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Update on Mars Bluff Navy Yard/CSS *Pee Dee* Cannon Investigations

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Saved by the Bell...Well, Horn...

By Joe Harvey, Hobby Diver #3052

A couple of years ago, I along with a few friends, were diving the Cooper River. It was a nice hot summer day and on the boat ride out we spotted lots of Big Lizards enjoying the sun which is not unusual on the Cooper. We had already made a couple of good dives and I was on my last dive. Nearing the end of my dive (#500), as I was getting ready to start up, I could hear the boat traffic, one boat right after the other. Since I couldn't start up, I pattered around looking for fossils and stuff, listening and waiting. We found out later that a boat club out of Charleston

with over 70 boats was on their way to Gilligan's Restaurant. With no let up of boats overhead and with air now down to 250psi, I had no choice but to come up on the edge of the grass, which is about 10ft off the bank. I would much rather face snakes and gators than a boat propeller any time. I hit the surface, looked around, and as luck would have it, an 8ft alligator was laying on the edge of the bank about 20 yards from me. I could see a BIG SMILE on that big boys face and he started moving towards me. Well I felt that I had only two choices, 1) swim 10ft to the bank and

stand up to show him that I'm not just a bird sitting on the water or 2) try the Dive Alert signal device I had just installed (a super loud air horn). Well I hit the signal as I was swimming towards the bank and that gator decided he didn't want anything to do with me. Big Sigh of Relief.

On the way back to the boat landing we would ease up to gators and hit the DiveAlert and we got the same reaction. I am very happy with this little device. I have been diving the rivers of SC for over 25 years and have had some very uncomfortable Gator vs. Diver situations and this

little alert device, for around \$50 bucks, is money well spent! Happy Diving...Safe Diving. ■



DiveAlert air horn

Update on Mars Bluff Navy Yard/CSS Pee Dee Cannon Investigations

By Jim Spirek, SC State Underwater Archaeologist, SCIAA

We are still working to document and to prepare for the recovery of three cannons that were thrown overboard from the CSS *Pee Dee* in the Great Pee Dee River at the Mars Bluff Navy Yard during the

waning days of the Civil War. The armament of the Confederate gunboat consisted of two Brooke rifles, a 6.4-inch and a 7-inch, and a 9-inch Dahlgren smoothbore. These guns were the premiere naval

weapons of the Civil War. Until recently, we had only verified the presence of two of the three cannons—the 6.4-in Brooke rifle and the 9-in Dahlgren smoothbore.

These two cannons were found a number of years ago by the CSS *Pee Dee* Research and Recovery Team led by Ted Gragg and Bob Butler. Their group was originally licensed by the Maritime Research Division (MRD) through an Intensive Survey License that evolved into a Data Recovery License to investigate the river bottom alongside the abandoned navy yard. Besides discovering and

documenting the two cannons, the group recorded and recovered a number of artifacts including carpenter and shipbuilding tools and other sundry items. They also recovered a number of munitions associated with the two Brooke guns, but interestingly, none for the Dahlgren. These items are on display at the South Carolina Civil War Museum in Myrtle Beach operated by Gragg. I would suggest that if you are in Myrtle Beach to visit the museum and take a look at this important Civil War naval collection. Gragg has also

(Continued on page 7)



A 7-inch Brooke rifle at the Washington Navy Yard

Cannon Investigations (Continued from page 6)

published a book titled, *Guns of the Pee Dee: The Search for the Warship CSS Pee Dee's Cannons*, that relates the team's odyssey to investigate the remains of the gunboat, armament, and the navy yard. The archaeological conundrum was that while each caliber shell for the Brooke rifles were present, the physical remains of the 7-inch proved elusive. Despite methodically searching the waterfront, and along the apparent line of the two other jettisoned cannons, with physical probing, excavation, and deploying a cesium magnetometer, the remains of the 7-inch cannon remained obscured by sand, trees, and other magnetic debris. That is, until the adjacent landowners, Glenn Dutton and Rufus Perdue, decided to take advantage of extremely low-water to give it a go and search for the cannons themselves. Observing two piling stumps that only appear at very low river levels, the pair deployed a metal detector and searched around the area. Noting a magnetic disturbance that corresponded in length to a large object, the men recorded their findings on a map of the site, and alerted us to its potential discovery.

On 4 December, the MRD deployed to verify the discovery of the 7-inch Brooke rifle. Gathering together our crew and volunteers (Ted Gragg, Bob and Chad Butler, David and Cody Freeman), and assisted by Glenn Dutton

and Rufus Perdue, we located the object with our metal detector and immediately excavated several feet of sand to find the muzzle of the cannon. The cannon lays parallel to the river with its muzzle pointed upriver. Additionally, we inserted a GoPro Hero2 underwater camera down the bore of the cannon and noted the rifling was in excellent condition. As mentioned above, the elusive nature of the cannon was puzzling because of the lack of a large magnetic presence, especially as the mass of iron weighs approximately 15,000 lbs. Another factor to obscuring its location was that it was thrown a bit further into the stream, rather than as presumed near the riverbank like the other two. We had planned to systematically weed through a number of large magnetic anomalies along the shoreline in the future to search for the gun, but were saved the time and expense by the landowners' discovery of it.

