

Topics in African American History 3

# Whom we would never more see

**History and archaeology  
recover the lives and deaths  
of African American Civil War soldiers  
on Folly Island, South Carolina**



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beach to capture Battery Wagner, then use their heavy rifled artillery to begin the process of silencing Fort Sumter—key to the harbor.

The Federals concentrated their preparations for the attack on the north end of Folly Island. Working at night in total silence, their “. . . duty was quite arduous,” wrote one Connecticut soldier.<sup>11</sup> Gillmore was attempting to conceal over eleven thousand soldiers and ten batteries of some forty-seven field rifles and mortars, each with 200 rounds available. They were hardly invisible. Throughout the preparations, Confederates watched the activities, and pickets taunted the Federals that “General Beauregard had such an exalted opinion of the Yankees on Folly Island that he was coming over. . . . [to give them] all a ‘farm six feet by two.’”<sup>12</sup> Confederate General Beauregard, however, was wary. Though the Federals appeared to be aiming for Morris Island, he thought that the real attack would be against his lines on James Island—a possibility that meant he could not afford to move too many troops from there into his fortifications on Morris Island. In reality, he could only continue to strengthen his positions and wait.

Gillmore came on 8 July 1863. The attack began with General Alfred H. Terry’s 3,800-man feint onto James Island. The landing on Morris was to follow Terry’s demon-

stration, but the weather refused to cooperate, and the main attack had to wait until 10 July. After a two-hour bombardment by gunboats and the guns on Folly Island, the Confederates could not strongly challenge the amphibious landing. Federals soon pushed through the Confederate fortifications on the south end of Morris Island and proceeded up the beach toward Battery Wagner.

The next week’s events are now legend. The Federals attacked Battery Wagner on the 11th and were repulsed after heavy casualties. A week later, another frontal attack against the battery severely bloodied the African American 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Over forty percent of the regiment were lost, many, along with their commander Colonel Robert Shaw, were buried by the Confederates. The *New York Tribune* reported that the 54th “made Fort Wagner such a name for the colored race as Bunker Hill has been for ninety years to the white Yankees.”<sup>13</sup> Shaw’s father was quoted as adding: “They buried him with his brave, devoted followers who fell dead over him and around him. . . . We can imagine no holier place than that in which he is . . . nor wish him better company—what a bodyguard he has!”<sup>14</sup>

The losses first at Secessionville and then of some fifteen hundred men in two attacks against Battery Wagner, dampened the offensive

spirit of the Union. A long siege began that was to last some nineteen months. During those months, Federals subjected Charleston and Fort Sumter to sporadic bombardments, and Confederate defenders returned fire. In September, after the Federals had spent months zig-zagging their trenches closer and closer, the Confederates abandoned Battery Wagner. For the Confederates, the battery had fulfilled its mission well, costing the Union much time, effort, and blood. Throughout the rest of 1863 and 1864, the Union would maintain soldiers on Folly, Morris, and Coles Islands, occasionally probing the Confederate lines on James Island and trading artillery fire with the Confederates.

Meanwhile the events of war elsewhere in the South continued to make Charleston less and less important to the final outcome of the war. During the winter of 1864, the Union began to thin the number of units laying siege to Charleston until there were only enough soldiers left to man the guns and to skirmish. Eventually, the forces of General William T. Sherman threatened Charleston from the rear. On 17 February 1865, the Confederates abandoned the city and the coast to the Union, and the siege ended. By then, however, Charleston was no longer the prize it had been in 1861. For in two months, Lee would surrender his army to Grant.

# The 55th Massachusetts and 1st North Carolina Colored Infantry

Some nine regiments composed solely of African Americans were among the twelve thousand-odd Union soldiers who would take part in the siege of Charleston.

## A war for union

When Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers at the beginning of the war, African Americans in the northern states tried to enlist but were promptly rejected.<sup>15</sup> The reasons given were numerous. At first, the war was a war to preserve the Union, and the question of slavery was one that many white northerners wished to avoid. Also, white volunteers flooding the recruiting stations meant manpower was not yet a problem. In addition, Lincoln feared that arming African Americans would drive the border states into the Confederacy “to arm the Negroes would turn 50,000 bayonets from the loyal Border States against us that were for us.”<sup>16</sup>

Underlying these reasons, however, was prejudice. To many Americans, both North and South, the idea of arming the black population was nonsense. Most of their reasons had been expressed in the past and would be heard again in the future. White soldiers did not want to fight beside blacks. They considered blacks inferior and were convinced that they would fail to stand in battle. According to the prevailing preju-

dice, the years spent in slavery had left the blacks uneducated and unfit for military duty. Certainly, they had been denied the chance to learn to read and write and to develop other skills they would need to participate fully as American citizens. Yet despite such shortcomings, blacks had shown they could fight from the first Colonial conflicts through the War of 1812.<sup>17</sup>

There was much dissent on the issue. Abolitionists and free blacks loudly proclaimed the right to fight for the freedom of those in bondage. The most famous and ardent supporter of this cause was Frederick Douglass who, like many blacks, hoped that participation in the military would give them equality of rights during peacetime. His most often repeated quote from an 1863 speech in Philadelphia spoke to the heart of the issue.

*Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters U.S.; let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder, and the bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on the earth or under the earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United States.<sup>18</sup>*

## A war for emancipation

While the debate over black participation waxed, casualties rose in the

Union armies, the martial spirit of the white volunteers waned, and their ranks began to thin. Attitudes changed, and people in the North began to ask why the black man, too, could not shed his blood. This question grew increasingly vocal as the focus of the war shifted from saving the Union to freeing the slaves. When Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in January of 1863, the abolitionist push for the official use of African American soldiers grew stronger.

One ardent abolitionist, Governor John Albion Andrew of Massachusetts, was in a perfect position to take immediate action. On 26 January, he received authorization to raise a regiment of African American volunteers. He recruited throughout the northern states, and, with the help of other abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, he soon raised two regiments of free blacks: the 54th and 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry.

## The 55th Massachusetts

The 55th Massachusetts mustered in at Readville, Massachusetts, on 12 May 1863, and when the 54th left for Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, the 55th took over the abandoned barracks to learn the rudiments of soldiering. Lieutenant Colonel N. P. Hallowell and Captain A. S. Hartwell, both formerly with the 54th,



Sgt. Nicholas Saib of the 55th Massachusetts was born in Mali, Africa (Massachusetts Historical Society).

commanded the cadre that would train the recruits pouring in from across the northern states.<sup>19</sup>

The men of the 55th Massachusetts were among thousands of free African Americans living in the north before the war. One hundred thirty-nine came from Pennsylvania, 222 from Ohio, 97 from Indiana, 68 from Kentucky, and 66 from Missouri. Large numbers of recruits also came from other states—56 from Illinois, 23 from New York, and 22 from Massachusetts. Some two hundred forty-seven had at one time been slaves, and of those, 106 were from Virginia, 30 from North Carolina, and 24 from Tennessee. Six men listed South Carolina as their birthplace. One veteran of the 55th was even from Africa. He had been purchased as a slave by a Russian minister to Constantinople and

served as his private secretary. Private William Herbert and three others called Canada home.<sup>20</sup>

Other than the color of their skin, the men of the 55th Massachusetts represented a typical cross-section of the mid-nineteenth-century American male. Within their ranks, there were 596 farmers, 76 common laborers, 34 barbers, 50 waiters, 27 cooks, and 21 blacksmiths. Some twenty-seven were teamsters and another 20 were sailors. There were also six teachers, three engineers, one confectioner, one clergyman, and one student. Private Herbert was a tinker. These men were not uneducated, 477 could read, and 319 could read and write. During their training at Readville and on Folly Island, many others took the opportunity to learn to read and write in schools set up for that purpose. They averaged 23 ¼ years of age and five feet seven inches in height.<sup>21</sup>

Training practices at Readville were remarkably similar to basic training today. The soldiers stood guard, policed the grounds, inspected the barracks, served in fatigue details, and drilled in squads, companies, and battalions. Battalions drilled evenings except when four- or six-mile road marches were scheduled. But they survived basic training, and with typical unit pride, their regimental history states.

*No regiment left Massachusetts with a better outfit than the fifty-fifth. Few, if any, in better drill and discipline for the length of time they had under instruction; none with*

*more faithful, intelligent, and efficient corps of officers, or men more thoroughly devoted to the cause which they had undertaken.*<sup>22</sup>

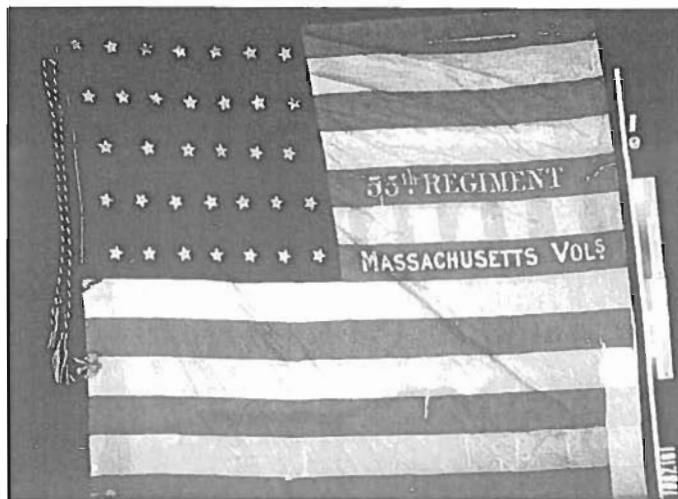
With the world watching these African Americans, regimental pride did indeed run deep, and from the very first day. At the end of the tattoo roll-call that evening:

*One of their number stepped from the ranks and made a simple and appropriate prayer, and the whole squad joined in singing one of their peculiar hymns. The practice thus commenced was continued, and adopted by each company in succession.*<sup>23</sup>

Trained and armed with the Enfield Rifle calibre .574 and Springfield muskets, the 55th Massachusetts broke camp on 21 July 1863 and from Boston, embarked for the war on the steamer *Cahawba*. The soldiers arrived at New Bern, North Carolina, on the 25th. There they became part of General Edward A. Wild's "African Brigade" along with the 1st North Carolina Colored Infantry. Five days later they left for Folly Island and the siege of Charleston.

### **The 1st North Carolina**

In stark contrast to the 55th Massachusetts, the men of the 1st North Carolina had been slaves until only a few months before they became soldiers. The unit had been raised after many slaves had deserted their plantations and sought the protec-



Left: State Color, 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Right: National Color, 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry (Massachusetts State House Flag Project).

tion of the Union armies. General Wild, helped by Joseph E. Williams, a well known black abolitionist, found recruits among those seeking safety and freedom in raids across the North Carolina countryside. In one such raid:

*we were informed that there were upwards of thirty colored prisoners in the Duplin Court House that were to be tried for their lives for attempting to escape inside the lines of the United State forces. We tried to break down the door with axes . . . This door seemed to be about as hard as that of any iron safe. Finally the key was sent for, threatening the sheriff with vengeance in case of refusal, in the form of tar and feathers. . . . [The door is opened] The thirty was a fabulous number, which had diminished to*

*three live colored men; their lives were saved. Two of them came on to Newbern to join Wild's brigade.<sup>24</sup>*

General Wild set up a camp for the slaves and their families at New Bern on Roanoke Island where he and their commander, Colonel James C. Beecher, formed and trained the regiment. Beecher also established schools for the slaves. A group of African American women ordered a battle flag for the unit:

*The flag is to be made of blue silk, with a yellow silk fringe around the border. On one side the Goddess of Liberty is represented with her right foot resting on a copperhead snake. On the reverse side, a large gilt rising sun, with the word 'Liberty' in very large letters over the sun.<sup>25</sup>*

The 1st North Carolina's close ties to Massachusetts were demonstrated when Governor Andrew of Massachusetts consecrated the flag.

### **Folly Island, South Carolina**

The 55th Massachusetts and 1st North Carolina landed on Folly Island on 3 August and:

*proceeded along the beach to the extreme northerly end of Folly Island, and bivouacked in the sand. So urgent was the call for men that heavy details for fatigue were made at once, and it was not until after five days that the camp vacated by the 47th New York, about four hundred yards south of Light-house inlet, in a small grove of palmetto on the beach, was assigned to the Fifty-fifth, the First North Carolina going into camp directly north of them.<sup>26</sup>*

From that time on, the 55th and 1st North Carolina were engaged in the heavy labor of preparing positions on Folly and Morris Islands.

### Settling in

One of the rationales for sending the 55th Massachusetts to South Carolina was the mistaken and stereotypical belief that the blacks could withstand the hot, humid weather of the South better than whites. The 55th suffered almost immediately on their arrival in the South, however, first at New Bern and then on Folly Island, where sickness and disease hit them quickly. Twelve men died in the first seven weeks, and by the end of December, the toll had risen to twenty-three. To make matters worse, because the brigade had left New Bern in a hurry without tents, knapsacks, blankets, and personal gear, the soldiers worked and slept in the open. When their cargo eventually arrived in September, much of it had been stolen or destroyed.<sup>27</sup>

The heavy labor continued throughout the fall. Detachments of both the 55th Massachusetts and 1st North Carolina worked in labor parties on many of the adjacent islands, hauling cannon, building gun emplacements, and standing guard. In November, the brigade moved its camp inland to the back of the island, along Folly River. By this time, morale had improved, and the weather was turning more healthful, although disease still claimed some lives. The brigade remained on Folly Island until 13 and 14 February 1864, when it was called to Florida. It left

the Charleston area without firing a shot at the enemy.

### To Florida and back

In Florida, the 1st North Carolina, now redesignated the 35th U.S.C.I., and the 55th Massachusetts campaigned against the Confederates. The 35th U.S.C.I. saw its first combat in the battle of Olustee, where the Union army was mauled on 20 February 1864. The 35th, 8th, and 54th Massachusetts joined six white regiments in the hard fight. Together, they lost some eighteen hundred sixty-one men; of those, two hundred thirty of the 35th were killed, wounded or missing.<sup>28</sup> In Florida, Wild's "African Brigade" was disbanded, and after the Jacksonville Campaign, the two regiments fell under different commands. They would meet again, however, at the battle of Honey Hill. The 35th U.S.C.I. went on to distinguish itself throughout the war, accumulating fifty-three combat deaths and seeing battle at Black Creek, Florida; St. John's River, Florida; and Honey Hill, South Carolina.<sup>29</sup>

The 55th Massachusetts returned to Folly Island in mid-April of 1864, its soldiers now hardened campaigners but still untested in combat. By then, the siege of Charleston had become less crucial to the outcome of the war. The soldiers of the 55th found the island almost deserted. Other units on Folly had been detached to the many small islands in the area. The 55th itself was quickly broken into detachments, and its soldiers again began to carry out fa-

tigue details and pull guard duty throughout the barrier islands.

