to continue the Port Royal Sound Survey, specifically to conduct research into *Le Prince* and the Station Creek Wreck. If you would like to help sponsor additional field work or archival research activities for the continuing investigation of *Le Prince* and other shipwrecks in Port Royal Sound, please consider a tax-deductible contribution to the Archaeological Research Trust (ART) earmarked for the project. For additional information about the project, contact James Spirek (spirek@sc.edu) or Christopher Amer (amerc@sc.edu) or reach us by phone at (803) 777-8170.

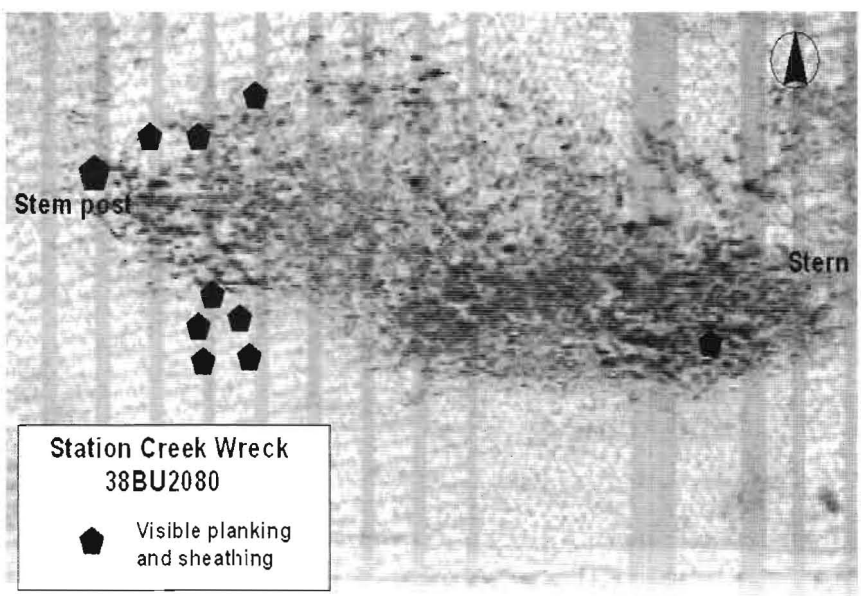

Fig. 3: Extent of visible wooden structure and exterior metal sheathing at the Station Creek Wreck (*SCIAA graphic*)