"THE BEST EVER OCCUPIED..."

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF A CIVIL WAR ENCAMPMENT ON FOLLY ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA

Research Manuscript Series 209

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ABSTRACT

In May of 1987, the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology was informed that human remains were being unearthed by road construction in a private residential development on Folly Island, South Carolina. This information led to a two year investigation of the 1863 winter camp of the Federal Army, used during its siege of Charleston. During the investigations a black military cemetery was salvaged (site 38CH920), and three areas of the Federal camp were examined as part of a data recovery project, and a later research effort (sites 38CH964, 38CH965, 38CH966). All of the sites were recommended as eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. This report presents the results of all archaeological and historical investigations of the winter camp conducted from May 1987 to May 1989. The cemetery contained the remains of at least 19 black soldiers, most likely from the 55th Massachusetts, 1st North Carolina Colored Infantry, and the 2nd U.S. Colored Infantry. The material culture from the camp sites represented refuse of several possible Federal military units, deposited in latrines, wells, and trash pits. In addition to the archaeological analysis, a detailed historical overview is presented.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**LIST OF FIGURES** .............................................................................................................. v

**LIST OF TABLES** ........................................................................................................ v

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ................................................................................................. viii

**CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

by Steven D. Smith ......................................................................................................... 1

- History of Investigations .............................................................................................. 2
- Environmental Setting ................................................................................................. 7
- Research Design ......................................................................................................... 8
- Methodology .............................................................................................................. 10

**CHAPTER II: HISTORIC BACKGROUND**

by Chris E. Fonvielle, Jr., with James B. Legg ................................................................. 13

- Part 1: The Siege of Charleston .................................................................................. 13
- Part 2: Life on Folly Island ......................................................................................... 22
- Part 3: The 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment .................................................. 24

**CHAPTER III: CEMETERY SITE ARCHAEOLOGY 38CH920**

by Steven D. Smith, with Sharon L. Pekrul and James B. Legg ........................................ 35

- Introduction ............................................................................................................... 35
- Results ....................................................................................................................... 35
- Interpretations .......................................................................................................... 48
- Summary 38CH920 .................................................................................................... 62

**CHAPTER IV: CAMP SITE ARCHAEOLOGY, 38CH964, 38CH965, 38CH966**

by James B. Legg ......................................................................................................... 65

- Introduction ............................................................................................................... 65
- Site 38CH964 ........................................................................................................... 65
- Site 38CH965 ........................................................................................................... 87
- Site 38CH966 ........................................................................................................... 90

**CHAPTER V: MATERIAL CULTURE**

by James B. Legg, with Natalie Adams, Ramona Grunden, and Steven D. Smith ............ 99

- Introduction ............................................................................................................... 99
- Artifact Catalog ....................................................................................................... 99
- A. Clothing ............................................................................................................... 100
- B. Arms .................................................................................................................... 109
- C. Personal ............................................................................................................... 111
- D. Kitchen ............................................................................................................... 112
- E. Indulgences .......................................................................................................... 118
- F. Medicine ............................................................................................................. 122
- G. Tools, Architecture, and Transportation ............................................................. 123
- Summary .................................................................................................................. 127
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS
by Steven D. Smith ................................................................. 129
Introduction ........................................................................ 129
Identities of Military Units Occupying The Sites ....................... 129
Site Functions and History ......................................................... 129
Comparative Analysis ............................................................... 130
Archaeology ......................................................................... 130
Soldier Life on Folly Island ....................................................... 131
Survey and Excavation Methodology for Civil War Sites ............. 132

REFERENCES CITED ...................................................................... 135

Appendix A: Human Remains From 38CH920 by Ted A. Rathbun .................... A-1
Appendix B: Vertebrate Faunal Remains From Sites 38CH964 and 38CH965 Folly Island, Charleston County, South Carolina, 1988 Excavation by Lynn M. Snyder ................. B-1
Appendix C: Oyster Analysis 38CH964, 38CH965 by David R. Lawrence ............. C-1
Appendix D: Miscellaneous Historical Documents ............................... D-1
Appendix E: Collectors As Sources by James B. Legg .............................. E-1
Appendix F: Artifact Totals ................................................................ F-1
# LIST OF FIGURES

