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Search for the USS *George Washington*

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Upcoming Field Schedule

The MRD (Maritime Research Division including SDAMP) field season is drawing to a close.

October

MRD will be continuing the remote sensing survey in Charleston Harbor for the American Battlefield Protection Program October 11-15. The SDAMP office will be open during this

period.

November

MRD will be in Beaufort from November 8-12 for a remote sensing project on the *USS George Washington*. The SDAMP office will be closed during that week. SDAMP will be removing the buoys from the Cooper River Heritage Trail sites sometime in early

November. We may need a volunteer or two for this project, so watch out for emails regarding this opportunity.

If you are interested in more information about MRD projects visit:

www.cas.sc.edu/sciaa/mrd/resprojs.html ■



**Archaeologists
at lunch**

Field Work

Search for the *USS George Washington*

By James Spirek

Since implementing the Port Royal Sound Survey in 1998, we have searched for the remains of the Army gunboat, *USS George Washington*, sunk by Confederate artillery in 1863 on Whale Branch River. In the late 1930s, crabbers found a bronze howitzer reportedly from the gunboat, which was shortly removed to the Beaufort Museum where the weapon is still on display. A researcher in the 1980s attempted to locate the gunboat with a magnetometer where the howitzer was found, but detected no evidence of the gunboat. In preparing our search, we used published accounts of

the incident and post-sinking activities to guide our survey coverage. According to the transcribed and published accounts in the Official Records of the Navy, several days after the gunboat's sinking, a Navy gunboat towed the wreck to a different position in the river to ease salvage operations of the gunboat by an Army unit.

Using our remote-sensing ensemble, we created a primary survey block at the proposed historical location of the shipwreck. We then expanded the search block East and West to encompass the area between the Highway 21 bridge to Brickyard

Creek to account for the reported post-wrecking movement of the wreck. One of the surprising finds from these survey blocks was the sheer number of magnetic anomalies in a waterway of limited commercial navigation. We believe, based on sonar records, that the vast majority of these anomalies most likely represent the accumulation over the years of crab traps that have lost their buoys, with some possibly related to the phosphate industry active in the late 1800s. At the proposed historical and original location of the shipwreck, a number of large magnetic anomalies were detected. Probing with

a 20-foot hydraulic probe failed to make contact with the sources of several selected anomalies

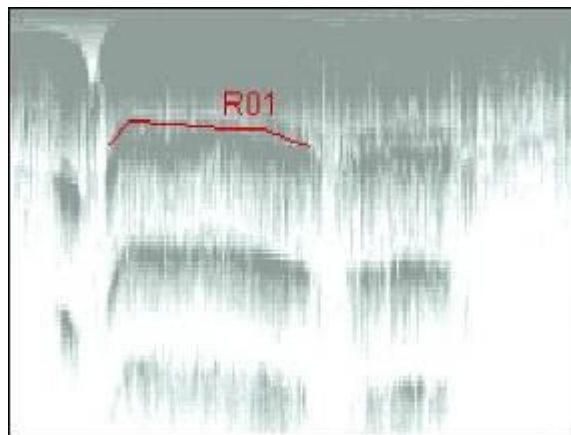
In an effort to gather more historical information about the incidents surrounding the sinking of the gunboat and to help pinpoint its resting place, we contracted with an historical researcher to copy the pages of the *E.B. Hale's* logbook, the Navy gunboat that had supposedly towed the *Washington* to another location, at the National Archives in Washington DC. He successfully copied the pages of the book and sent them to us. Reading the logbook, we were

(Continued on page 6)

Search for the USS *George Washington* (Continued from page 5)

fortunate to have a detailed description of the gunboat's activities on the day in question. We discovered that the gunboat never towed the vessel, but did come close the wreck and fired a few shots at the enemy battery that had sunk the vessel. We still have to get the original letter, but believe that the compilers of the ORN had simply misread the word "toward" and instead wrote "towed". A simple clerical error—but one with profound effects when attempting to find a gunboat in a fairly large area. This

essentially meant that the remains of the vessel should be at its historical resting place. Meantime, we had conducted some sub-bottom profiling work at this area and located two acoustic anomalies several feet below the sediment. One is associated with a large magnetic anomaly suggestive of a shipwreck, while the other is not. Later this fall, we intend to use hydraulic probes at these two locations in an attempt to find the final resting place of the USS *George Washington*. ■



Sub-bottom profiler image of the USS *George Washington*

The Archaeology of Naval Operations at Charleston Harbor, 1861-1865

By James Spirek

In 2008, the Maritime Research Division was awarded an American Battlefield Protection Program grant administered by the National Park Service to study the naval battlefield of Charleston Harbor. Through archaeological remains and historical research, the project aims to identify the boundary, and the various core and defining features, of the battlefield, namely the wrecks of ironclads and blockade runners, now-submerged land batteries, and obstructions. To accomplish the goals of defining the battlefield boundary, the accurate positioning and extent of the associated

features required the use of Differential Global Positioning System (DGPS) and a variety of non-disturbance remote sensing technologies. One problem noted in past surveys in the Charleston area, and throughout the state, is the location of known and documented sites oftentimes is located hundreds of yards away from their recorded locations. Therefore, a key goal of this project is to precisely re-locate previously documented sites using DGPS, as well as to determine the scope and extent of the wreckage using a variety of appropriate electronic devices. Research and field

operations undertaken to identify these known and potential features from both sides of the conflict will develop a more complete understanding of the battlefield that will aid in the interpretation and preservation of these Civil War resources.

A number of battlefield features both on land and underwater have been examined using remote sensing equipment and visual inspection. Several land features were documented including the reported remains of the "Devil", a torpedo raft used by the USS *Weehawken* during the ill-fated 7 April 1863 Federal attack on Fort

Sumter, the now-naturalized site of the "Swamp Angel" battery used to launch projectiles into Charleston, and the remains of several blockade runners now inland on Sullivan's Island and Isle of Palms. Marine magnetic and acoustic survey occurred in several areas in attempts to locate the 1st and 2nd Stone Fleets sunk off Charleston to obstruct the main channels into the harbor, remnants of now-submerged batteries including Battery Wagner, and inner harbor obstructions including frame torpedoes and row pilings. Some of

(Continued on page 7)