### Combat

War eventually found the 55th Massachusetts. On 21 May, it skirmished with the Confederates on James Island along with the 103rd New York. Nineteen-year-old Private Phineas Cost—or Corst—Company E of Rockaway, New York, took a musket ball in the leg, becoming the first member of the 55th to receive a combat wound.<sup>30</sup> Two days later the 55th made a feint on Johns Island. The engagements, though neither crucial nor particularly bloody, gave the regiment combat experience.

Throughout that summer, both the Confederates and the Federals withdrew men from Charleston for pressing needs elsewhere. By June, the Federals believed that Confederate positions were weakened enough for them to move against the city. On the first of July, General Alexander Schimmelfennig led an attack against the Confederate lines on James Island, striking again at Fort Lamar in Secessionville. The 55th Massachusetts was placed in the center reserve of the battle line where combat was unlikely. But when a blast of grape and musket fire from a Confederate battery checked that center, the 55th Massachusetts deployed and charged, capturing two twelve-pound Napoleon guns.<sup>31</sup> One sergeant wrote proudly of his regiment's performance:

*Could you have been on the battlefield on the morning of July 1st,*

*and seen them under a shower of shot and shell deploy into line of battle when it seemed as though the day was lost by the giving way of two regiments (one white, and the other colored, both rushing back discomfited)—I say, could you have seen the old 55th rush in, with the shout of 'Remember Fort Pillow!' you would have thought that nothing human could have withstood their impetuosity. We know [sic] no defeat. The guns we were bent on having.<sup>32</sup>*

The 55th kept the guns for future campaigns.

Though the Union attack accomplished little for the Federals, the 55th's action gave it confidence and pride. The cost was nine men—seven killed outright, and two mortally wounded. Nineteen other men, including two officers, received wounds. The soldiers of the 55th carried the wounded back under fire and planned to recover those who had died on the field that evening. But the recovery failed, and when the 55th was ordered to fall back, it left its dead for the Confederates to bury. That did not happen, however, and eight months later, when officers of the 55th Massachusetts returned to the battle site, they found the grisly remains of James Davis, Lewis Peck, and the five others. They lay where they had fallen; their skulls had been taken.<sup>33</sup>

Word of an impending campaign became an order to move on 26 November. The regiment arrived on Hilton Head Island two days later

with five days cooked rations and 140 cartridges per man. On the evening of the 29th, it landed at Boyd's Neck, South Carolina, and the next day joined an expedition of Union soldiers, including the 54th Massachusetts and 35th U.S.C.I., on the road to Grahamville, South Carolina.

A few miles down that road, the Federals encountered Confederate skirmishers. They beat them back slowly to their "entrenchments, situated on a bluff at the further side of a small swampy creek, which crossed the main road just as it turned sharply to the left."<sup>34</sup> Thick woods covered both sides of the road. The bluff was called Honey Hill.

After the federals had tested the strength of the rebel lines, the 55th and the 54th were formed into a double column and wheeled off the road into the woods on the right. With artillery and supplies strung along the road, thick woods beside it, and orders drowned out by the noise of battle, both regiments lost cohesion. In a futile attempt to take the entrenched enemy, the 55th, 54th, and 35th U.S.C.I. formed and charged the bluff across a wooded swamp. The 55th was thrown back, twice rallied, charged again, and eventually was forced to retreat. The fury and violence of the battle equaled the 54th's rush against Battery Wagner. Even a Confederate account credited the aggressiveness of the soldiers:

*The Negroes, as usual, formed the advance, and had nearly reached the creek when our batteries opened*

*upon them down the road with a terrible volley of special case. This threw them into temporary confusion, but the entire force, estimated at five thousand, was quickly restored to order. . . . Thus the battle raged from eleven in the morning till dark. . . . The centre and left of the enemy fought with desperate earnestness. Several attempts were made to charge our batteries, and many got nearly across the swamp, but were in every instance forced back by the galling fire poured into them from our lines. We made a visit to the field the day following, and found the road literally strewn with their dead.<sup>35</sup>*

On the evening of the battle, the 55th and the rest of the column retreated back down the road to Boyd's Neck. Next morning's roll call "revealed a loss, in killed and wounded, of half the officers and a third of the enlisted men engaged."<sup>36</sup> Thirty-one soldiers of the 55th Massachusetts had been killed and 138 wounded.

## **Victory**

Though most of the expedition soon left Boyd's Neck for Hilton Head, the 55th Massachusetts remained until it was sent to Savannah on 1 January 1865. It returned to Folly Island in February and joined an expedition to James Island. On 9 February along with the 144th and 54th New York, it attacked and captured Confederate positions at a cost of one man wounded. On the 19th of February, word spread that

Charleston had been abandoned, and two days later, the 55th entered Charleston:

*Few people were on the wharf when the troops landed, or in the street when the line was formed; but the streets, on the route through the city, were crowded with the colored population. Cheers, blessings, prayers, and songs were heard on every side. Men and women crowded to shake hands with the men and officers . . . On through the streets of the rebel city passed the column, on through the chief seat of that slave power, tottering to its fall. Its walls rung to the chorus of manly voices singing 'John Brown,' 'Babylon is falling,' and the 'Battle-Cry of Freedom;' while, at intervals, the na-*

*tional airs, long unheard there, were played by the regimental band. The glory and triumph of this hour may be imagined, but can never be described. It was one of those occasions which happen but once in a lifetime, to be lived over in the memory for ever.<sup>37</sup>*

The 55th Massachusetts continued to serve occupation duty in South Carolina for a few months in places like Monck's Corner, Eutaw Springs, Orangeburg, Summerville, Ridgeville, and Mount Pleasant. On 29 August 1865, it was mustered out at Mount Pleasant, and then on 23 September, it was formally discharged in Boston. "32 commissioned officers and 822 enlisted men were mustered out; of these, 18 offic-

ers and 653 men had left Readville in 1863, and had served with the regiment from its organization."<sup>38</sup>

Over the course of those two years the 55th Massachusetts had campaigned hard and served well. From the relative safety of the Northern states, these African Americans had risked their lives and their freedom. Had they been captured, it was unlikely they would have been accorded the same treatment as white soldiers. Still, they heeded the call of the recruitment posters: "If we would be regarded Men, if we would forever SILENCE THE TONGUE OF CALUMNY, of prejudice and hate; let us rise NOW and fly to arms!"<sup>39</sup> Of those 653 who heeded the call and joined the 55th Massachusetts, 175 failed to return.



# Rediscovery and excavation

When the Union Army moved inland to seize Charleston in 1865, it abandoned a Folly Island completely devastated by two years of intensive occupation. The army had camped and dug privies, wells, and trash pits; constructed fortifications and buildings; raised hospital tents; cooked dinners and buried the remains; and burned the wood it cut for its fires. Contemporary accounts say not a tree was left standing. Soldiers had lost buttons, buckles and ammunition; they had broken bottles, thrown away worn equipment, and mislaid their pocket knives. These things they left behind. They also left behind an unknown number of friends and comrades. Unable to be shipped home to their families, the dead were interred in numerous small regimental, brigade, and division-level cemeteries.<sup>40</sup>

The soldiers detailed to bury Private William Herbert would have had no inkling that the grave they dug would one day be disturbed for road building. Neither could they have imagined that one hundred twenty-four years later, archaeologists would reclaim Private Herbert by careful excavation. Nor could they conceive of any circumstance that would make scientists return to what the soldiers viewed as a rather dismal little island just to learn about the experience of their regiment. Yet that is exactly what happened.

## Unearthed by development

Much of the modern town of Folly Beach now covers the old campgrounds. One area called the Seabrook property remained untouched, however, until 1987, when the construction of new roads to serve the development of a private residential community turned the property from a forest with moderate to heavy understory into open, exposed sand dunes. Local and out-of-state collectors, who had known the island was an excellent place to find Civil War relics and had been collecting there at a steady pace for at least twenty years, flocked to the area when word of the construction activities spread. When two avid local collectors discovered human bones among the debris, they contacted the Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology.

The collectors were afraid of looting and hoped that professional archaeologists would recover the human remains and rebury them somewhere safe. Certainly, immediate protective measures were called for because the cemetery was threatened not only by its probable discovery by other collectors but by the continued construction of the roadbed as well—today, the sand ridge at the site has been completely leveled. The key question, however, was whether this area was an archaeological site or an abandoned cemetery, which, by law, would have

to be turned over to the Charleston County Coroner for handling.<sup>41</sup>

The Institute contacted the landowner, the county coroner, the Charleston County Medical Examiner's Office, officials of the City of Folly Beach, the State Historic Preservation Office, and the South Carolina Coastal Council. After much discussion, everyone agreed that the remains were not of recent origin and that they held considerable historical interest. They also agreed that the skeletal material should be reburied eventually but wanted to know what archaeologists could learn by excavating the site in the meantime.

The developer agreed to a 30-day construction delay while a team put together by the Institute—archaeologists, physical anthropologists, historians, and experts in faunal analysis—conducted salvage archaeological excavations of the area. Then when construction began again, Carolina Archaeological Services, Inc., (CAS) agreed to help monitor the situation and recover any burials not found during the excavations. During the initial excavation, the team recovered fourteen burials and a miscellaneous collection of bones on the surface. Later, during sewer construction, CAS recovered four more burials.<sup>42</sup> Backhoe tests were then dug to be sure no further burials were left in the area of the site.

Archaeologists begin excavation of the cemetery in the rough bulldozer cut on Folly Island (SCIAA).



### Posing questions

To guide the excavations, the archaeologists developed a research design. The design outlined each step they would follow to remove the burials and posed several important questions they would need to answer as they worked. Whom did the burials represent? Why were they on Folly Island? How had the people died? Were the burials Union soldiers who had died during the siege of Charleston? Though the odds were good that the burials were soldiers, the site could have been a slave cemetery—there had been a plantation on the island. It could also have been a place where the bodies of people who had died during a long transatlantic voyage had been abandoned—ships often avoided quarantine by leaving the bodies of the dead on the barrier islands before

they arrived in Charleston. Until they excavated, the archaeologists could not know. And even when they had finished, one question remained.

They had recovered eighteen human burials and numerous human bones that had been exposed by a bulldozer when it had unknowingly ripped through the unmarked cemetery. Oddly, only two skulls were recovered with the eighteen burials. Where were the other sixteen skulls? Here was a mystery. And added to it was the fact that all but the two burials with the skulls had been disturbed before the archaeologists uncovered the graves. The disturbance could not have been by a bulldozer because many of the burials were deep—far below its scrapings. The culprit lay elsewhere—but where?

Much more would be learned about the soldiers, the site, the 55th Massachusetts, and the Civil War before the mystery of the missing skulls was solved. For the next two years archaeologists worked like detectives, piecing together separate facts as they were gathered and analyzing these in light of others. Through a combination of archaeology, physical anthropology, and archival research they finally learned many of the secrets of this site, including the probable outcome of the missing skulls.

The first clues came from the slow, meticulous excavation of the site. The archaeologists dug at predetermined depths—usually ten centimeters—one level at a time, stopped and recorded everything they saw, measured the location of every artifact from a common central



Archaeologists returned to Folly Island to excavate portions of the campground near the cemetery site (SCIAA).

point, recorded those locations in both horizontal and vertical space, and drew and photographed anything they saw that might be important. As they dug deeper, they recorded the depth of the base of each grave and observed and recorded each grave shaft.

Why this careful attention to detail? Because it is the spatial relationships between the artifacts found rather than the artifacts themselves that tell archaeologists most about a site and about the people who lived there. Additionally, archaeologists get only one chance to excavate a site. Because they can never replace the dirt that each shovelful or trowel scraping removes, they cannot afford to miss anything. Details that may seem insignificant to them on-site may become critical once they return to the laboratory to analyze

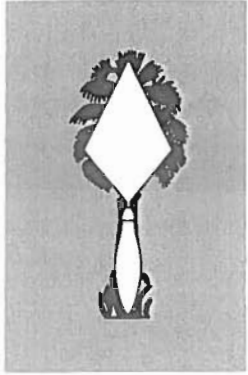
their findings and notes. At Folly Island, the depth of each burial, the location of each grave, and which artifacts came from which grave all provided the archaeologists with valuable facts. Each fact, built upon and considered with other facts, then gave them the answers to the questions they had asked.

### **The graves**

The archaeologists found that most of the burials at Folly Island had been dug individually, buried at different depths, and laid out in clusters rather than in neat rows. Curiously though, three of the burials—numbers 15, 16, and 17—were set out in a row and buried at relatively the same depth. Could 15, 16, and 17 be the graves of Private William Herbert and the other two men who were buried Christmas week in 1863?

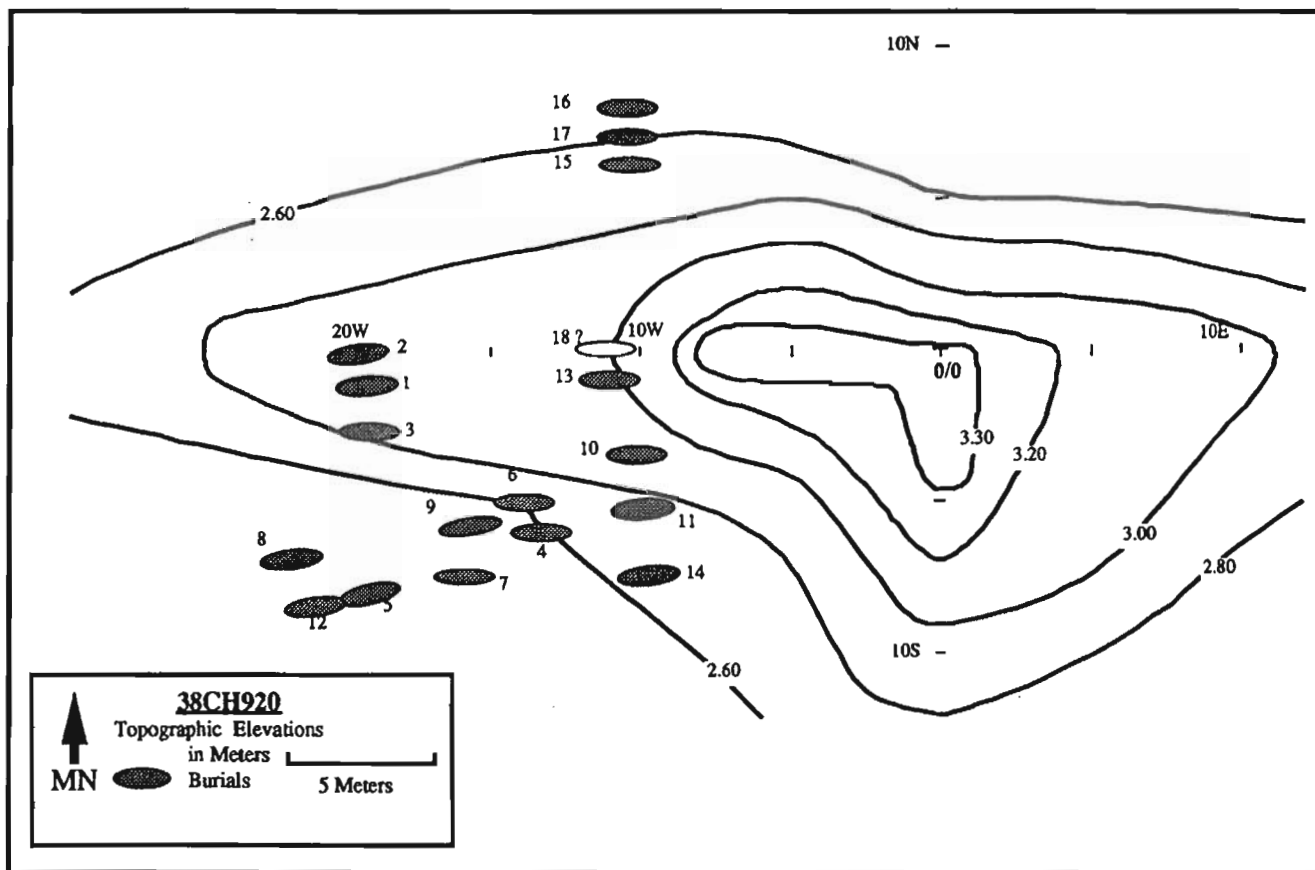
### **Characteristics of the burials**

Each of the burials had a number of different characteristics. With one exception, the bodies were laid east/west, their hands were folded across their chests or abdomens, and their positions were extended and supine. The one exception was laid either on his back or on his side. Although the preservation of coffins was imperfect, it appeared that nine of the soldiers had been buried in simple, hexagonally-shaped coffins. Grommets in some burials indicated that seven of the men were shrouded in rubber blankets and that four of those men were buried in coffins as well. Union uniform and civilian buttons found in the graves suggested that eight men were buried wearing uniform “sack coats” and civilian undergarments, and buckles from forage caps showed that four of



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The cover: Reenactors of the 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry pose for photographers at the reburial ceremony in Beaufort, South Carolina (Massachusetts State House Flag Project).