1.1 Detail of U.S.G.S. 7.5 James Island topographic map, 1959 .......................................................... 3
1.2 Developer's map of project tract showing sites 38CH920, 38CH964, 38CH965, and 38CH966 ................... 5
2.1 Detail of "Map of the Defenses of Charleston City and Harbor" .................................................... 15
2.2 Detail of "Military Map of the Middle Part of Folly Island" ......................................................... 19
2.3 Photograph of unidentified Federal camp on the beach, Folly Island, S.C ........................................ 24
2.4 Map and other details of the interior camp of the 55th Massachusetts ........................................... 27
2.5 Photograph of unidentified Federal camp in the interior of Folly Island ........................................ 29
2.6 Photograph of Federal officers' tents in an unidentified interior camp on Folly Island ......................... 29
3.1 Site 38CH920, General Site Map ................................................................................................. 37
3.2 Site 38CH920, View west during excavations in May 1987 ............................................................ 38
3.3 Site 38CH920, Representative soil profile .................................................................................... 39
3.4 Site 38CH920, Burial 2 ................................................................................................................ 40
3.5 Site 38CH920, Burial 5 ................................................................................................................ 42
3.6 Site 38CH920, Burial 7 ................................................................................................................ 43
3.7 Site 38CH920, Burial 14 .............................................................................................................. 46
3.8 Site 38CH920, Burials 15 and 16 ................................................................................................. 47
3.9 Site 38CH920, Topographic map ................................................................................................. 51
3.10 Historic photograph taken on the Cold Harbor, Virginia, battlefield, showing postwar removal of the dead ... 56
3.11 Enlarged detail of U.S.G.S. 7.5 min. James Island topographic map ............................................. 61
3.12 Detail of Vodges - Becker Map of 1863 ..................................................................................... 63
4.1 Site 38CH964, General Site Map ................................................................................................. 67
4.2 Site 38CH964, Representative Soil Profile .................................................................................... 68
4.3 Site 38CH964, EU2, profile of N. wall ......................................................................................... 69
4.4 Site 38CH964, 5 x 6m excavation block, plan ............................................................................. 69
4.5 Site 38CH964, 5 x 6m excavation block, bullets in situ ................................................................. 70
4.6 Site 38CH964, Feature 9, plan .................................................................................................... 71
4.7 Site 38CH964, Feature 9, profiles of well approach trench ......................................................... 72
4.8 Site 38CH964, Feature 9, south end of well approach trench before excavation ......................... 73
4.9 Site 38CH964, Feature 9, south end of well approach trench and well chamber after excavation .... 73
4.10 Site 38CH964, Feature 10, plan ................................................................................................. 78
4.11 Site 38CH964, Feature 10, after excavation ............................................................................... 79
4.12 Site 38CH964, Feature 11, plan of portion excavation ................................................................. 80
4.13 Site 38CH964, Feature 11, profile, north wall of EU11 ............................................................... 81
4.14 Site 38CH964, Feature 11, well chamber and shaft near water table ......................................................... 81
4.15 Site 38CH964, Feature 13, plan and profile ........................................................................................................ 83
4.16 Site 38CH964, Feature 16, plan and profile ........................................................................................................ 85
4.17 Site 38CH965, General Site Map .................................................................................................................... 89
4.18 Site 38CH965, Feature 1, profile, north wall of EU2 .......................................................................................... 90
4.19 Site 38CH966, Locus A, General Map ................................................................................................................ 92
4.20 Site 38CH966, Locus A, EU1, profile, north wall ............................................................................................... 94
4.21 Site 38CH966, Locus B, Feature B-3 before excavation ..................................................................................... 95
4.22 Site 38CH966, Locus B, Feature B-3, conjectural profile of well ...................................................................... 96
5.1 U.S. Army model wearing dress or uniform coat, Model 1858 Army Hat, and rifle-muskel accoutrements .. 101
5.2 Large uniform buttons ...................................................................................................................................... 102
5.3 Small uniform buttons and forage cap hardware ............................................................................................... 103
5.4 U.S. Army model wearing flannel sack coat and Model 1858 forage cap ......................................................... 104
5.5 U.S. insignia and other militaria ........................................................................................................................ 105
5.6 Utility and civilian buttons .................................................................................................................................. 106
5.7 U.S. Army model wearing rubber blanket or poncho, with grommets ............................................................. 107
5.8 Miscellaneous clothing-related artifacts ........................................................................................................... 108
5.9 Ammunition ......................................................................................................................................................... 110
5.10 Personal items ..................................................................................................................................................... 112
5.11 Ink wells ............................................................................................................................................................... 113
5.12 Kitchen-related artifacts .................................................................................................................................... 114
5.13 U.S. Model 1858 Canteen .................................................................................................................................. 115
5.14 Tumbler and beaker bases .................................................................................................................................. 115
5.15 Cut bottles............................................................................................................................................................ 116
5.16 Food and medicine bottles .............................................................................................................................. 117
5.17 Tinned iron food can (38CH964, Feature 11) .................................................................................................... 118
5.18 Stoneware ale bottles, shouldered brown and white varieties and unidentified varieties ............................. 120
5.19 Stoneware ale bottles, brown and white unshouldered varieties .................................................................. 121
5.20 Glass ale bottles ................................................................................................................................................ 122
5.21 Variation among dark olive-green ale bottle necks from 38CH966, Locus A, surface .................................. 123
5.22 Miscellaneous alcoholic beverage bottles ......................................................................................................... 124
5.23 Tools ................................................................................................................................................................. 125
5.24 Transportation-related artifacts ........................................................................................................................ 126
5.25 Barrel well liner (38CH966, Locus B, Feature B-3) ......................................................................................... 127
5.26 Barrel well liners ................................................................................................................................................ 128
B-1 Generalized beef cuts indicated by the faunal remains from sites 38CH964 and 38CH965 ......................... B-12
E-1 Military unit camp locations as seen by collectors ............................................................................................ E-2
LIST OF TABLES