Now that all three cannons are accounted for, there still remains one mystery—where did the Dahlgren come from? The pedigree's of the two Brooke rifles are known, both cast in Selma, AL and shipped directly to the Mars Bluff Navy Yard to arm the gunboat in 1864. Markings on the trunnions and breech of the Dahlgren indicate it was cast in Fort Pitt, PA in mid-1862. According to research undertaken by Dr. Larry

Babits, now retired director of the Program in Maritime Studies at East Carolina University, it is posited that the gun was captured from one of three Union gunboats due to the manufacture of the Dahlgren in mid-1862. Two of the Union gunboats were out west, which seemed unlikely for the Dahlgren to have come that far due to the railroad logistics at that time in the war. Whereas the Confederate salvage of the 9-inch battery, consisting of five 9-inch Dahlgren smoothbores, off the rammed and sunk USS *Southfield* on the Roanoke River at Plymouth, NC seemed a more viable candidate, particularly as the railroad logistics were conducive for transporting the gun to Mars Bluff.

Dr. Babits' research indicating that the USS *Southfield* seemed the most viable candidate for the Confederates to obtain a captured 9-inch Dahlgren intrigued me greatly, considering that I had written my graduate thesis

on the remains of the gunboat while a student at ECU. I immediately poured over my notes to see if I had come across any information on the markings on the *Southfield* guns. When reviewing my notes associated with a Confederate attack on Union army and naval forces in Plymouth in December 1862, in which the *Southfield* was disabled, I hit paydirt. The captain of the *Southfield*, responding to an inquiry of the conduct of the gunboat during the attack, listed each of his guns along with their markings. Perusing the markings of the five 9-inch guns indicated that they were cast before the war had commenced, and therefore did not match the one in the river. However, correspondence before the gunboat was rammed and sunk in early 1864 indicated that either one or two 9-inch Dahlgren guns were headed to the *Southfield* to replace two injured guns. On 30 March 1864, the two guns arrived in Plymouth

(Continued on page 8)



Underwater image of the 9-inch Dahlgren smoothbore in the Pee Dee River

Cannon Investigations (Continued from page 7)

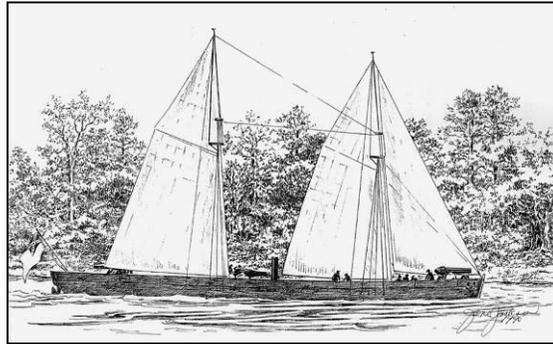
and were immediately placed aboard the gunboat. If the *Pee Dee* Dahlgren gun is from the *Southfield* then it must be one of these two that arrived just in time for its penultimate engagement with the CSS *Albemarle* that destroyed the Union gunboat in the early morning hours of 18 April 1864.

The MRD intends to launch a research foray at the National Archives in Washington, DC, hopefully to answer these questions using Union navy correspondence, as well as

to gather information from Confederate correspondence, relating to the identity of this 9-inch Dahlgren. In the meantime, we are preparing

the necessary material requested by the US General Services Administration, the Federal agency that owns this historic property on behalf

of the American public, to obtain an indefinite loan to display the cannons at the new Florence County Museum. Additionally, we are preparing information to create a Request For Proposal to recover, conserve, and transport the cannons. We hope that this will occur in late summer/early fall 2013. These research activities are funded by a Drs. Bruce & Lee Foundation grant. Look to upcoming issues of the *Quarterly Reporter* for updates on this project. ■



Modern rendering of CSS Pee Dee

Diver Safety

Be Prepared

By Dan Orr, President, Divers Alert Network (DAN)

Preparation for scuba diving begins long before you arrive at the dive site. In addition to the skills required to enjoy the dive, it is important to be in good health and prepared to meet the physical demands of the sport.

In reviewing the data DAN Research has compiled on dive accidents, almost one-third of the diving fatalities were attributed to cardiac incidents; approximately half of these incidents occurred in divers 40-59 years old. What is really disturbing is that 60 percent of those fatalities had signs and symptoms they or others around them recognized as cardiac-related before or during the dive, but they continued to

dive anyway.

DAN medics recommend all divers get an annual physical from a physician familiar with diving medicine beginning at age 35 or whenever there is any significant change in health status. An annual physical can help identify heart-related issues and corrective actions to take to reduce the likelihood of experiencing a cardiac-related issue while scuba diving. If you suspect someone is exhibiting signs or symptoms that could indicate a cardiac problem, call the dive or notify the divemaster, trip leader or other authority.

Maintain your gear

Thorough preparation also involves making sure your equipment is

maintained properly and has been inspected annually by a qualified maintenance technician. In addition, when travelling to a dive site it is good to pack a "Save-A-Dive" kit that includes critical replacement parts. The basic "Save-A-Dive" kit typically includes rubber goods likely to break or wear out such as mask and fin straps, "O" rings and a regulator mouthpiece with tie wraps. If any of your equipment requires batteries, replacements are a good addition. Depending upon the type of diving you do, the equipment you use and how remote your travel is, your "Save-A-Dive" kit may need to be more extensive. If you are a technical or rebreather

diver, it would be wise to incorporate redundant replacement parts for any critical or essential equipment.

Preventative precautions

In order to make sure you don't forget to pack everything you need, it is wise to make a comprehensive checklist. This same checklist will also be helpful when repacking at the end of your trip to ensure nothing is left behind. Once you arrive at the dive site, whether it is a shore site or a dive boat, you and your diving partners should follow a regular pre-dive ritual in preparation for each dive. Pre-dive rituals and the use of checklists are essential components in

(Continued on page 9)