Topographic map of Wild's Brigade cemetery, site 38CH920, showing burials (SCIAA).

the men had worn forage caps to their graves. All but one of the soldiers were buried in their trousers, and the one remaining was either buried nude or in undergarments only. One soldier was buried with a rubber pipe with ceramic inset.

### The clothing

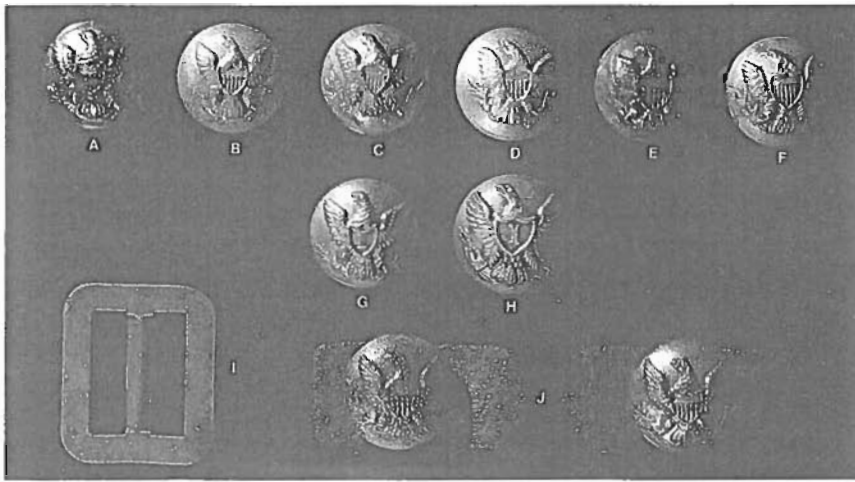
The fact that almost all of the buried soldiers wore some sort of clothing is interesting in light of a letter written by Charles Bowditch, a white of-

ficer with the 55th Massachusetts, on 6 February 1864:

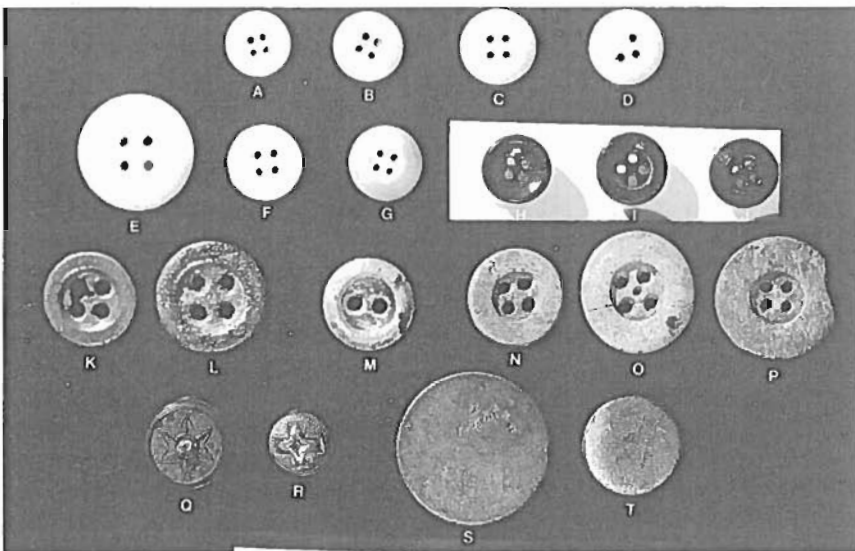
*The negroes are the hardest people to reason with that you can imagine. Last night I had a talk with one of my men, a very respectable inhabitant of Connecticut, and one who has received a very good high school education. I asked him how it was that his class refused so earnestly to wear the clothes of a man who had died. He couldn't tell ex-*

*actly, but said that he had a suit of clothes of his father' [sic] and grandfather's and that he would sooner go naked than wear them. I tried to argue with him, but it was not [sic] use; the superstition was too deeply imbedded in his mind to be easily eradicate.<sup>43</sup>*

This "superstition" does not appear to have extended to shoes, however, for the burials held foot bones—often undisturbed—but nei-



Union military buttons recovered in the graves and at the campsite. A through F are enlisted men's uniform buttons; G and H are infantry officers' buttons; I is a forage cap strap buckle; and J is a fragment of a leather forage strap with two side buttons attached (SCIAA).



Utility and civilian (undergarment) buttons recovered in the graves and at the campsite. A through G are made of white or "milk" glass; H through J are made of black glass; K and L are tin; M is made of pewter; N through O are bone; Q is made of hard rubber; and R through T are brass (SCIAA).

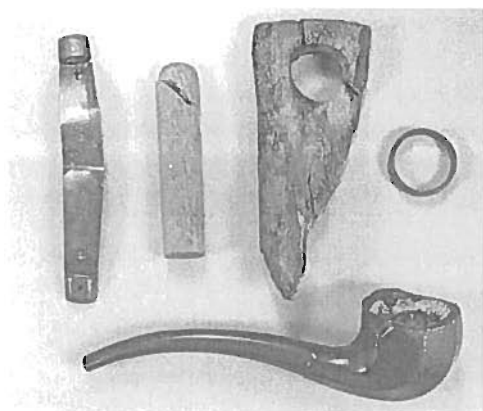
ther shoes nor shoe nails. Probably, they had been removed before burial. Colonel (then Major) Fox, the 55th Massachusetts regimental adjutant, noted that shoes were a problem. "There are some 15 more or less in the regiment who wear No. 12 and two who wear No. 13, and it is with great difficulty we

can keep them from having to go barefooted."<sup>44</sup>

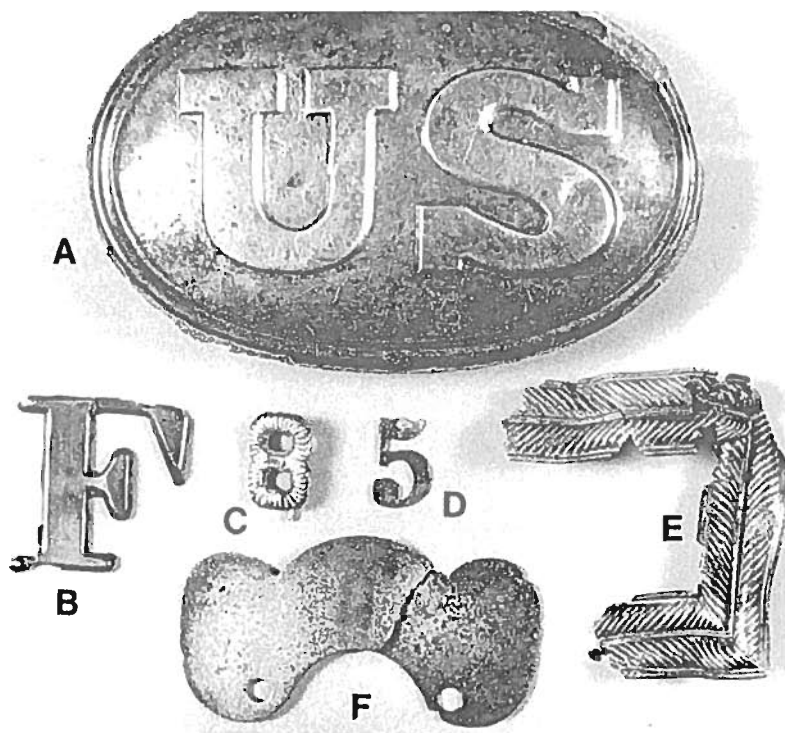
### The bones

Physical anthropologists can analyze bones and tell archaeologists as much about the humans of the distant past as they can tell detectives about the murder victims of today. A

study of the bones in these burials revealed that as a group, the soldiers were relatively healthy, young, African American males. They ranged in age from sixteen to forty, although most were between twenty and thirty, and probably only three were older. Their average height was five feet six inches, and most of them had led a



Top. A rubber pipe with a ceramic inset was found in one burial. Right. A: Cartridge box plate; B: Enlisted man's company letter "F". C: Officer's regimental number "8". D: Stencil scrap number "5" found in grave and used as a regimental number. E: Fragment of an officer's shoulder strap. F: Fragment of an enlisted man's shoulder scale or epaulette (SCIAA).



life of heavy labor. They had probably not died of combat wounds since the bones showed no evidence of trauma.<sup>45</sup>

### Answers from the excavation

The individual graves, the loosely defined rows, the different characteristics inside each of the burials, and the absence of shoes implied that the soldiers had died individual deaths from disease in beds in a camp hospital over an extended period. Had they all died in combat and been disposed of at the same time, most would still have been wearing shoes, and they probably would have been buried in neat rows at similar depths or—more likely—

placed in a single trench, a typical way to dispose of carnage.

The evidence that showed the burials were all African American males in Union uniforms confirms they were members of one of the black Civil War military units that had been stationed on Folly Island during the siege. But which one? Nine black regiments, including the legendary 54th Massachusetts, had spent time on Folly Island during those two long years. Burial number three, however, produced a clue—a sheet-brass stencil blank, which had been modified to be worn as an insignia. The blank was the number "5." The archaeologists took note of this important artifact, then turned

their attention toward historical documents.

### Answers from documents

Sorting out the various African American regiments that were on Folly Island during the siege and identifying the one these burials represented was a complex problem. The regiments included: 1) 21st United States Colored Infantry (earlier designated the 3rd and 4th South Carolina Colored Infantry); 2) 33rd U.S.C.I. (1st S.C.C.I.); 3) 34th U.S.C.I. (2nd S.C.C.I.); 4) 1st N.C.C.I. (North Carolina Colored Infantry, who in February 1864 became the 35th U.S.C.I.); 5) Elements of the 2nd N.C.C.I. (later the 36th

U.S.C.I.); 6) Elements of the 3rd N.C.C.I. (who became the 37th U.S.C.I.); 7) Elements of the 2nd U.S.C.I.; 8) 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment; and, 9) 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment.<sup>46</sup>

Details of service in the siege of Charleston quickly eliminated three—the 21st U.S.C.I., the 34th U.S.C.I., and the 54th Massachusetts. Sources showed that soldiers of the 21st U.S.C.I., though they performed fatigue duty on Folly Island from April 1864 to February 1865, actually camped on Morris Island until they were detached from there on 20 February 1865 and sent to Charleston. The 34th U.S.C.I. arrived on Folly Island on 13 April 1864 only to be transferred quickly to Morris Island. And the 54th Massachusetts had duty on Folly Island from April to November 1863 but did not camp there.<sup>47</sup>

This left six—the 1st N.C.C.I., detachments of both the 2nd N.C.C.I. and the 3rd N.C.C.I., the 2nd U.S.C.I., the 33rd U.S.C.I., and the 55th Massachusetts. The troops on Folly Island camped on the beaches during the summer and moved inland to the back of the island along Folly River during the winter. The location of the cemetery showed it was used primarily, possibly exclusively, when soldiers were camped along Folly River. But many units camped along the back of the island. Which ones camped in or near the cemetery?

### **Identifying the camp**

A careful analysis of the historical documents in conjunction with a



A model demonstrating the use of a rubber poncho with grommets. Often, these ponchos were used as blankets (Smithsonian Institution).





history—a compilation of Major Charles Fox's letters and journals—says that in November the unit moved inland to:

*a spot on the west slope of a wooded ridge, in the middle of the island, on the road leading from the Campbell House to the beach. This ridge was the third from the sea—the bluff over the beach being the first—and only a gentle rise or two of wooded ground separated it from the marshes bordering on Folly River. A good location for cold weather; it would have been decidedly unhealthy in summer, when the health of the troops could only be preserved by encamping as near as possible to the beach, exposed to the sea breeze. This camp was gradually improved, a parade ground cleared in front, and soon made, if not the best regimental camp on the island, certainly the best ever occupied there by the regiment.<sup>48</sup>*

Although a letter Fox wrote to his wife on 4 November suggested a discrepancy about the number of ridges—

*Wednesday, Nov. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2 ½ o'clock P.M. Have just returned from our new camping ground. For a winter location it is much better than the one where we now are. The camp will be in the woods, the officers tents on a little ridge, the second from the sea, the fronts as now, toward the marsh, but with an old cotton field, which will make a fine parade ground, and a ridge of land covered with brush and*



Parade ground of an interior camp on Folly Island (National Archives).

