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Jonathan Leader
University of South Carolina - Columbia, leaderj@mailbox.sc.edu

Randy Burbage

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Humanitarian Exhumation at the Citadel's Johnson Hagood Stadium
By Jonathan M. Leader and Randy Burbage

Twenty-six Confederate sailors and marines, and the remains of a three-year-old child, were carefully recovered from under the floor of the Johnson Hagood Stadium last June and July of 1999. On November 12, 1999, they were reburied in the Soldier’s Ground at Magnolia Cemetery, Charleston, South Carolina. How the people came to be buried under the floor of the stadium and how the Charleston community came together to rescue them is a tale of dedication, perseverance, and luck. It is also a story of community relationship and interdependency.

When South Carolina seceded from the Union, the Charleston Mariner's home donated their burial ground to the state for use as a military cemetery. It was used by the Confederacy until the capitulation of Charleston in 1865. The majority of
the war dead in the area were sent to the larger cemeteries, such as Magnolia Cemetery Soldier's Ground. But a significant number of Confederate and Union dead are still to be found in smaller, less centralized cemeteries scattered throughout the state. The Confederate Naval and Marine Cemetery was maintained by the ladies of Charleston. In 1922, the cemetery was spruced up by the addition of a fence made of white concrete pillars with black iron pipe rails and by the placement of an obelisk in the center of the grounds. The obelisk contained the names of the people who were known to be buried there. This information was derived by the ladies from the surviving headstones. This is an important point, as five separate acts of vandalism between 1865 and 1922 had destroyed a large number of the headstones. The ladies did the best they could with the information that they had. The obelisk also noted that there were "ten unknowns" and "four torpedo boatmen" from the H. L. Hunley also buried at the site.

The area around the naval cemetery was used as a fairground and livestock exhibit area for many years starting in the 1900s. Given its long use, it is unsurprising that the city would consider the fairgrounds as being a good area to locate a public stadium. The military cemetery was still clearly marked in the 1940s, when the decision was finally made to build the stadium. The city entered into negotiation with a developer, and an agreement was reached to have the cemetery moved to the west and the stadium built on the cemetery and adjoining grounds. It is at this point that the history becomes murky. It would appear that the developer may have been told that they could start the process by the city and "move the stones." At any rate, the stones were moved to an unknown place or places, and the obelisk was relocated to Magnolia Cemetery Soldier's Ground as agreed. Unbeknownst to the city, the graves were left behind.

The Hagood Stadium was completed in 1947.
The majority of work on the stadium was done by hand, very little in the way of heavy equipment was used. The girder supports were attached to floaters rather than pylons, which was a departure from normal engineering. The soft sands of Charleston are not stable and pylons sunk to great depths are usually used to provide support. The floaters were for the most part 5 feet X 6 or 7 ft. concrete pads roughly 28 inches deep. While clearly a design flaw in terms of safety in an earthquake prone location, the use of floaters proved to be a boon to the archaeology. There were no pylons extending through the burials. On the other hand, on at least four separate occasions it became clear that the workmen had unearthed the dead while preparing the in-ground molds for the floaters and poured the concrete directly on top of the skeletons.

The stadium was given as a gift to the Citadel, South Carolina’s Military University, in 1967. The Citadel staff had no idea that the stadium was on a cemetery or that any cemeteries had ever been in the area. In the early 1990s a group of local historians, re-enactors, civic organizations, and genealogical groups banded together as the Confederate Heritage Trust (CHT). The CHT, a non-political, non-profit organization, has as its mission the preservation of historic battle-grounds, camps, graves, and history of the Civil War. As part of its mission, it engaged in the registration and cleaning of sites in the Charleston area. There are repeated references to the Confederate Naval and Marine Cemetery in the news articles and histories of the time. The CHT, under the leadership of Randy Burbage, made it a point to look for the graves at the Magnolia Cemetery located 14 graves and recovered 13 bodies. The failure of the developer to move the bodies was no longer a supposition, it was now a fact. Negotiations with the Citadel for the recovery of the remaining bodies took several years. The reasons for this were quite ordinary and understandable. The projected cost of the recovery from under the stadium was quite high. None of the groups, including the Citadel, had the cash in hand. The danger to the structure and the people doing the recovery was also high. Undermining an antique stadium with known structural defects is not the type of project one does without due consideration, study, and care. Last and certainly not least was the scheduling of the project. The Citadel is a military academy and university of high repute and community interaction. Many organizations, schools, and groups rely on the Citadel for facilities support. The stadium is in constant use. An opportunity occurred in 1999 when the Citadel closed the stadium to accomplish much needed repairs. The SCIAA performed Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) tests of the stadium’s interior to show that there were burials still in place under the structure. The GPR results were positive. Coordinating with the Citadel, the SCIAA and the CHT,
The Governor's School for Science and Mathematics students, Rachel Kopartny and Elizabeth Lambert, volunteer on the project. (SCIAA photo by Jonathan Leader)

