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

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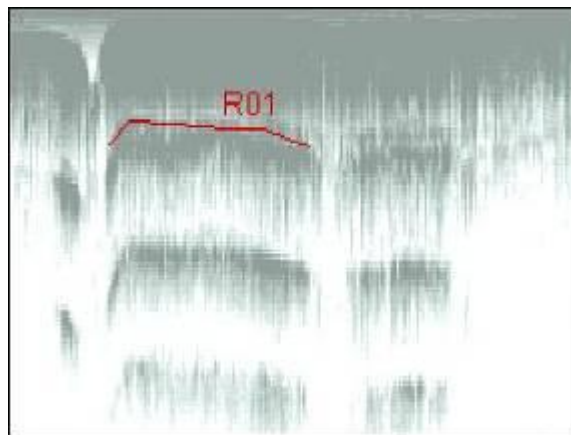
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Search for the USS *George Washington* (Continued from page 5)

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

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Charleston Harbor (Continued from page 6)

the electronic data is still undergoing post-processing and analysis to determine whether for example, we have pinpointed the location of the two Stone Fleets.

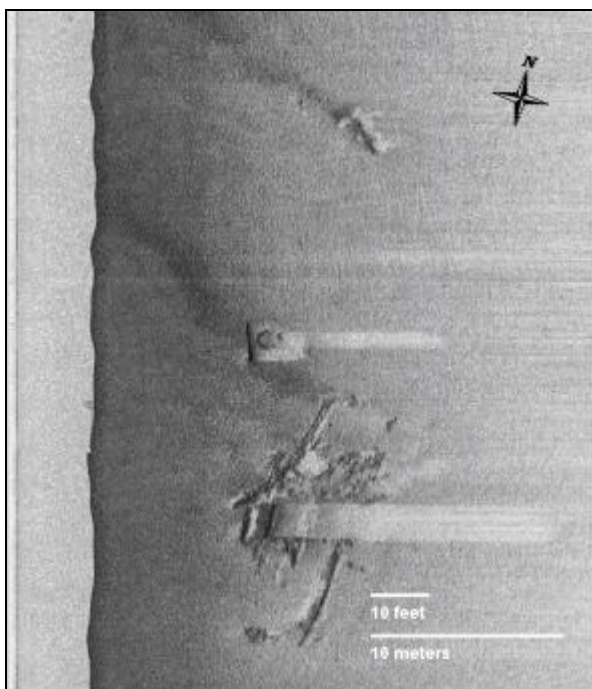
We also dove on several wreck sites, namely the USS *Patapsco*, and the blockade runners *Mary Bowers/Georgiana* and *Constance*. Sunk in January 1864 during torpedo-sweeping operations by a torpedo (mine), USS *Patapsco*, rests between Fort Sumter and Fort Moultrie in about 30 ft. of water. The remains consist of the lower hull of the vessel that has been substantially destroyed through post-war salvage activities. A week of diving on the

site with volunteers revealed that a dredge pipe lies amidships and athwart the wreck. The wreck appears to have its bow pointed out towards to the sea, which is the most integral part of the wreck—with extant floor beams and some deck plating, along with hull structure along the port side, and a jumble of unidentified iron components all interspersed with “ghost” crab traps. Aft of the dredge pipe, the wreck disappears into a scatter of various iron components of deck frames, plating, and some pipes. Diving on the superimposed blockade runners *Georgiana/Mary Bowers* wreck site off Sullivan’s

Island revealed the two wrecks form an “X” with the amidships a jumble of iron components, while the fore and aft ends of each wreck still present a coherent shape. Both wrecks, built of iron, are extant to their turn-of-the-bilge, although there are substantial sections of the *Georgiana* hull, as well as boilers from both wrecks, extending several yards into the water column. Several dives on the *Constance* revealed two boilers, the lower smokestack, and various elements of the hull structure. Other dive sites included investigating several rock-laden barges marked as obstructions on nautical charts, as well as one uncharted

and located while searching for the 2nd Stone Fleet. These wrecked barges most likely represent the effects of the 1893 hurricane that struck them while laden with rocks to build the Charleston Harbor jetties.

Currently, we are continuing our remote sensing operations to locate the two Stone Fleets and working on the report. We hope to conclude the project by early next year. I would like to thank the many volunteers that have aided our project, and of course the MRD staff in their efforts to complete the project. ■



Sonogram showing *Constance* wreckage, viewing from south to north, or bottom to top: main portion of wreckage containing a boiler and hull structure; another boiler with steam drum attached; and further away a portion of the ship structure (SCIAA)