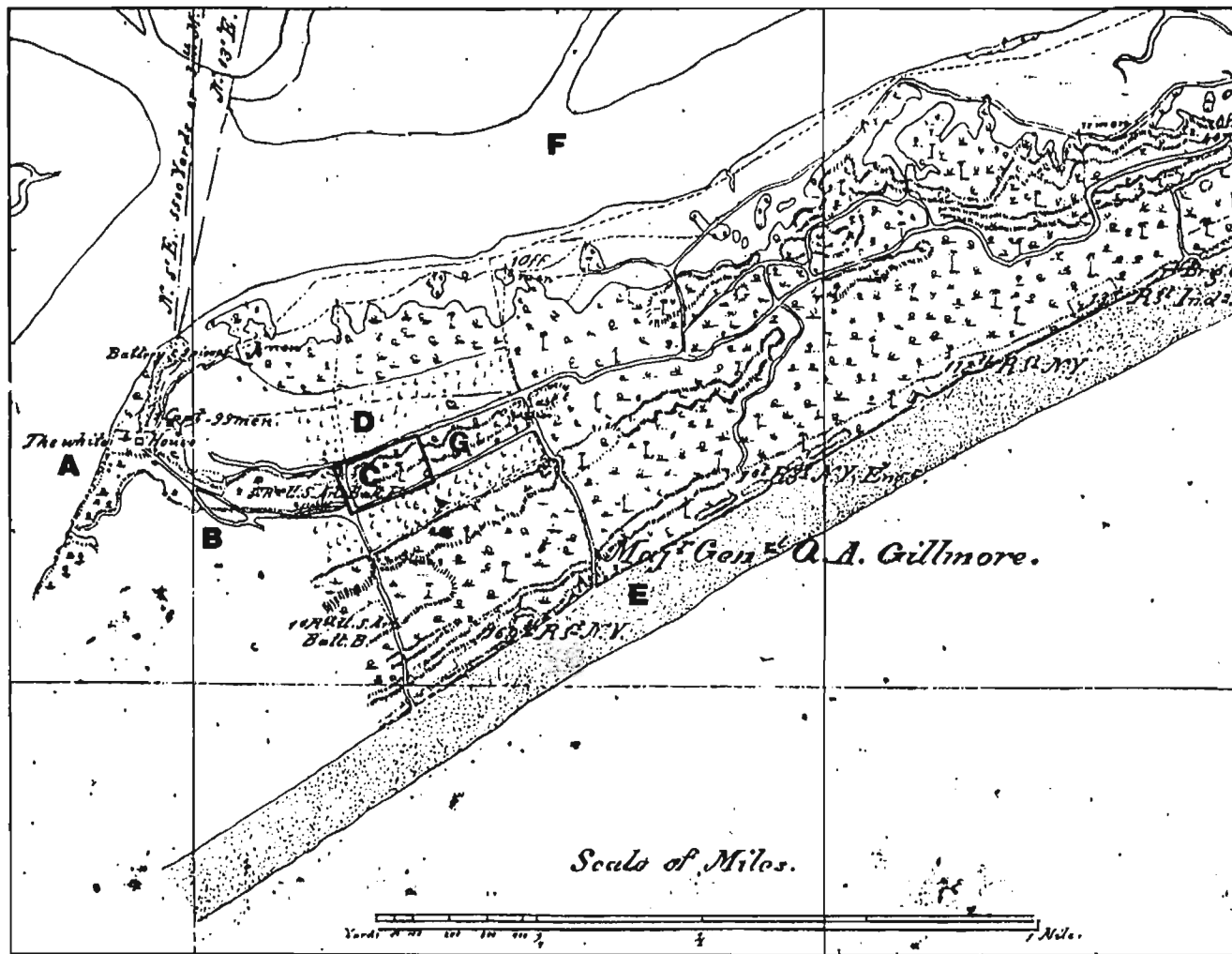
*dwarf palmetto, between us and it.<sup>49</sup>*

—a draft version of the regimental history showed that the camp began at the ridge farthest from the sea, no matter which way the ridges were counted:

*The 8th day of Nov. the Brigade Camp was changed to a spot previously selected on the slope of the wood ridge in the middle of the Island, on the North side of the road leading from the Campbell (or White) House to the beach. This ridge was the third or farthest in land from the sea, the beach bluff being the first, and had only a gentle rise or two of wooded*

*ground between it and the marsh bordering on Folly River. A good location in cold weather, it would have been decidedly unhealthy in summer.<sup>50</sup>*

Engineer A. Becker of the 103rd N.Y. produced a military map of Folly Island dated 5 October 1863, by order of General Vogdes. Unfortunately, he completed the map one month before the 55th Massachusetts moved to the interior of the island. Still, an examination of this map in conjunction with a U.S.G.S. topographic map and the description given in the regimental history clearly placed the winter camp of the



Detail of Vogdes-Becker map of 1863 with additional Civil War features superimposed (National Archives). A=White house (Seabrook); B=road to beach (Hudson Ave.); C=55th Mass. camp site; D=cotton field; E=Gillmore HQ; F=unnamed creek (common reference point); G=38CH920 cemetery site.

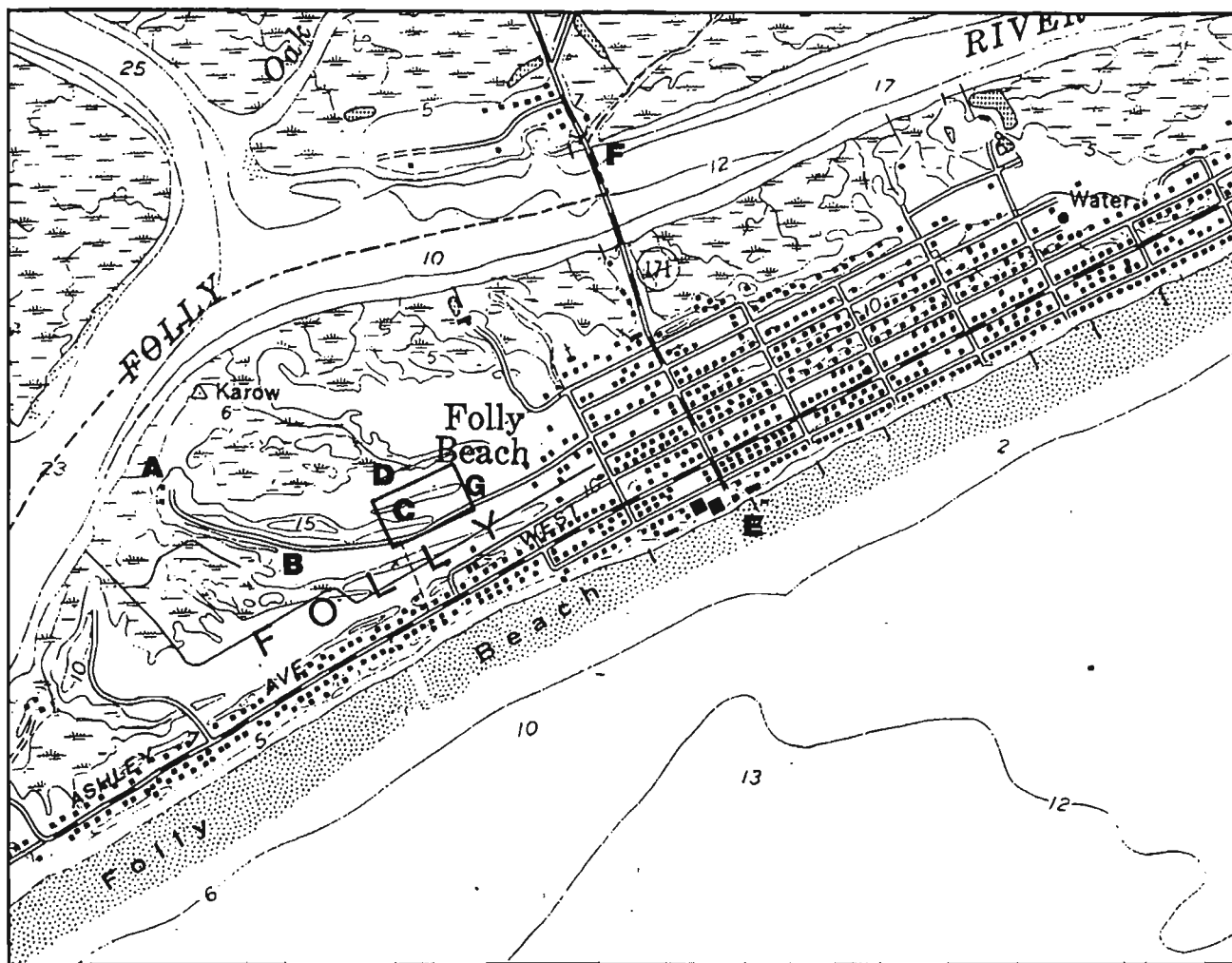
55th Massachusetts, and by extension the 1st North Carolina, close to the cemetery site.

The maps share some points of reference. The present Seabrook house—"A"—is in the same area on

the U.S.G.S. map as the Campbell or White house on the Becker military map. The road shown on the military map going east from the White house—"B"—is shown today as Hudson Ave. on the U.S.G.S. map.

Finally, a small path leading from the beach to Hudson Ave. on the U.S.G.S. map is the remnant of the road on the military map leading from the beach to the White house.

These reference points and the



Detail of U.S.G.S. 7.5 min. James Island topographic map, 1959 (photorevised 1979), with Civil War features superimposed on project area. A=White house (Seabrook); B=Hudson Ave. (road to beach); C=55th Mass. camp site ; D=cotton field; E=former location Gilmore HQ; F=unnamed creek (common reference point); G=38CH920 cemetery site.

ridge farthest back from the beach on the road to the Campbell or White house placed the 55th Massachusetts camp at "C," facing a marsh, east of the location shown on the military map for Battery E, 3rd U.S.

Artillery, and south of a cotton field—"D." The road on the left flank of the camp matches the path marked on the U.S.G.S. map, which put the cemetery near the camp's right rear next to the regimental hos-

pital and chaplain—a logical spot since camp cemeteries were usually placed near camp hospitals.

Other documents supported this location also. In a letter to Surgeon General Dale of Massachusetts,

Interior camp along a dune line on Folly Island. Could this be the camp of Wild's Brigade? (National Archives).



for example, W. L. Brown, the regimental surgeon of the 55th Massachusetts, said, "The camp is now located . . . to the rear of General Gillmore's headquarters."<sup>51</sup>

An additional piece of historical documentation—the Morning Reports of the 1st North Carolina—identified the site as a brigade rather than a regimental cemetery. The report noted that Private Primus Rin had died in the 1st N.C.C.I. regimental hospital on 3 February 1864 and had been buried in the brigade cemetery on 4 February 1864.<sup>52</sup> By identifying the cemetery this way, the report suggested that during the winter camp of 1864, the dead of both the 55th Massachusetts and the 1st North Carolina, which were together as a brigade and camped next

to each other at this time, were buried at the site.

Thus, the facts revealed by research into the archaeology, history, and physical anthropology of the cemetery identified it positively as that of the 55th Massachusetts and 1st North Carolina Colored Infantry. Interestingly, long after this analysis had been completed, the relic collector who had alerted the archaeologists in the first place admitted that he had recovered the stencil of one Private Harrison Peril, Company K, of the 55th Massachusetts, just west of the cemetery!

This evidence tends to eliminate further consideration of the 33rd U.S.C.I. and the small detachments of the 2nd and 3rd N.C.C.I. The 33rd U.S.C.I. was on duty at

Folly Island in 1864 from July to November and briefly in December. They were in winter camp on Folly Island only for a brief time.<sup>53</sup> Normally they would have buried their dead in their regimental cemetery. Certainly under the strange circumstances of war, however, one or two members of their unit or of any other units on the island in the winter of 1864-65 could have been buried in another regiment's cemetery. And that is exactly what happened to two members of the 2nd U.S.C.I. To explain that mystery, archaeologists had to go further into the historical documents to learn more about the soldiers they recovered.

### **Identifying the dead**

From day one of the excavation, pub-

Table: Soldiers of the 55th Mass. and 1st N.C.C.I. who died on Folly Island  
13 November 1863 to 13 February 1864

Name	Rank	Reg.	Co.	Cause	Date	Ref.
Edwin Barber	Pvt.	55th	E	Disease	12/15/63	A,B
Samuel Fields	Corp.	"	"	"	11/27/63	A,B
Albert Johnson	Pvt.	"	F	Pneumonia	11/28/63	A,B
Richard Gentry	Pvt.	"	H	Typhoid	11/19/63	A,B
Hiram Wood	Pvt.	"	I	Typhoid	12/22/63	A,B
John Bryant	Pvt.	"	K	Disability	11/21/63	A,B
Stephen Maddox	Corp.	"	A	Pneumonia	1/31/64	A,B
Charles Cole	Pvt.	"	B	Typhoid	12/20/63	A,B
William Herbert	Pvt.	"	B	Typhoid	12/21/63	A,B
James Fox	Pvt.	"	B	Typhoid	12/23/63	A,B
Unknown	Pvt.	2nd*	A	?	12/?/63	C
Unknown	Pvt.	2nd*	A	?	12/?/63	C
Unknown	?	55th	?	?	12/?/63	A,B,C**
John Bird	Serg.	55th	F	Pneumonia	?***	A,B
Jordan Burton	Pvt.	55th	F	Consumpt.	?***	A,B
William Henry	Pvt.	55th	G	Typhoid	?***	A,B
Samuel Thomas	Serg.	55th	A	Disease	?****	A,B
Stanly Tadton	?	1st	K	Sickness	12/26/63	D
Warren Miles	?	"	B	Typhoid	12/21/63	D
Jackson Benson	?	"	C	Smallpox	2/10/63	D
Issac Coleman	?	"	E	Consumpt.	2/4/64	D
Jeffery Johnson	?	"	G	?	12/26/63	D
Frank Newby	?	"	G	Debility	12/31/63	D
Primus Rin	?	"	I	Typhoid	2/3/64	D
John Taylor Lee	?	"	I	Consumpt.	2/10/64	D
Alfred Mack	?	"	K	Sickness	11/27/63	D
Elisha Gibbs	?	"	K	Sickness	1/28/64	D

A= Fox 1866, B= Fox 1866,ms, C= Brown to Dale Jan. 1864, D= 1st  
N.C.C.I. Morning Reports and Order Books.

\*2nd U.S.C.I.

\*\* Both the published and draft versions of the regimental history state six  
individuals died in December, Regimental Surgeon Brown states 5 (Brown  
to Dale, January 12, 1864)

\*\*\* Published version of the Regimental History states these individuals died in June,  
draft clearly shows they actually died in January

\*\*\*\* Regimental histories state he died in 1864, however, Lt. Garrison diary indicates  
1863.<sup>54</sup>

lic interest in identifying the dead by name was strong. The archaeologists shared that sentiment but knew the only real opportunity for producing such evidence lay with the presence of some identifying tag inside the graves. When they found none, they knew it would be impossible to identify each of the human burials. The names of the soldiers who died during that winter of 1863–64, however, were a matter of record, and it is reasonable to expect that at least some of those names matched the burials.

