Shipwrecks of South Carolina

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SHIPWRECKS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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Slide 1
SHIPWRECKS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Slide 2
The South Carolina coast is 211 miles from North Carolina to Georgia; more than
double that counting the numerous bays and inlets. The sea depth rarely exceeds 30
feet, in places out to 5 miles with many treacherous and shifting sandbars on which
countless ships have met their end through grounding, foundering and sinking.

Slide 3
Additionally, there are over 3000 miles of inland waterways and rivers in which water
craft from prehistoric times…

Slide 4
…through to the present have been lost or abandoned.

Slide 5
Since 16th century, thousands of ships have visited the coast for exploration,
colonization, war and commerce. Probably of the earliest vessel lost on our coastline
was a Spanish Nao lost near Georgetown in 1526 during a failed attempt by the
Spanish to found the first settlement in the New World. Like many shipwrecks
known to us by research, the Capitana has yet to be found.

Slide 6
(Browns Ferry Vessel, Hunley, Chattooga Canoe) Some wrecked or abandoned
vessels were the subject of recovery operations and can be studied in the leisure of a
laboratory or museum surrounding.

Slide 7
(S.S. Lawrence) Some ships are just too large to recover and must be studied by
other means.
Slide 8
(Malcolm Boat) Still others have been recorded in situ and reconstructed on paper.

Slide 9
One thing all these watercraft have in common, whether on the beach, embedded in a riverbank, or underwater, is that they are in state waters and therefore managed by the state.

Slide 10
That includes sites that are believed by some to contain valuable items (treasure). But that is another story for another day.

Slide 11
Among the countless wrecked watercraft in State waters lies a body of naval and other military vessels spanning the years from the American Revolution to modern times.
- Many of these wrecks are still owned by the Department of the Navy, which maintains custody of all U.S. Navy vessels not specifically relinquished by an act of Congress no matter where they are located in the world and Confederate craft.
- Navy has turned to the states as co-stewards to help in developing management plans for these national treasures.

Slide 12
During the mid-1990s, SCIAA’s Maritime Research Division teamed up with federal agencies (Naval Heritage Command and NPS) to survey the remains of U.S.S. Housatonic and to record and recover the Confederate submarine H.L. Hunley. Since then, we have received funding for more surveys to study the presence of these military craft throughout the state.

Slide 13
As the survey methodologies advanced from project to project, so did the survey technology. Note the difference between the three hefty computers use in 2003 to drive our remote sensing array (on the left) and the laptop console of last year (lower right).

Slide 14
Based on our work with the NHC on Hunley/Housatonic and with our equipment, the NHC requested that we assist them in inventorying and assessing the Navy wrecks in SC waters and provided us with a grant from the U.S. Department of Defense.
- Developed contextual history of U.S. naval presence in South Carolina, then individual ship histories pre and post sinking.
- NHC database showed 96 Navy-owned wrecks in the state. Our research concluded that some of those were Confederate blockade-runners and foreign vessels, leaving 46 wrecks owned by the U.S. Navy spanning a time from the Revolution to WWII.

Slide 15
Earliest U.S. Navy (Continental Navy) vessel is known to have been lost in SC waters was the *Queen of France*, purchased from France in 1777 and scuttled in the Cooper River in an attempt to block the British invasion of Charleston in 1779.

**Slide 16**
After the Revolution (in which Britain had a fairly active role), a change of U.S. policy favored coastal and harbor defense, a policy that endured until after the War of 1812. During that time, the Navy built and acquired numerous shallow-draught vessels, such as gunboats, used to patrol the coast and the inland waterways, leading to much grounding in the shoal waters of the coast, and foundering in the fickle ocean offshore.

**Slide 17**
During the War Between The States the dominant mission of the Union vessels present in Charleston, the South’s largest port, and throughout the South, was to create an effective blockade and deny the Confederates their trade with Europe. The Union had a prodigious navy, which forced the Confederate into a defensive posture for the duration of the conflict, resulting in numerous ship losses on both sides of the conflict. The large and continuous presence of the Union vessels off Charleston required also a readily available coaling, victualing, and repair depot to service the cranky iron and steam vessels of war that had been developed for the conflict. And so, Port Royal Sound, some 60 miles southwest of Charleston, was taken in November 1861, mounting simultaneous attacks on forts Walker (Hilton Head), and Beauregard (Bay Point), and became the headquarters for the South Atlantic Blockade Squadron (Virginia to Key West), and as a staging point for launching offensive operations.

**Slide 18**
As you have already seen in Jim’s talk, in 1861 and 62, the Union forces attempted to close Charleston Harbor by scuttling 30 old New Bedford whaling vessels loaded with granite blocks across the two channels leading into the harbor. The “Stone fleets” as they came to be known, served their purpose for but a brief time before disintegrating to piles of rock ballast on the seafloor.