3.1 Depth of Skeletal Materials Below Surface, 38CH920 ................................................................. 50
3.2 Grave and Coffin Size (in cm), 38CH920 ................................................................. 53
3.3 Mortuary Patterns at 38CH920 ........................................................................ 55
3.4 Possible Individuals Buried at 38CH920 ................................................................. 60
4.1 Feature 9 Proveniences, 38CH964 ................................................................. 74
4.2 Feature 10 Proveniences, 38CH964 ........................................................................ 77
4.3 Feature 11 Proveniences, 38CH964 ................................................................. 79
4.4 CMDS Artifact Collection, 38CH964 ................................................................. 85
4.5 Minimum Number of Vessels From Locus A, 38CH966 ........................................................................ 92
4.6 Minimum Number of Vessels From EU 1 and 2, Locus A, 38CH966 ........................................................................ 93
4.7 Minimum Number of Vessels From Locus A and C, 38CH966 ........................................................................ 96
5.1 Folly Island Artifact Catalog ........................................................................ 99
5.2 Military Clothing-Related Artifacts ................................................................. 106
5.3 Varieties of Buttons From Private Collections ................................................................. 108
5.4 Civilian Clothing-Related Artifacts ................................................................. 109
5.5 Arms-Related Artifacts ........................................................................ 109
5.6 Embossed Marks Dark Olive-Green Ale Bottle Bases ................................................................. 120
A-1 Human Remains From 38CH920 ........................................................................ A-4
B-1 Summary of Identified Vertebrate Remains Recovered From Site 38CH964 ........................................................................ B-2
B-2 Summary of Identified Vertebrate Remains Recovered From Site 38CH965 ........................................................................ B-7
B-3 Meat Cuts Represented by Domestic Cattle and Pig Remains From Sites 38CH964 and 38CH965 ........................................................................ B-13
B-4 Identified Vertebrate Remains From Block Excavation, Site 38CH964 ........................................................................ B-16
B-5 Identified Vertebrate Remains From Feature 1, Site 38CH965 ........................................................................ B-20
F-1 Artifact Tables ........................................................................ F-1
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The cemetery site was brought to the Institute’s attention by collectors Robert Bohm and Eric Croen. Robert and Eric worked hard, side by side with us, during the first two hot weeks of excavations. Robert continued to help us throughout the project, especially towards the end, in the interpretation of the project area. I am also happy to say that despite a serious illness, he is rapidly recovering and was able to attend the reburial of the soldiers in May of 1989. Mr. David Ruth of the National Park Service was also instrumental in alerting us to the site and I thank him for his efforts behind the scenes.

Coordination for the rescue of the burials in 1987 was accomplished by Michael Roberts of Ravenel, Eiserhardt Securities, Inc., Mayor Richard Beck and the City Council of Folly Beach, and the Charleston County Medical Examiner’s Office under Dr. Sandra Conradi. Lee Wilson and Judy Koelpin of the Medical Examiner’s Office worked many a long hot day with us, and provided field identification for the skeletal remains as they appeared. Their help was immeasurable. During that first effort, the developer and the city provided night and weekend site security (T.M. Marshall, Fred Bothman, George Horton, and Shep Bone) at their expense. Ravenel, Eiserhardt Securities also provided the assistance of a professional surveyor at no cost. Coordination with the Public Service Department of Folly Beach was provided through Steve Robinson. Edward Seabrook, former landowner, provided invaluable oral history concerning the last 40 years of the project area.

Excavations at 38CH920 were completed by an outstanding Institute crew consisting of Keith Derting, Nena Powell, Peggy Brooks, Carl Naylor, and Tommy Charles; all directed by Sharon Pekrul. Volunteers consisted of Barbara Hiott, Carl Steen, Robert Bohm, and Eric Croen. Additional professional help came from Martha Zierden, and Kimberly Grimes with the approval of Dr. Charles Brumgardt of The Charleston Museum. Artifacts from the project will be transferred to The Charleston Museum for long-term curation.

Keith Derting and Sharon Pekrul continued their help once the Institute returned from the field. Keith and Sharon worked hard to complete preliminary analysis while doing their full-time jobs. Sharon did the majority of the preliminary analysis for site 38CH920 and contributed to Chapter III. She was also helpful in turning this text into English.

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The second phase of the Institute’s project was field-directed by Lisa D. O’Steen. Her crew consisted of Tommy Charles, Nena Powell, Carl Naylor, Mark Newell, and Jean Spencer. Volunteers on that project included Jackie Baker and Jody McInerny. It was also at this time that Chris Fonvielle, an Instructor at East Carolina University, joined the research team as primary historian. Chris did an excellent job, the fruits of which are seen in Chapter II.
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In October of 1988, the Institute was able to return again to the site to sample the project area. This effort was field-directed by James B. Legg. Jim has been the outstanding asset in the completion of the Folly Island project, hence his senior authorship. An expert in Civil War history and military equipment, he is one of those whose working knowledge of the war and its artifacts turns fieldwork into a field school. Jim is also a conscientious archaeologist and an artist with a trowel. Jim's efforts in the lab and in the analysis phase were equally exacting.

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Steven D. Smith
Principal Investigator,
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