The table at left lists twenty-seven soldiers—fifteen of 55th Massachusetts, ten of the 1st North Carolina, and two of the 2nd U. S. C. I.—who died between 14 November 1863 and 13 February 1864. The list is highly speculative, however, because it is impossible to know with any certainty either exactly who was buried in the brigade cemetery or when the first and last burials took place.

### Dating the first interment

The regiments established winter camp slowly throughout November of 1863, and sometime during that month, when the regimental hospitals were sufficiently completed, they began to treat patients there rather than at the previous camp on the Folly Island beach. Entries in Fox's regimental history of the 55th Massachusetts coupled with the assumption that the very sick and those near death would not have been transferred until the new winter hospital was operating, persuaded the archaeologists to exclude

Topics in African American History 3

# **Whom we would never more see**

**History and archaeology  
recover the lives and deaths  
of African American Civil War soldiers  
on Folly Island, South Carolina**

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**by Steven D. Smith**

## **Contents**

1. Preface
2. The siege of Charleston
7. The 55th Massachusetts and 1st North Carolina Colored Infantry
13. Rediscovery and excavation
28. Life and death on Folly Island
41. Reburial
45. Notes
50. Index

from consideration those in the 55th who had died before 14 November 1863:

*Wednesday Nov. 11th" The regiment is gradually collecting at this place, a large number of convalescents having come down today with much of the baggage. . . .*

*Friday Nov. 13" To-day we fixed up two hospital tents quite nicely, and built a stable, or rather a frame to be covered with canvas, for the horses.<sup>55</sup>*

Nothing was found to indicate when the 1st North Carolina hospital was established, but if it was up and running before the 55th's, it is possible that the names of two 1st North Carolina soldiers who died on 13 November should have been included in the list.

### Dating the last interment

The brigade struck camp on the 12th, and the two regiments left the island together on 13 February 1864.<sup>56</sup> The very sick, however, remained behind. "On leaving Folly Island, a number of the men who had been exposed in Virginia to the small-pox, were left behind."<sup>57</sup> If the sick remained in the regimental hospitals at the winter camp after the regiments left, the individuals who died after 12 February probably would have been buried in the cemetery. If the sick were transferred to division-level hospitals on the island—as they likely were—the use of the cemetery probably ceased. The records show that while some sick 1st

North Carolina soldiers who had been left behind died, none from the 55th Massachusetts succumbed to disease from February, when the regiment left, until around April, when it returned. In all, sixty-three men of the 55th Massachusetts died of diseases during their Folly Island service.<sup>58</sup>

### Uncovering discrepancies

Discrepancies between the monthly statistical summaries in both the draft and published versions of the regimental histories and other historic documents relating to the 55th Massachusetts added to the problems of compiling the list of names for the table.

The first discrepancy occurred between the statistical summaries of November 1863, which said ten men died of disease<sup>59</sup>—nine in the regimental hospital and the other one elsewhere<sup>60</sup>—and the rosters of names in both the draft and published histories, which listed only nine deaths in November. A diary kept by Lt. Garrison—an officer of the 55th Massachusetts—may explain the conflict, for in it, he recorded that Sergeant Samuel P. Thomas died from disease on 17 November 1863<sup>61</sup>—one year earlier than the November 1864 date given by the regimental histories. The archaeologists included Thomas in the table because Garrison's diary, unlike the regimental histories, appears to have been contemporary, not written after the war from memory.

The second discrepancy occurred between the statistical sum-

maries of December 1863, which say six men died in the regimental hospital, and the rosters of names in the draft and published histories, and a letter report from Regimental Surgeon Brown to Massachusetts Surgeon General Dale,<sup>62</sup> both of which list only five deaths in December. The sixth death given in the statistical report remains unaccounted for, and is listed as an unknown individual in the table.

The third discrepancy occurred between the published regimental history, which says three members of the 55th Massachusetts—Bird, Burton, and Henry—died in June of 1864,<sup>63</sup> and the statistical summaries and a letter report from Brown to Dale, both of which list four deaths<sup>64</sup> (of Bird, Burton, Henry, and a Private Maddox) in January. Since the handwriting in the draft of the history looks like "Jan" instead of June, the deaths of Bird, Burton, and Henry are listed in the table.

### The U.S.C.I. troopers

What about that detachment of 2nd U.S.C.I. soldiers who were on Folly Island? Brown, in his letter report to the surgeon general noted that in December, "In addition to the number of deaths in our own regiment, two privates of Co. A, 2nd Reg. U.S. Col'd Infantry, died in our hospital. They were on detached service; and as the Post Hospital on Folly Island has been broken up, they had no other place to go."<sup>65</sup>

Officially, the 2nd U.S.C.I. were assigned to the Department of



the Gulf and never on Folly Island. Company A, of the 2nd U.S.C.I., however, was placed on detached service on Folly Island from August to December of 1863—interesting, in light of the fact that when Company A was detached from its assembly area in Virginia and sent to Folly Island, the 2nd U.S.C.I. had not even been formally organized as a regiment.<sup>66</sup> This kind of ambiguity in the records of the Civil War makes it difficult either to produce an accurate list of soldiers represented among the burials or to pinpoint the location of any one regiment at a particular time. Given the circumstances,

however, these two 2nd U.S.C.I. troopers have been included in the table as unknowns.

#### **Private William Herbert**

Private William Herbert, who died of typhoid during Christmas week of 1863, is listed in the table. The presence on Folly Island of this African American from Nova Scotia in an American uniform must have seemed odd to many who met him. Just why he left Canada to fight for the freedom of his race in America or what his thoughts and his life were like during his final days can not now be known. What was possible, how-

ever, was to find out something about the experiences he shared with his fellow African Americans during the summer and fall of 1863. With this in mind, archaeologists returned once more to the archives and to Folly Island to excavate portions of the campground near the site. Although the intense reuse of the area by many units made it impossible to match archaeological features to a particular unit, the archaeologists were able to use what they found to present a vivid picture of life and death on Folly Island during the Civil War.

# Life and death on Folly Island

On 3 August 1863, Private Herbert and his regiment, the 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, landed on Folly Island, marched to the north end, and joined in the intensive preparations for the assault on Morris Island. For the next six months they would be subjected to a Spartan life of exhaustive labor, excessive heat, boredom, tension, and fear. Life on Folly Island would be uncomfortable for all the troops, and for the African Americans, the added burden of prejudice would keep them under intense pressure to prove their worth.

Today, Folly Island is a quiet, six-mile-long barrier island running from the southwest to the northeast, its shores bordered by the Atlantic on the east and a scenic marshland on the west. The town of Folly Beach caters to some tourists but mainly to residents, who have all the benefits of living by the ocean on an island that is near to, but not in, a major metropolitan city. Probably, the island was even more beautiful, remote, and quiet in 1863 with only one major landmark, the plantation main house near Stono Inlet. With little intrusion by man, this long, thin, dash of land—only three-quarters of a mile wide at its widest point—consisted of high undulating sand dunes, wide beaches, and thick inland woods of palmetto, scrub oak, and pine. But the arrival that August of thousands of Yankee soldiers hell-

bent on the capture of Charleston, soon made the island a cramped, noisy, wretched place. One soldier wrote home “A man in civil life must indeed be a fool to think he could live on such a baron [*sic*] place.”<sup>67</sup>

## Heat, sand, and creatures

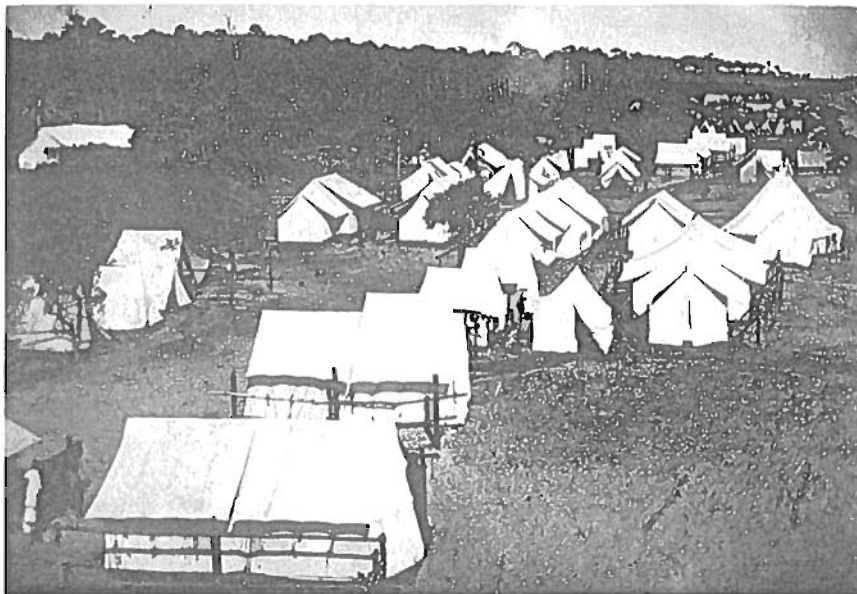
Many soldiers echoed his sentiment. With no time to acclimate, these northerners had been dropped on to a hot, humid island to dig fortifications and haul cannon. “Folly Island was probably the worst place in the army. If there is a worse place than these islands I don’t want to see it,” wrote a New York trooper.<sup>68</sup> The only relief from the heat came in the evening when summer breezes fanned the beach and the troops who were camped there for that purpose. During the day, life on the beach in a heavy blue uniform was, to say the least, quite unpleasant. “Our exposure to the excessive heat of the day,” a soldier complained, “rapidly reduced the physical tone of the organization.”<sup>69</sup>

The price paid for living on the beach—or anywhere on Folly Island in the summer for that matter—was high. It meant enduring sand: “If you fell asleep, on waking your face would be covered, your clothes were full [of sand].”<sup>70</sup> The “greatest annoyance experienced was from the immense clouds of fine sand which penetrated everywhere, and covered whatever eatables we had.”<sup>71</sup> It

meant enduring mosquitoes: “Even overcoats [were] no protection from the ravenous . . . hoard of blood suckers . . . stinging, buzzing . . . screaming . . . dashing into your ears, wearing a fellows life out with coughing, slapping, pinching, and scratching.”<sup>72</sup> It meant enduring sand fleas, ticks, and flies. Assistant Surgeon Burt Wilder noted that “The flies here are very greedy and indiscriminating; they will remain on a morsel till it actually enters the mouth, and they plunge headlong into ink and other unsuitable liquids; they can bite severely too.”<sup>73</sup> Wilder, an avid naturalist, discovered another danger:

*Yesterday a man suddenly dropped something that he was carrying and Lt. Thurber took it on a stick to the Q.M.'s tent. . . . It was a 'Portuguese Man-of-War,' . . . I put it in a basin of water without touching the tentacles. After examining it about ten minutes I felt a stinging over the back of that hand, especially the middle joints of the fingers. This steadily increast [*sic*], extending up the arm, and finally reacht [*sic*] my chest so that on that side I could scarcely breath; this lasted for about an hour; and the pain in the arm gradually ceased.”<sup>74</sup>*

There were some compensations. “Men and officers bathe a good deal, but the beach slopes so gradu-



The only relief from the heat came in the evening, when summer breezes fanned the beach and the troops who were camped there for that purpose (U. S. Military History Institute).

ally that the surf is pretty far out and there is some fear of sharks."<sup>75</sup> Assistant Surgeon Wilder, his duties to the sick excusing him from much of the hard labor his men and other officers were enduring, had a singular perspective on the regiments' summer beach-side home:

*Just before supper the Q.M., Major, Captains Crane and Goodwin and myself had a magnificent surf bath; the waves were very high, higher than our heads, and I was overwhelmed several times. This is the finest beach I ever saw, and were other conditions in keeping with our stay here might be regarded as a delightful summer outing.<sup>76</sup>*

The fear of sharks was well-founded, however. One soldier wrote:

*Our camp is in the midst of the sand hills on the beach of the Atlantic, whose roaring breakers I hear tumbling on the shore, as I sit here writing. The boys have already caught a crocodile weighing eleven hundred pounds and one of them has been so unlucky as to have his leg bit off by a shark. The position is a healthy one.<sup>77</sup>*

### Duties

Whites and blacks both worked hard during that summer and fall, and drill was probably one of their least taxing duties. Immediately on arrival, the men of the 55th Massachusetts and 1st North Carolina were assigned fatigue duties. The regimental history notes that:

*From Aug. 10 until the opening fire upon Fort Sumter, Sept. 5, 1863,*

*heavy details for both night and day fatigue were made from the regiment, amounting on the average to at least three hundred and fifty men each twenty-four hours. These details were employed in cutting timber, making gabions, building wharves, loading and unloading stores, artillery, and ammunition, hauling heavy guns to the front, and working in the trenches on Morris Island. The greater part of the work was under fire.<sup>78</sup>*

Vogdes worked the troops, especially the African Americans, hard. A New York soldier wrote home saying these work details sometimes lasted thirty-six to forty-eight hours with little or no rest; and one detail labored for sixty hours without rations. Assistant Surgeon Wilder complained:

*Brig. Gen Vogdes, in command of the island, called while I was studying our sick list this morning and said it was too large; and hoped I did not allow men to impose upon me and when not really ill; it makes me somewhat indignant for he has been taking our men, 400 or 500 at a time, and many of them have been out four or five nights in succession at hardwork; I am determined that none shall go who are unfit.*<sup>79</sup>

The soldiers' tasks were both Herculean and dangerous. The work of cutting trees, hauling cannon, and digging fortifications could quickly cause an accident. Assistant Surgeon Wilder often referred to the treatment of accident victims in his diary:

*There are several minor surgical cases under my care just now; a toe nearly crushed off, a finger crushed yesterday, a foot that had to be lanced this morning, and a hand accidentally shot a few days ago; the man whose arm was dislocated some time ago has been on duty for several days.*<sup>80</sup>

Besides heavy labor, there was soldiering to do. The men performed gun drill, marched up and down the beaches, then joined the picket line on the north end of the island. Even when they were exhausted by labor, they were forced to endure not only the tedium of guard duty but the anxiety it created as well. They could neither sleep, nor lie, nor sit down. Those who sat risked being hung by the thumbs; those

who slept risked execution. And when the cannonade against Fort Sumter began in the early fall:

*in addition to guard, picket, and fatigue duty, the [55th] was required to be under arms at four a. m., and to remain until daybreak . . . It was considered very unhealthy for the men to stand still or lie down in the open air before sunrise, and the regiment was frequently drilled upon the beach, by company or battalion. during this morning hour.*<sup>81</sup>

The vacation atmosphere Assistant Surgeon Wilder felt eluded the troops, and morale continued to decline during the summer. "We looked every hour upon the same naked beaches of sand, the same drooping palmettos," wrote one despondent soldier.<sup>82</sup> Most were away from home for the first time and home-sickness, or "nostalgia" as the physicians termed it, was acute. "[An] indescribable shadow . . . overhung and pervaded our organization," one soldier remembered. "The men [were in] a negative mood, never seen in the regiment before."<sup>83</sup>

The primary target for their complaints, quite naturally, was their commander. "It is the general opinion that [Vogdes] is the meanest man alive," stated one trooper. "He is the greatest coward in the Army; keeps a whole company to guard his headquarters, and dares not go out after dark."<sup>84</sup> Bored troopers even took a few pot-shots at their own men on Morris Island across Lighthouse Inlet.