with the active support of Senator McConnell, were able to get permission to exhume the bodies from under the floor of the stadium. Fieldwork commenced June 22 and ended July 30, 1999. During that time, over 300 cubic yards of earth were moved by 120 volunteers working 12-14 hour days. All the dirt was sifted and the materials recovered were listed and carefully packed away for conservation and analysis. The burials were drawn in situ and photographed, then removed and packed in secure boxes for transport to the SCIAA for analysis. The project site was mapped, which as it turned out was the first and only time that the stadium had an actual plan drawing. All activities at the site were recorded by the site registrar, who also kept track of the visitors and community donors.

The corps of volunteers included Euro-Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans. The oldest volunteer was in his 80s, and the youngest under 12. It was a very nice cross-section of Charleston's population. The volunteers were bonded together by the understanding that no one's dead should be treated with anything less than dignity and respect. The volunteers also often stated that if they couldn't protect a military cemetery at the Citadel, whose burials would be safe anywhere in the state? A serious point in a state undergoing rapid development.

The outpouring of support from the Charleston community was amazing. Coffee and rolls, lunch, and afternoon snacks were provided every day for the volunteers from private individuals and local restaurants for the duration of the project. Other items such as heavy duty aluminum foil and film were provided by community businesses. The Charleston Police Department, under the leadership of Chief Rubin Greenberg, and in conjunction with the Citadel University Police, provided security to the site.

The cemetery itself turned out to occupy only a small fraction of the area originally set aside for its use. The original fence post holes from the 1860s were located very early in the project. Based on the fieldwork, it appears that the ladies relocated the fence to enclose only the area where the bodies were located. The postholes from this fence, along with

Top L to R: Barry Gooch, Manning Williams, John Dangerfield, George Naumann, Elmore Marlow, Joe Willis, Bottom L to R: Brian Burbage, Jonathan Leader, Mike Burbage, Randy Burbage, and Doug Burbage. (SCIAA photo)
the public and “dead” gates, also were located early in the project. A significant scattering of large broken marble chips found under the 28 inches of fill dirt, which itself was brought to the site from an unknown location, suggests that the grave markers were simply rent from the earth and piled up in pieces by the workmen. It seems very unlikely that any have survived intact.

The first burial was encountered the first day. The sandy soils of the site made the identification of grave shafts remarkably easy. A non-denominational service was held the next day at the site for the dead, and then exhumation commenced. It rapidly became apparent that the burials were laid out in an east-west orientation and that they were in ordered rows. A number of the burials went under the walls and floaters of the stadium. In consultation with building experts and with the permission of General Grinalds, President of the Citadel, these individuals were recovered. There can be no doubt that additional burials are still under the support structure of the stadium in areas too dangerous at present to work. The stadium is scheduled for demolition and rebuilding in the next several years. SCIAA and the CHT are scheduled to return at that time.

Four of the sailors were found as pairs in single burials. The state of the bodies and the historic documents available made it possible to identify these individuals as likely members of the first crew of the H. L. Hunley. The Hunley was the first submarine to sink an enemy vessel in time of war. Five of the first crew perished when the vessel sank at its moorings at Fort Johnson. Considered to be a secret weapon, pains were taken to keep its operation and the subsequent deaths secret. This effort became moot when it sank the second time claiming the life of its benefactor, Horace L. Hunley, and many of the mechanics who had helped build it at the Lyons Machine shop in Alabama. Hunley and the ill-fated second crew were buried at Magnolia Cemetery in a donated plot.

Reburial of 23 sailors, marines, and a child took place on November 12, 1999 at the Soldier’s Ground at Magnolia Cemetery. Fifteen horse-drawn caisson with burial platforms were used to transport the deceased to the cemetery. The funeral march started at the Charleston Battery and was lead and escorted by Civil War re-enactors in full period uniform. Many of the re-enactors worked as volunteers on the project. In addition, quite a few of the re-enactors had assisted as an honor guard for the reburial of the 55th Massachusetts soldiers recovered in 1989, during an earlier SCIAA project at Folly Beach, South Carolina.

The reburial of the sailors and marines from the stadium was well attended. Several thousand people lined the four-and-half-mile parade route to the cemetery. At the cemetery, over 2,500 people were in attendance for the burial service. It was a positive and moving experience, showing what can be accomplished when the public and the professional community come together for the common good.

The first Hunley crew was reburied in a separate ceremony on March 25, 2000. An article in the next Legacy will provide photographs.