**Slide 19**
After the War Between the States, the U.S. naval activities decreased and coastal defense, once again, took precedence. The federal presence in Port Royal Sound continued with the development of a naval base on Parris Island, featuring a large dry dock. However, rivalry between Charleston and Port Royal, and the fact the Port Royal facility was unsuitable for handling large battleship due to rapid and intense silting of the dry-dock and approaches, led to the development the Charleston Navy Base in 1901.

**Slide 20**
The Charleston Navy Base operated successfully through two World Wars, the Depression, and a Cold War, only to be shut down in 1993 by BRAC (Base Closure and Realignment Commission) as a means of reducing military infrastructure and saving operating and maintenance costs.
Slide 21
During the post Civil War years, only 2 U.S. Navy vessels are known to have sunk in SC waters, U.S.S. Hector (pictured here), a fuel/freight carrying collier, which sank during a gale in 1916, and a WWII patrol vessel that ran aground in 1942 near Charleston.

Slide 22
SO, in a nutshell, what do we know about U.S. Navy vessels lost in South Carolina waters?
- Most, 44 (94%), were lost in the vicinity of Charleston during the Antebellum Period (1785-1865), including 40 vessels lost during the Civil War.
- Scuttling caused most losses, while 8 grounded, and 5 were lost to enemy action. Of course, what we are really seeing here is data being totally dominated by the 30 Stone Fleet ships scuttled off Charleston.

THE SURVEY
Slide 23
Four main areas in a 120-mile stretch with Charleston central. Three projects. We begin our survey in Charleston Harbor, the jewel in the state since its founding. Most wrecks buried beneath several meters if fluvial deposits. Methodology-approximate locations known from historical and contemporary sources. Survey blocks set up encompassing all known locations, 15 to 50-meter lanes spacing towing mag and side-scan, and gathering depth data.

Slide 24
While each of the 5 wrecks surveyed met their end from different causes, the post-depositional history of each site is similar-contemporary salvage, demolition and burial. For example, U.S.S. Keokuk, a 159-foot long, 660-ton double turreted experimental ironclad, was hit by more than 90 shots when the vessel ventured too close to Ft. Sumter, sank with no loss of life. Confederate crews salvaged 2 11-inch Dahlgrens and other items, dismantled turrets. In 1874, the wreck was further demolished during a drive to clear the approaches to southern ports. Not surprising that the magnetic signature of the wreck indicated scattered wreckage.

Slide 25
U.S.S. Patapsco, a 190-foot, 1875-ton single turret ironclad, suffered a similar fate when it hit a torpedo (mine) on January 15, 1865, sinking in less than a minute taking 62 crew to the bottom of the harbor. Patapsco was Passaic Class. Construction of similar later class of ironclad shown here.

Slide 26
However, Patapsco sank near the main shipping channel, allowing enough scouring of the site for some wreck components to be picked up on sonar records.

Slide 27
Only ironclad that we actually “saw” (BLACK WATER). Bow.
Slide 28

Slide 29
Components investigated suggest only the lowest reaches of the hull extant. **Note dredge pipe across hull (wavy horizontal object lying across the center of the upper left image).**

Slide 30
Second area of survey was Port Royal Sound, lying 60 miles southwest of Charleston and the site of Admiral DuPont’s headquarters for the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

Slide 31
Federals built docks for supplying the fleet and the army. Along Hilton Head shore, where T-dock was located. Mag hits, T-dock and 1870-shoreline georectified.

Slide 32
Station Creek (Machine Shop Creek). Protected waterway for moving vessels to St. Helena Sound.

Slide 33
Admiral Dupont petitions Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles for a repair facility to expedite field repairs to the cranky ironclads and gunboats of the South Atlantic Blockade Squadron. Floating repair facility, buildings shipped in and placed atop two whalers destined for the Stone Fleet-U.S.S. Edward (340Ton) and U.S.S. India (366 Ton). Ironclad repairs start January 1863. By fall 1863, ships in bad shape. India was lifted off piles by unusually high tide, recovered and broken up for machinery. Edward was abandoned, in sinking condition, near dock. Floating depot used for 2 years until foundry moved ashore to a small midden. Dock built.

Slide 34
Survey along shore in front of midden revealed numerous magnetic hits. Magnetic and acoustic contacts (Ballast piles).

Slide 35 and 36
We investigated one ballast pile (SC2-s1) 28 meters long by 12 meters wide with large magnetic disturbances beneath the huge granite rocks…And containing ship timbers, mostly pine frames 23cm square, 7.5cm ceiling planking, and 1.6 cm pine planking with copper sheathing, fastened with treenails. All timbers exhibit severe teredo damage. One copper drift, found near one end of the rock pile, is 4-1/2 feet long and likely fastened four timbers together. Scattered amongst, and around the ballast pile are numerous ships fittings (egg. pulley sheaves) and artifacts from the Civil War period.