Fortunately, morale improved. The weather cooled throughout the fall, and with the gun emplacements built and the siege continuing at a slower pace, duties lightened. The men, who had only a few months earlier complained bitterly about duty on Folly Island, now were finding it "quite a healthy place."<sup>85</sup> One officer wrote that "the men were cheerful . . . and vivacious."<sup>86</sup> For the 55th Massachusetts and the 1st North Carolina the move to their "very pleasant" winter camp on the back of Folly Island improved their quality of life considerably.<sup>87</sup>

## **Water**

Finding a source of drinkable water for thousands of troops laboring in the hot sun on that tiny island was a problem that kept the soldiers forever digging wells. Most of the potable water was "worse than miserable-brackish and unhealthy."<sup>88</sup> Assistant Surgeon Wilder, who remarked on the ". . . poor water" in August, noted after the move that "the water is better at this camp."<sup>89</sup> The best water was found within the inland sand ridges close to the soldiers' winter camp where the natural hydrology of the large dunes provided the most refreshing water reaching depths several times the height of the dune.<sup>90</sup> A regimental history of the 157th New York noted that :

*All the water used on the island [Folly] was obtained by digging below tide-mark and curbing with barrels. The finest and best protected well*



*in camp was made by cutting into a sand dune and making a winding passage to the water, thus placing the water continually in the shade and protecting it from dust and dirt blowing around the camp.<sup>91</sup>*

Archaeologists excavated three of these walk-in wells and found the New Yorker's description accurate. The soldiers probably dug the wells by gradually working the barrels deeper and deeper into the sand while removing the center muck. The wells probably did not produce for very long. The excavation showed they had been used as trash dumps and then back-filled by the soldiers, probably for sanitary reasons. The



Left: Excavation into one of the numerous wells dug into the low, level areas of the campground uncovered a large barrel in excellent condition, although the water it produced probably was very unpleasant. Right: "The finest and best protected well in camp was made by cutting into a sand dune and making a winding passage to the water" (SCIAA).

wells yielded many glass bottles, some cut evenly across their middle and glazed at the cut to be used as drinking glasses. Excavation into one of the numerous wells dug into the low, level areas of the campground uncovered a large barrel in excellent condition, although the water it produced probably was most unpleasant—unlike the water from under the dunes.

### **Food**

The soldiers' fare probably received mixed reviews. Most of the time they ate a staple diet of spoiled canned meats, moldy hardtack, and coffee. "I live mainly on rice, peas, mush, and molasses, with the inevitable

hard tack and coffee; I have a good appetite."<sup>92</sup> Although campaigning soldiers often took advantage of their situation to relieve the civilian population of their possessions, the archaeological excavations on Folly Island produced few civilian containers or plates, probably because there was little or nothing there for the soldiers to loot. Three different excavations uncovered only one small ceramic sherd, which easily could have come from pottery that had been used and broken at the plantation long before the soldiers' arrival. Rations cans were uncovered and included some that had been modified for re-use as cookers or cups. The absence of ceramic pottery

suggested that the soldiers were using only what they were issued and eating mostly what was brought onto the island from elsewhere; it also suggested that their lifestyle was meager and Spartan. One can well imagine their delight when they arrived in Florida after seven months on Folly Island to find that:

*the orange groves near the camp were loaded with ripe oranges, rare flowers were blooming luxuriantly, the moss drapery that hung from the live oaks made comfortable beds, and pigs and chickens which had not deserted the town with its other residents, and cows straying loosely outside the lines, were put in requisition for the use of the troops.*<sup>93</sup>

Occasionally, the Quartermaster supplemented the soldiers' diet. In October, the 55th Massachusetts was given "Soft bread . . . and vegetables . . . to prevent scurvy."<sup>94</sup> Sometimes, they got presents: "This month, a gift was received, from the freedmen near Hilton Head, of a quantity of sweet potatoes. They also, at another time, sent a large number of watermelons to the regiment."<sup>95</sup> Sometimes, they received packages from home. And often, they received condensed milk, corn starch, dried apples, jelly, lemon syrup, mustard, crackers, bottled tomatoes, and honey from the Soldiers' Relief Society.<sup>96</sup>

No matter how 'baron' the island, the soldiers soon became expert foragers and found ways to supplement their normal fare. The sea and marsh provided much-needed pro-

tein—and recreation. Fishing became popular when they had time off and it was safe. "Almost the only luxury obtainable in August and September was fresh fish, caught by the men from the beach."<sup>97</sup> A typical diary entry from those soldiering on Folly Island might read, "Frank caught some crabs today and they were excellent eating."<sup>98</sup> Oystering was also popular, and the archaeological excavations at the winter camp uncovered a number of shells that showed markings from being shucked with a knife. An analysis of the ligaments suggest they were caught and eaten during the winter months. Oystering was dangerous though, for while they were on an oyster hunt, Sergeant Johnson and Private Logan of Company F of the 55th Massachusetts were captured by Rebels.<sup>99</sup>

To improve morale, health, and diet, the army issued General Order Number 40:

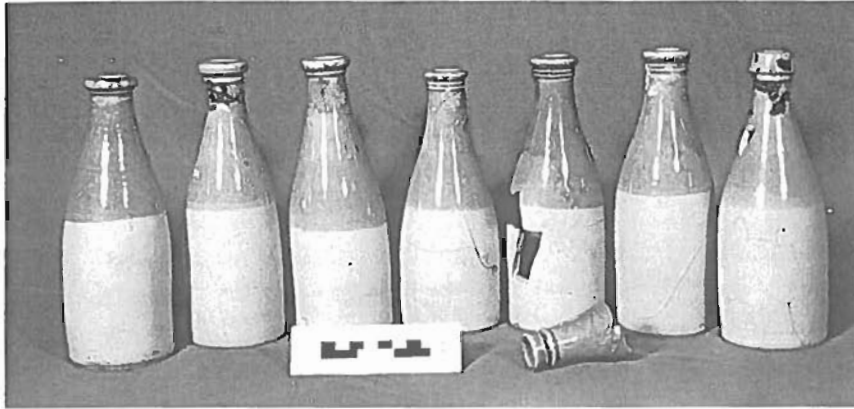
*Fresh meat is to be issued as often as practicable, and commanding officers, while near the sea-coast, will encourage such of their men as are off duty or not otherwise employed to fish during the cool hours of the morning and evening. . . . In a scarcity of fresh meat those troops in the most exposed and unhealthy situations are to be first served.*<sup>100</sup>

The excavations produced solid evidence to show that at least sometimes the troopers were able to obtain meat. The bones from butchered cows and pigs were recovered from several trash pits, and all indicated that the meat came from fresh beef and pig

that had been transported to the island and slaughtered nearby. The butchering marks on a bone from one pit indicated that the cuts served were probably soup or stew meats that had been quartered and dressed before they arrived at the camp; the marks on a bone from another pit suggested it had come from prime cuts of beef. Besides beef and pig, the pits held the remains of turkeys and sheep. Some soldiers, or perhaps officers, had enjoyed at least one good solid meal.<sup>101</sup>

### **The sutler**

Yet another way to supplement a soldier's fare was to take a trip to the regimental sutler. Each regiment was allowed one sutler by law. Brigade commanders usually appointed the sutlers, although sometimes state governors appointed them to pay off a political debt.<sup>102</sup> The government fixed the sutler's prices, allowing them a profit that, according to the soldiers, was always too high. Sutlers were loved for their goods, hated for their prices, and usually were considered scallwags. Still, they provided a long list of luxuries and necessities that the army did not—apples, raisins, crackers, boots, gloves, shirt buttons, tooth brushes, pipes, razors, tobacco, stamps, stationery, soap, canned meats, vegetables and sardines, peppers, pickles, socks, magazines . . . and on and on.<sup>103</sup> The improved morale of the 55th Massachusetts during their stay at the winter camp was surely partly because "about this time, the stores of the regimental sutler, D. W. Johnson, arrived, much to the gratification of officers and men; for the



"Mr. Scudder went to Hilton Head last evening but will return soon. He brought me a box of ale in small stone bottles" (SCIAA).

former had been dependent for stores upon the sutlers and commissaries on Morris Island, which the distance, and restrictions on passes, made difficult of access."<sup>104</sup>

### Alcohol

Sutlers also provided the men and officers with another 'necessity' of a soldier's life. Throughout history, soldiers had always temporarily relieved the boredom, fear, and anxiety of war with the consumption of alcohol. This, coupled with the poor quality of the drinking water on the barrier islands made the men on Folly Island no exception. Not unexpectedly, the excavations uncovered a large number of wine, whiskey, and beer bottles. One site—perhaps the location of a sutler's camp—was covered with bottles, and three hundred seventy of these—a small sample—were recovered for analysis.

Sutlers were prohibited from selling alcohol,<sup>105</sup> but this regulation seems to have been widely ignored by the sutlers and soldiers alike. The journal entries of an officer of the

104th Pennsylvania, who was assigned to enforce regulations on incoming shipments from the sutler during the siege, typifies the soldiers' attitudes toward this prohibition:

*A non-commissioned officer . . . came with an order for 4 boxes of wine and bought 11. The provost-martial seized his whole lot and I suppose they will be confiscated.*

*I had 4 bottles of ale given to me one of which I kept myself and distributed the rest among my men.*

*The Provost-martial General by order of Genl. Gillmore seized goods of a Mr. Clark Sutler, . . . and have arrested him—goods consisting of ale, wines, etc.*

*I sold my mocking bird Dick for \$60 to Sutler of 62 Ohio Volunteers. Rec'd four barrels of ale in payment . . . I have turned over to our Sutler one barrel ale.*

*Cargo of sloop Golden Rod confis-*

*cated and unloaded at wharf. I had to be very sharp to keep detail of 56th Regt. Pena. Volunteers from all getting drunk. They broke open a number of barrels of bottled ale and started the sider [sic] barrels to leaking . . . A great many boxes were stolen—of wine . . . One of Capt. Holmes men boasted that he stole three boxes. The Capt. discovered one box and appropriated it to his own use.*

*Mr. Clark, sutler on Golden Rod was released last evening having been completed to work on fortifications at the front . . . the whole of his ales, wines, and cider were confiscated.<sup>106</sup>*

Had the army tried to stop the sutlers, they probably only would have increased the size of the black market, for the soldiers and officers were going to get their beer, whiskey, and wine somehow.

Friends visiting officers often brought alcohol with them as gifts.

*Mr. Scudder went to Hilton Head last evening but will return soon. He*

The soldiers carved bullets that archaeologists would find 120 years later (SCIAA).



*brought me a box of ale in small stone bottles; I have never cared for any thing of the kind but this enervating climate and rather trying life seems to suggest its use and very likely it will do me good.*<sup>107</sup>

Fragments of these white and yellow stone bottles were found in many of the archaeological excavations.

It was more difficult for the soldiers to obtain spirits. For the soldiers of the 55th Massachusetts, boxes from friends and packages from the aid societies in Boston helped. According to donation lists, the soldiers received many packages containing shrub, cherry bounce, cravat, sago, rum, cider, whiskey, currant wine, bitters, and cordials—all of which contained alcohol, and all of which must have been most welcome.<sup>108</sup>

Beyond various derivations of

the opium poppy, alcohol was about the only pain remedy available to the regimental surgeon. A regimental surgeon's book from the 54th Massachusetts revealed that he issued alcohol and opium regularly to relieve pain. Regimental hospitals maintained stocks of liquor, chiefly whiskey, and officers had ready access to these stocks. Enlisted men, however, required a "prescription." One trooper in the 55th Massachusetts, who knew the surgeon had whiskey, tried to acquire a "prescription" on his own. "The barrel of whiskey is kept in my tent; one of the soldiers contrived to slit the tent and steal some by boring a hole; but I tracked him and he will be punished."<sup>109</sup>

The men, especially the officers, sometimes got drunk. Assistant Surgeon Wilder noted that, "last night, after a visit from officers of another

regiment some of our own became grossly intoxicated and the major put four of them under arrest," and "Lt. Fowler, our new regimental quarter master, was grossly intoxicated today and fell off his horse while at Pawnee Landing and again near the quarters of Col. Littlefield."<sup>110</sup> These men eventually resigned to avoid court martial.

Controlled general issues of whiskey were sometimes allowed, added to the water to make it palatable or after "a strenuous march, heavy fighting, or in cold, rainy, or snowy weather."<sup>111</sup> The regimental historian of the 127th New York recalled that on Cole's Island the regiment was supposed to have enough whiskey to:

*afford each soldier a gill or two each day, presumably for medicinal purposes and chiefly to go against the effect of miasma from the marshes, but*



*much of the whiskey . . . was in some way diverted, with the result that the soldier lost his anti-malarial medicine, with the exception of about one gill per month.*<sup>112</sup>

### Spare time

It would be inaccurate and unfair to conclude that the men on Folly Island consumed any more or less liquor than soldiers all over the South. Furthermore, they found other ways to relax. They played card games like whist and participated in ball games, quoits, and gymnastics. Sometimes they made up games. "Between five and six Col. Hartwell, Col. Fox, Captains Nutt and Thurber and I amused ourselves with casting a huge hammer with a handle three feet long; Lt. Mowry . . . excelled us all in the throw with both hands, but I was the winner with the swinging throw and the throw over the head."<sup>113</sup> Soldiers also collected shells, walked the beaches like vacationers, and carved bullets that archaeologists would find 120 years later.

The men of the 55th Massachusetts also spent their precious free time learning to read and write.

*Two large tents have been erected and floored adjoining each other, making a room some 45 by 25 feet, with suitable desks and benches for its furniture. Evening schools have been established. The valuable accessions to the reading matter of the regiment, recently received from Massachusetts, have given us quite a library. . . . I find there are not a few in the regiment, who, although never having*

*been slaves, are unable to write their names, and many are unable to read. A year's experience in the army has shown them the disadvantage of being dependent upon others to do their writing and reading of letters; and they are now applying themselves assiduously with spelling book, pen, ink, and paper.*<sup>114</sup>

Officers, including Assistant Surgeon Wilder served as teachers.

Though some of the men of the 55th Massachusetts and many of the 1st North Carolina were uneducated, they, like all men, still pondered the great mysteries of life. They often engaged in open debates.

