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Hunley Recovery Set for July

By Christopher F. Amer

Plans are now set for the recovery of the submarine *H. L. Hunley*. The South Carolina *Hunley* Commission met on Thursday, February 10, 2000, to review presentations by the principal groups involved in this effort. Audio visual presentations detailed the work conducted to date on the project, the current state of funding and fundraising, the present status of the conservation laboratory (Building 255 on the old Charleston Navy Base), and the proposed recovery strategy.

Currently, the project has generated more than five million dollars, or a little over one-third of the estimated 16 million dollars needed to ensure curation of this historic boat in perpetuity. Refurbishment of Building 255 is in full swing and the contractors predict a late April completion date for the facility. Oceaneering, the company

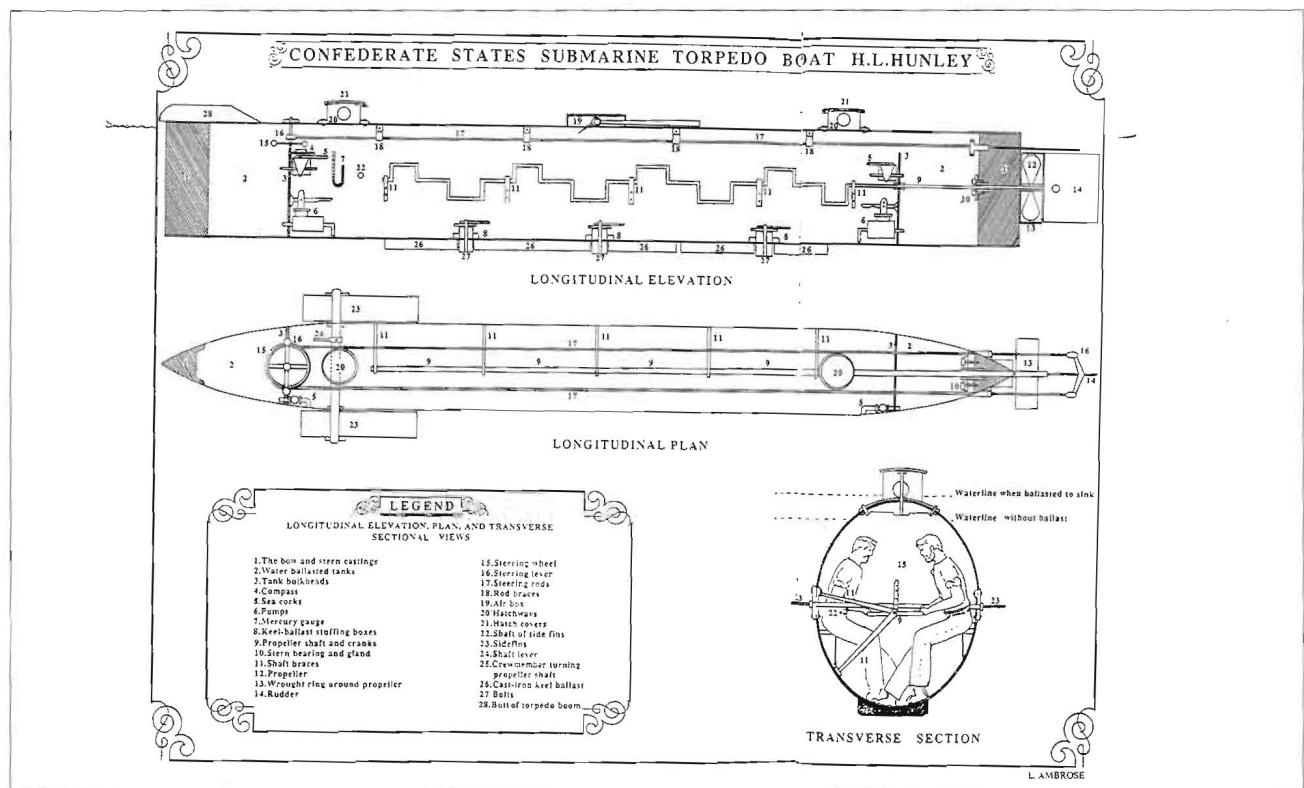
that recently successfully recovered Gus Grissom's Liberty Bell capsule from the sea floor, gave a highly detailed accounting of their strategy to excavate, lift, and transport the *Hunley* to the conservation facility complete with a computer animation of the entire process. Following the presentations, the commission voted to move ahead with the plans.

Current plans include a joint SCIAA, *Hunley* Center, Naval Historical Center, National Park Service, and Oceaneering excavation and preparation of the site during the latter part of May and June with the lift occurring in July. Analysis of the hull and excavation of the interior of the boat will proceed over the following year, with conservation continuing for an estimated five or six years. The remains of the third crew, which we assume to be still inside the submarine, will be buried

at Magnolia Cemetery beside the graves of Horace Hunley and his crew (the second crew) and the five sailors exhumed from beneath The Citadel (the first crew) last year.

A primary consideration throughout this project has been the safe recovery and preservation of the *Hunley* and its occupants. To that end, in November the *Hunley* Center sponsored a symposium to explore the latest techniques and strategies for dealing with artifacts of this magnitude and complexity. Top metals conservators and archaeologists from around the world were brought to Charleston to apply their expertise to the project. The recommendations of the group are being incorporated into the excavation, recovery, and conservation plans.

When conservation of the hull and artifacts is complete, the *Hunley* will be moved to a yet-to-be-built wing of The Charleston Museum.



Drawing of the torpedo boat *H. L. Hunley*. (Courtesy L. Ambrose)