Slide 37
The wreck, aptly named the Station Creek Wreck (38BU2080) is probably the remains of U.S.S Edward.

**Slide 38**
Third Area-Ashepoo/ Combahee/Edisto (ACE Basin) Rivers. Similar to Charleston methodology, looking for and confirming location and situation of known wrecks. ACE Basin scene of combined operations to harass the Confederates and try to break the railroad supply line between Savannah, Georgia and Charleston.

**Slide 39**
*Dia Ching*- New York built in 1862, 170 feet, 520 T screw steamer, single propeller driven by two engines. Union gunboat shelled, from Tar Bluff in January 1865, went aground here, abandoned after being hit over 30 times, and set afire. Located magnetically at downstream end of debris trail. Deeply buried, so water probing-2 to 2 ½ meters down.

**Slide 40**
Almost a year earlier, U.S.S. *Boston*, a 215 foot long, 574 T transport steamer, was sunk in Edisto River May 1864. Built in New York in 1850. *Boston* was sent up Edisto River at night to deposit troops to flank the enemy. An unreliable pilot took the vessel behind enemy lines, and after being hailed by Confederate sentry, tried to turn around and grounded. Hit by over 70 shells, 2 going through boiler, set afire, burning to death 75 cavalry horses and 8 team horses. Only 13 men killed or wounded. Contemporary salvage of engine, and one of the few naval vessels subjected to treasure hunting-1980s by Florida salvager, who recovered personal items, horse tack and artifacts positively identifying the wreck as the *Boston*.

**Slide 41**
Mag results (left). Wreck in less than 2 meters (7 feet) of water. Side-scan sonar results (right). Frames, 0.5 meters (18 inches) apart, keelsons, bulkheads, all sticking up to 1 meter above the sediments.

**Slide 42**
Winyah Bay/Pee Dee region, 60 miles NE of Charleston, to record what we could of U.S.S. *Harvest Moon*, 193 foot long side-wheel steamer, Admiral Dahlgren’s flagship that hit a mine and sank in March 1, 1865. Sank in minutes in 4.6 m of water. Came into Georgetown to see how troops were doing after taking Georgetown. And to locate remains of other Civil War vessels.

**Slide 43**
*Harvest Moon* was the easiest of the wrecks to find. Big smokestack is very prominent. But silting has reduced water depth to less than a foot at low tide. Therefore, tidal windows to work on the flat underwater mud plane. Double tubed stack, nearly 5 feet in diameter. Inner tube over a meter (44 inches) in diameter. Riveted iron plates, bolted atop one another. With horizontal iron tube (condenser) at mud level and a cowling that defines the upper deck level. Side-scan reveals only smokestack.

**Slide 44**
Mag data (yellow lines) confirms a dispersed pattern left from the extensive salvage of the wreck that occurred for a month after the sinking. Probing took several days; with 122 probe locations, working off Jon boat and C-Hawk for higher platform. Wreck hull, machinery, and debris encountered from .6 meters (2 feet) to 4.1 meters (13.5 feet) below sediment. Probe locations and identifications-continuous wood and iron contacts gave orientation of vessel, and approximate length of hull. A wider swath of magnetic hits reflects the extensive contemporary salvage that occurred as salvage vessels came alongside to take away recovered items and large, non-salvageable objects were dragged to the side and left.

**Slide 45**

Further up the Pee Dee River, which empties into Winyah Bay near Georgetown another drama had been unfolding during the war. The Confederate gunboat *Peedee* was built at the Mars Bluff Navy Yard and after a very brief career of only a few days was scuttled two weeks after Georgetown was taken by Union forces. I won’t go into details as I report on this project at last year’s conference. Suffice it to say that parts of the vessel had been salvaged over the years.

**Slide 46 and 47**

We relocated the remains of the scuttled gunboat and conducted an excavation at the Navy Yard a couple of miles upstream, recovering evidence of the construction and operation of the vessel.

**Slide 48**

Many of our survey projects (certainly those you have seen here) have focused on the naval and military aspects of the submerged cultural heritage of the state. This has as much to do with the available funding, which of necessity, comes from external sources, as from the programmatic direction of the Maritime Research Division. These projects have afforded us an opportunity to develop our multi-faceted approach to locating, recording, and assessing sites, which is being applied to all site and survey investigations as funding allows.
SHIPWRECKS OF SOUTH CAROLINA
Welcome Aboard: Global’s Mission is dedicated to the “...finding and preserving of historical, cultural and marine resources. Our research is sound. Therefore, “We go...because we know.”
SHIPWRECKS OF SOUTHERN CAROLINA