*About an hour ago, hearing a loud voice in one of the company streets I went to listen . . . They were holding and [sic] out-door debate; it seems to have been in progress for several nights; the question was, which are the more attractive, the works of nature or the works of art. What I heard was very extraordinary. Each speaker seemed to wish to say all that he knew upon any subject . . . Finally the subject was dropped for this, Which is the ruling force, the hope of reward or the fear of punishment? One speaker claimed that the incentive to our armies was the hope of accomplishing some good; but a rascal named Pelett declared that he had no hope of anything, but enlisted for fear of being drafted.*<sup>115</sup>

### Prejudice

The hopes and thoughts of the men of the 55th and the 1st North Carolina

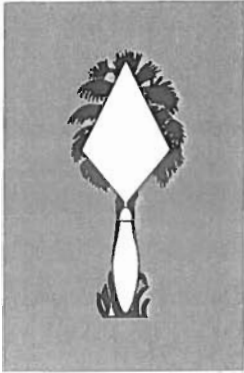
were much like those of soldiers everywhere in every war. Each day, however, they carried one extra, heavy burden—that of prejudice. Prejudice was prevalent in the forces of both the North and the South and was manifest on Folly Island in actions, words, and deeds. Throughout the war, the U.S.C.I.s, which the 1st North Carolina would become part of in February 1863, received the worst equipment, the worst supplies, and the worst guns in the army because many high ranking Union officers thought so little of these soldiers.<sup>116</sup>

African American soldiers were also given the worst and most menial tasks and employed by the white troops to do labor for them. This infuriated Colonel Beecher of the 1st North Carolina, who wrote to Colonel Wild:

*They have been slaves and are just learning to be men. It is a draw-back that they are regarded as, and called 'd\_\_d Niggers' by so-called 'gentlemen' in uniform of U. S. Officers, but when they are set to menial work doing for white regiments what those Regiments are entitled to do for themselves, it simply throws them back where they were before and reduces them to the position of slaves again.*<sup>117</sup>

This practice became so widespread and unfair that General Gilmore eventually put a stop to it:

*While there [Morris Island] I read two of Gen. Gillmore's General Orders. One prohibits the employment of colored troops to perform*



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*Steven D. Smith*

*menial or unmilitary service for white troops. In one case they had been employed to form a camp and pitch tents for whites.*"<sup>118</sup>

Sometimes the African American soldiers took matters into their own hands. One soldier of the 55th Massachusetts wrote to an African American paper in Philadelphia:

*While we were waiting with patience for the long looked for morning to dawn, some of the men got to rambling about, as is common among all soldiers, when one of them happened . . . to get a little too near one of those men . . . who took it upon himself the prerogative of calling one of our men a nigger: this not going down well with the soldier, he was for using the stock of his gun over Pat's head. . . . Col. Fox ordered Pat to come out and give a reason why he should call a soldier a nigger, but, not being able to satisfy the Col., he ordered him under arrest, and sent him, accompanied by at least two file of good brave colored soldiers, to report to the Provost Guard.*<sup>119</sup>

For the African Americans, however, the most irksome form of discrimination was their pay. When they enlisted, recruits in the segregated black regiments had been promised equal payment for services—in Massachusetts this meant \$13.00 dollars a month for rations and clothing, a bounty of fifty dollars for signing up, plus \$100.00 on mustering out. In June 1863, however, the War Department announced

that the African American troops would receive \$10.00 a month.<sup>120</sup> This insult set off a flurry of protests by white officers and men alike and near mutiny among the black regiments. Governor Andrew of Massachusetts even offered to make up the difference for the 55th and 54th, but to the 55th Massachusetts, principle was more important than money. Officers and men of the 55th and 54th Massachusetts wrote numerous letters to gain equality in pay. Then on 16 July 1864 after their continued refusal to take the \$10.00 a month, seventy-four members of the 55th Massachusetts stated their case in a letter to Abraham Lincoln:

*We Have Been in the Field now thirteen months & a Great many yet longer We Have Received no Pay & Have Been offered only seven Dollars Pr month Which the Paymaster Has said was all He Had ever Been authorized to Pay Colored Troops this was not according to our enlistment Consequently We Refused the Money . . . we came to fight For Liberty justice & Equality. These are gifts we Prise more Highly than Gold For these We left our Homes our Famileys Friends & Relatives most Dear to take as it ware our Lives in our Hands To Do Battle for God & Liberty. . . . therefore we Deem these sufficient Reasons for Demanding our Pay from the Date of our inlistment & our imediate Discharge Having Been enlisted under False & Prentence [sic] as the Past History of the Company will Prove.*<sup>121</sup>

It took great courage to overstep the chain of command and write directly to the president. Yet the wives of the soldiers wrote letters to him too. Rachel Ann Wicker, wife of Private William Wicker of the 55th, asked, "i wish you if you pleas [sic] to Answer this Letter and tell me Why it is that you Still insist upon them takeing [sic] 7 dollars a month when you give the Poorest White Regiment that has went out 16 dollars."<sup>122</sup>

Eventually and in stages, the issue was solved. In June of 1864, Congress authorized equal pay for all soldiers from 1 January 1864 and back pay to those who had been free as of 19 April 1861. Back payments were made in October of 1864 to the great relief of all. The regimental history notes that:

*For many months the sutler had sold to the men on credit . . . and every officer had probably done the same. It is not known that in a single case any man present with the regiment failed to repay his debts, often entirely forgotten by the lender; and the sutler's accounts were settled promptly and in full. Nearly eleven hundred dollars were raised by the men, without aid or suggestion from the officers, to supply the band and drum corps with new instruments.*<sup>123</sup>

Finally, in March of 1865, Congress authorized a law for equal pay from the time of enlistment for all African American troops.

## **Death**

If life for the black trooper on Folly

Island was often lonely, strenuous, and terror-filled, death could be that way as well. Death could come quickly and at any time. Though Wild's African Brigade saw no combat during the summer and winter of 1863, they were always in danger of being killed by fire, especially when they toiled on Morris Island. A trooper of the 54th Massachusetts wrote about the ever-present danger of artillery fire. "Last Wednesday two weeks, while everything was quiet, the enemy opened fire on our camp from Sullivan's Island, and the second shell killed two men in my company while eating their dinner."<sup>124</sup>

Death more often came slowly. The 55th Massachusetts would eventually lose some fifty-four men to combat, four to accidents, and one hundred twelve to disease. Disease killed most of the soldiers in the Civil War, and the toll on African Americans was devastating. About one African American soldier in five died of one of the various diseases that swept through their ranks.<sup>125</sup>

Sixty-three of the one hundred twelve soldiers of the 55th Massachusetts who died of disease succumbed on Folly Island. In the first hot, humid weeks there, the regiment lost twelve men to various diseases. By the end of 1863, it had lost another twenty-three. Typhoid fever, one of the worst, killed Private Herbert and thirty-three of his comrades. No doubt the heavy labor, heat, and poor diet contributed greatly to the number who died. And although the army's move into the winter camp at the back of the island improved con-

ditions somewhat, the 55th Massachusetts continued to lose men. During December of 1863—the month when Private Herbert died—a total of 355 men were treated at the regimental hospital. Eight suffered from typhoid fever, twenty-six from bronchitis, thirteen from tonsillitis, and twenty-two from diarrhea; five of these men, including Herbert, died.<sup>126</sup>

Death on Folly Island, far away from home, was lonely and cruel. Perhaps this hardened some men a little and made others accept its presence more readily:

*Last night I had an example of the readiness with which negroes resign the mselves to death when ill. A man who has been long subject to epileptic fits and who never should have been accepted, had four the other day and has been ill ever since; he had four fits last evening and insisted that he should die and that nothing need be done for him; his comrades and even the nurse had the same feeling; but I insisted on doing what I could for him; he passed a very comfortable night and this morning thanked me heartily.<sup>127</sup>*

Aside from making them comfortable, there was little the nurses and surgeons could do for the men who became ill. They administered alcohol and opium drugs to relieve pain, but more often than not it was the patient's reserves that determined the outcome. The number of African Americans who died of disease may have been high because so many of them who came to war had

been weakened by slavery and poverty. This coupled with the fact that they were given more duties than the white soldiers, left them with few reserves to draw on when they became ill.<sup>128</sup> Thus, many died and were buried far from home.

## Burials

The type of burial given varied widely during the Civil War. The archaeological excavations on Folly Island, and diaries and letters of the soldiers, however, can help piece together what might have happened to Private Herbert and his comrades after they died that Christmas week.

Certain regulations governed the burial of soldiers who died on duty. Private Herbert's personal effects would have been inventoried and sent first to the War Department in Washington D. C. and eventually on to his family. The bodies of field officers were often sent home, but those of the rank and file were interred where they died. Officially, it was the responsibility of the regimental surgeon to bury those who died in the regimental hospital:

*Should a soldier die in camp or regimental hospital, the Surgeon should notify his Commanding Officer and forward to him an inventory of his effects, with the disease from which he died and the date of death, select a place for burial and see that he is decently buried and his grave carefully marked. The duties thus far pointed out are obligatory, and no excuse can be made for their nonperformance in camp.<sup>129</sup>*

Graves were dug according to regulations—evenly spaced and at a certain depth. Every soldier was supposed to be given a military funeral. A private had an escort of eight comrades lead by a private, who wore black crepe around their left arms. They carried rifles or swords that pointed downward at reverse arms<sup>130</sup> and marched slowly to the grave. Drums or music accompanied the escort when possible, and a short ceremony was held at the grave site with soldiers at parade rest. Afterward, a salute of three rounds was fired. It is interesting to note that Colonel Beecher of the 1st North Carolina Colored Infantry wrote a special order on 14 July 1863 in response to a general order concerning the burial of his troops. Beecher's order gave details concerning funerals but prohibited drums and salutes.<sup>131</sup>

In most cases during the Civil War, regulations were not strictly followed. Burials after combat and during campaigns were varied and expedient. "The means of burial used by the army at the time was, by necessity, fast and crude."<sup>132</sup> After combat:

*Attempts were made to mark the graves of those whose identification was known, but those who could not be readily identified and the bodies of most of the enemy were simply placed in a single shallow grave or trench and covered over.<sup>133</sup>*

Soldiers were often buried where they fell. Sometimes they were buried individually, but often they

were buried together in trenches. Headboards marked their graves. To identify an individual, some headboards had names, and possibly regiments, either penciled on or carved into them; some had nailed to them a sheet-brass stencil, which soldiers obtained from sutlers to mark their equipment.

Though it might be expected that while they were in camp soldiers would have to bury their dead according to regulations, evidence from the excavations on Folly Island indicates that soldiers from Wild's African Brigade did not. Rather than finding neat rows of graves all dug at consistent depths, the archaeologists found scattered burials at various depths. This was because friends of the dead or the assigned details often buried soldiers who died in hospitals on Folly Island—and probably throughout the South—without great oversight. A Captain who was on Folly Island with the Third New Hampshire Volunteer Infantry wrote:

*The word "buried" may mean much or little, and the variation is largely governed by circumstances. It may mean a hastily-dug and shallow excavation,—the dumping into it of a comrade's body, a rapid movement to push back the earth that had been removed, and the disappearance from the spot of the living. That only, and nothing more, happened thousands of times under varying conditions.<sup>134</sup>*

Another letter from an officer from the 144th New York Volunteers

provides so much insight into burial practices at Folly Island—and into the human spirit—that it is quoted in its entirety:

*While on Folly Island in September, 1863, you will remember that very near every man in the Regiment got sick; the cause being in my opinion that everlasting marching in Virginia in the hot summer and then being transplanted to a sandy island in South Carolina, with bad and unhealthy water to drink. Well, for about three days I was the only officer for duty, the others reporting sick, and the common saying was, 'You can never kill a Dutchman unless you hang him and he will get used to that.' But soon some of the officers got better and I too came on the sick list and got worse and worse every week. Surgeon Leal's opium pills did not do me any good; only just put me to sleep and being asleep saw lots of little men dancing and laughing with all their might around me. One week passed and no better; another passed and still worse, and another week commenced finding me worse. Now things began to get serious. You will remember also that we buried our dead over and beyond a sand knoll marching by the dispensary tent. A Massachusetts Regiment which had their camp south of ours also buried their dead on the same ground, and almost every day we were obliged to hear the Dead March played through our camp, which told to us that another good Massachusetts man had died for this country. You will also remember that after digging about*

eighteen inches in the cemetery the bottom fell out and water filled the grave. Well, when on the third week I got worse I thought my time had come and I did not want to be buried in a water hole. I began to look around for a better spot. During my sickness which lasted three weeks (by the way this was the only time I was off duty during the service) I got in the habit of reporting myself daily at the dispensary tent to get the pills and drops and then crawl over the knoll on all fours, being so weak, and toward the burying ground and then set myself on a piece of palmetto log under a live oak tree. There was a cooler air here than in camp. I sat there in pain and distress thinking of my poor wife and children at home, and thought of all the good and bad I ever did in my life. The tree stood on a little rising ground and I expected to lay in a dry grave if buried under it. I took two of my most intimate comrades to the spot and asked them to bury me there, and they promised they would do so as soon as I was dead. This satisfied me and I thought I would die in peace. But lo! and behold! next day I again crawled over the knoll and to my surprise found two Massachusetts men digging and just finishing a grave for one of their comrades on the very spot picked out for myself. This made me so angry and mad that I left with disgust and said to myself: 'Now, I shan't die anyhow,' and started, apparently with less pain but much vexation across the island. I got to the White House, the only house on the island and provided



Burials 15, 16, and 17 (17 in center removed) buried in a row at the same depth (Carolina Archaeological Services, Inc.).

myself with a brick from the chimney and a door latch from the door, then started for Pawnee Landing, where the tide was about going out, exposing any amount of small oysters. I sat down placed the brick before me and with the latch knocked off the end of the oyster's shell and devoured the oyster, continuing at it the rest of the day. When night came I felt better and stronger, the oysters being the only thing I had eaten in two weeks. When I came to camp I bought a half pound of raisins and ate them skin and all. The next day I did the same thing and the next day reported for duty. I do believe if it had not been for that Massachusetts fellow stealing my grave I would not be here to relate this story.<sup>135</sup>

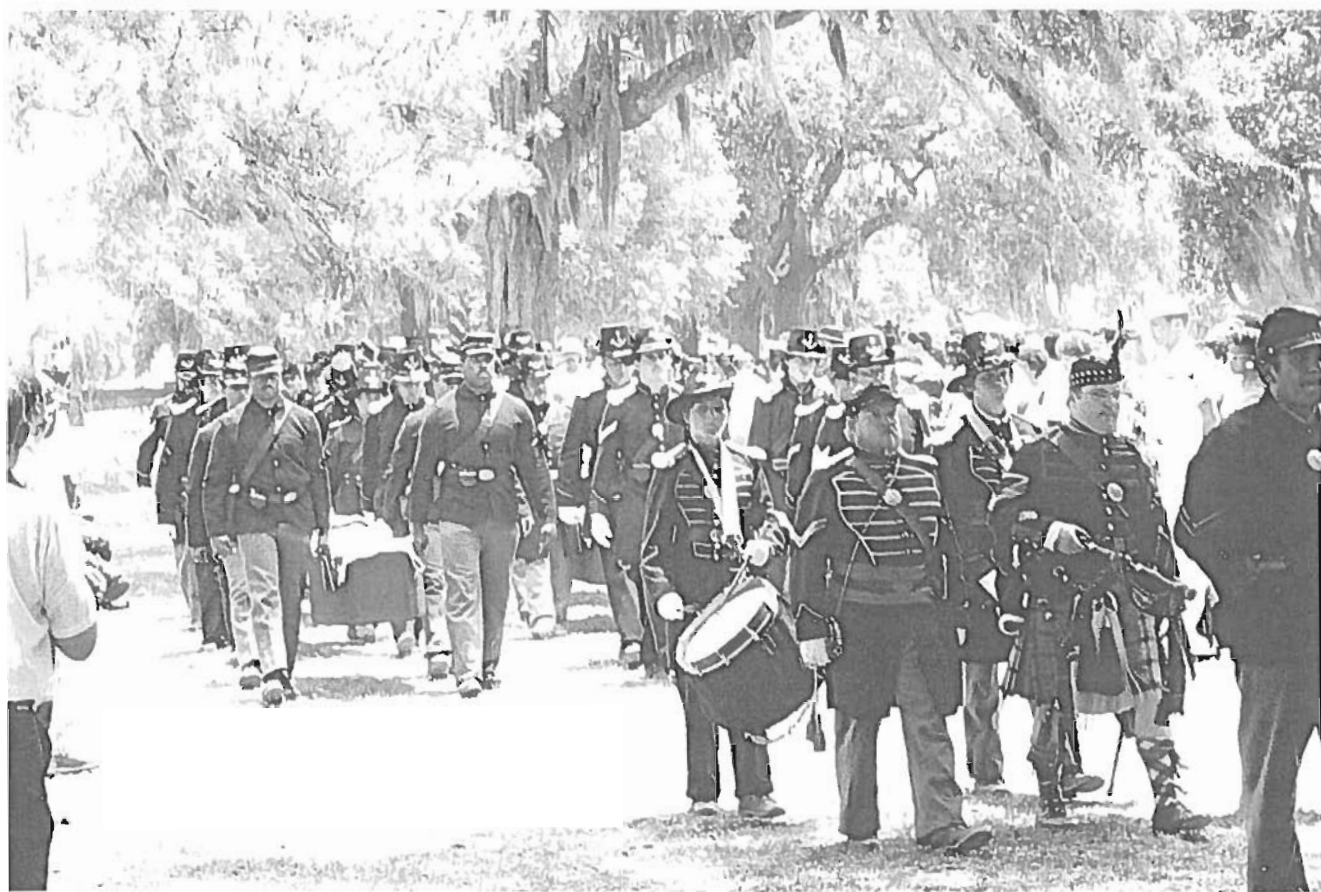
**Private Herbert and comrades**  
Private William Herbert died of typhoid on 21 December 1863. Four of his comrades died of the same disease within two days of Herbert. Warren Miles of the 1st North Carolina died on 21 December; Charles Cole died on the 20th; Hiram Wood died on the 22nd; and James Fox died on the 23rd. Archaeological and documentary evidence suggests that Herbert and two of the others might have been buried in the three shallow graves (15, 16, and 17) found in a row at the Folly Island cemetery. If this speculation is correct, then perhaps it can also be assumed that three of these soldiers received burials with some formality and ceremony.

Though Herbert, Cole, Wood, Fox, Miles, and at least twenty-four other African Americans from Wild's Brigade died that winter, they remained in the hearts of their comrades. A soldier of the 55th leaving Folly Island that February pondered life and death on the island:

*At daylight the order was given for all to come on board, and we were off.*

*As we streamed down the river, I could see the many forts and batteries our men had helped to build since they had been on the island. There was one thing more I saw, as the boat glided down that beautiful stream, which caused me to take a hurried glance over the past. I think I hear someone asking, what was that? I will tell you. As I passed near the place of the regimental graveyard, I*

*could not help thinking how many of our number we were leaving behind, whom we would never more see on this earth; those who had left their homes and home comforts at the same time I did, the young, the noble, and the brave, to fight for their country, and to avenge the country's wrongs.<sup>136</sup>*



Reenactors representing Federal and Confederate soldiers carried the coffins to a special part of the national cemetery in a reburial ceremony on 29 May 1989 (Massachusetts State House Flag Project).

# Reburial

On 29 May 1989, the remains of at least nineteen soldiers of Wild's African Brigade were laid to rest for the last time at Beaufort National Cemetery in Beaufort, South Carolina. This fulfilled the promise made to the City of Folly Beach and to the citizens of South Carolina that these remains would be reburied after they had been studied and identified. As scientists of the past, archaeologists and physical anthropologists would have liked more time to study the remains. After two years, however, it seemed to be the right time to return the remains to the ground and peace.

As it turned out, the timing was extraordinary. The Institute contacted the Beaufort County Veterans Affairs Office and suggested reburial at Beaufort National Cemetery because that cemetery already contained the remains of the 55th Massachusetts soldiers who were killed at the battle of Honey Hill. Unknown to the Institute, however, the movie makers of *Glory!*, which immortalized the 54th Massachusetts, were completing filming at Tybee Island, Georgia. They would be available with reenactors for the reburial ceremony on Memorial Day 1989.

Meantime, archaeologists were given the funds to conduct a few days research in Boston, probably because officials wished to have the remains identified by name. Al-



Each soldier was placed in an individual black coffin, and each coffin was covered with an American flag carrying thirty-four stars (SCIAA).

though it was impossible to do this with any certainty, the research did confirm what the archaeologists had suspected—that both the 55th Massachusetts and the 1st North Carolina Colored Infantry were represented among the dead. Among the original documents in Boston relating to the 55th Massachusetts were maps that confirmed that the two regiments camped together, side by side, while on Folly Island.<sup>137</sup> A quick trip to the National Archives in Washington then confirmed that both used the same cemetery during the winter encampment.

The reburial ceremony in Beau-

fort was quite moving. Beforehand, the remains had been carefully prepared, the bones wrapped in plastic and each individual sealed in a plastic liner. Each soldier was then placed in an individual black coffin, typical of the period, and miscellaneous bones were placed in the last coffin to make nineteen burials. Each coffin was covered with an American flag carrying thirty-four stars, and reenactors representing Federal and Confederate soldiers carried the coffins to a special part of the national cemetery. At the grave site, speakers, including Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachu-





Reenactors of the 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry stand at ease before the ceremony at the grave site (Massachusetts State House Flag Project).

sets, eulogized the soldiers and offered prayers. Taps was played, and a forty-gun salute ended the ceremony. At last, the members of Wild's Brigade could rest, protected from further disturbance.

### **The mystery solved**

And what of the missing skulls? Why were skulls and other bones missing

from the burials? Many possible explanations were offered, including voodoo and relic collecting. Careful research, however, revealed that the most likely explanation was that the U. S. government, as part of a general effort to rebury soldiers in national cemeteries, had the graves opened and the remains removed sometime after the war. An over-

whelming number of historical records document this practice at Folly Island and elsewhere in the South. Reburial started during the war at battlefields like Gettysburg, and by 1883, a quarter of a million Union soldiers had been reburied in seventy-nine national cemeteries. The government detailed soldiers and hired private contractors to find

and rebury soldiers and received thirty-four bids ranging from \$1.59 to \$8.00 per body for such work.<sup>138</sup> At Gettysburg, for instance, one "Mr. F. W. Bresecker [was contracted] to remove bodies from the field for reburial at the rate of \$1.59 each, with no more than 100 to be moved on one day."<sup>139</sup> At Fort Pillow in Tennessee, the cost of exhuming 258 Union battlefield casualties and reburying them at a fort cemetery was \$7.00 per body; the total cost plus head-posts and fencing was \$2,145.65. These soldiers were later exhumed and moved yet again to the national cemetery in Memphis.<sup>140</sup>

Those who first removed and reburied the soldiers at the Folly Island cemetery were obviously careless, taking only partial remains and missing at least two burials. One report relates a similar grisly scene at Gettysburg: "many of the undertakers who were removing bodies, also performed their work in the most careless manner, invariably leaving the graves open and often leaving particles of bones and hair lying scattered around."<sup>141</sup> An often-reproduced contemporary photograph shows this same sort of activity at the battlefield at Cold Harbor. Although this photograph was labeled as depicting a burial party at work, the random activity in the background suggests it is actually a photograph of members of a reburial party, who were excavating soldiers killed during the battle for reburial elsewhere.

J. T. Trowbridge described the job of reburial immediately after the



Postwar removal of the dead for reburial at Cold Harbor, Virginia, often mislabeled as a "burial party" (National Archives).

war. He wrote the following passage after his visit to the Chickamauga battlefield:

*Driving southward along the Lafayette Road we soon reached the site of Cloud Spring Hospital, in the rear of the battle-field. . . . There were indications that here the work of disinterment was about to begin. Shovel and picks were ready on the ground; and beside the long, low trenches of the dead waited piles of yellow pine coffins spattered with rain. . . .*

*More than nine tenths of the bodies taken from Chickamauga were unknown. Some had been buried in trenches; some singly; some laid side by side, and covered with a little earth, perhaps not more than six*

*inches deep, leaving feet and skull exposed; and many had not been buried at all. Through-out the woods were scattered these lonely graves. The method of finding them was simple. A hundred men were deployed in a line, a yard apart, each examining half a yard of ground on both sides of him, as they proceeded. Thus was swept a space five hundred yards in breadth. Trees were blazed or stakes set along the edge of this space, to guide the company on its return. In this manner the entire battle-field had been or was to be searched. When a grave was found, the entire line was halted until the teams came up and the body was removed. Many graves were marked with stakes, but some were to be discovered only by the raised or*

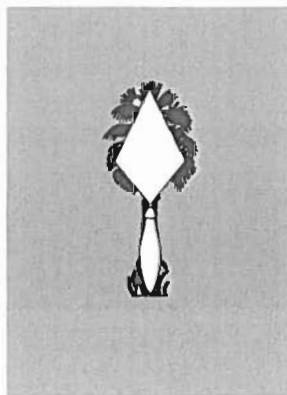
*disturbed appearance of the ground. Those bodies which had been buried in trenches were but little decomposed; while of those buried singly in boxes not much was left but the bones and a handful of dust.*<sup>142</sup>

If excavations for reburial caused the disturbances to the Folly Island burials, where were those burials taken? A soldier of the 3rd New Hampshire said that burials of members of his regiment who died on Folly Island were removed and reinterred at the Beaufort National Cemetery, in Beaufort, South Carolina. Most likely, the other reburials

were taken there as well. A history of Folly Island states that in 1867 and 1868, Mr. J. P. Low of Beaufort was contracted to remove bodies from Folly Island at the rate of \$5.50 each.<sup>143</sup> It is almost certain that it was Low who first disturbed the burials found by the archaeologists, and almost just as certain that he reburied some of the dead from the 55th Massachusetts in the Beaufort National Cemetery in 1867 and 1868.

Thus, some one hundred twenty-odd years later, on Memorial Day of 1989, the bones of Private Herbert and others who had died on Folly Island during the winter of

1863 and 1864 were finally reunited with their comrades in Beaufort National Cemetery. The studies of their remains have told us something of their lives, but the full story of the 55th Massachusetts and 1st North Carolina Colored Infantry is still to be written. As for their legacy—an epitaph to the 55th by P.C. Headley, a Massachusetts author, says it all: “They added to the military reputation of the Commonwealth, gave strength to the Union cause, and forever silenced the clamor against them in advance by the enemies of the colored race.”<sup>144</sup>



## Notes

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29. William A. Gladstone, *United States Colored Troops 1863–1867* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1990), 113–18. Gladstone incorrectly says the St. John's River is in South Carolina instead of Florida.
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# Preface

Four days before Christmas 1863, Private William Herbert, Company B, 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, died of typhoid and was buried on Folly Island, South Carolina, 1,070 miles from his snow-covered home in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. Private Herbert's body was taken to the brigade cemetery on a nameless sand ridge near the brigade camp. An officer wrote in his diary that Monday, "three men buried at one time."<sup>1</sup>

It was probably long after Christmas when Herbert's family learned that their nineteen-year-old, brown-eyed, black-haired boy<sup>2</sup> was among the 618,200 sons and fathers who would die in the American Civil War. While some died surrounded by the clamor and terror of battle, the majority, like Private Herbert, died lonely, singular, fever deaths. Both kinds of death were a human sacrifice for something the soldiers considered a greater good, and for Private Herbert and his two comrades, it was for something quite extraordinary. They were free black men, who had been living north of slavery less than a year earlier.

Their call to arms had come from black ministers and leaders whose recruitment posters admonished them, "Fail Now and Our Race is Doomed on this the soil of our

birth."<sup>3</sup> And so they who had freedom—and many others like them—came from Yarmouth, Nova Scotia; Pickaway, Ohio; Memphis, Indiana; and Providence, Rhode Island to sign up with the 55th at Readville, Massachusetts. They trained to be Union soldiers in the spring and summer of 1863, were shipped to Folly Island, and were dead by Christmas, gone from their families, their friends, their race—and lost until 11 May 1987.

That day a colleague of mine at the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology received a call from a relic collector in Charleston, South Carolina. The collector said he and a friend had found human bones at what was once a Civil War campsite. The site was at the edge of the town of Folly Beach, and the bones had been exposed when workers cut a road through a small forested area being developed for housing. Could an archaeologist come and investigate this find? Would someone recover these bones before they were lost to development?

As deputy state archaeologist for South Carolina, I had received many such telephone calls. Sometimes the finds turned out to be cow bones, or deer bones, or not bones

at all. Sometimes, however, they were human bones, and then we would begin the agonizing process of trying to do the right thing, in time, without adequate funding. Something had to be done, so I arranged to meet the collector at the Folly Beach site. Thus began a two-year project that involved three separate archaeological excavations, the continual analysis of sites and human bones, intensive archival investigations, and the eventual reburial of the human remains.

This is the story of Private Herbert's final year of life as a soldier with the 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. It is also the story of his probable rediscovery by archaeologists, and his eventual reburial in Beaufort National Cemetery in South Carolina along with at least seventeen others in his brigade. For me, this story is more than just an interesting sidelight in the history of America. Private Herbert represents a single but incredible example of the thousands, perhaps millions, of Americans who have given their lives, their dearest possession, for freedom. How wonderful that such men exist. How arrogant of us that we often forget their sacrifice.

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55. Fox, *Extracts*.
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57. *Ibid.*, 21.
58. Legg and Smith, *Best*, 62.
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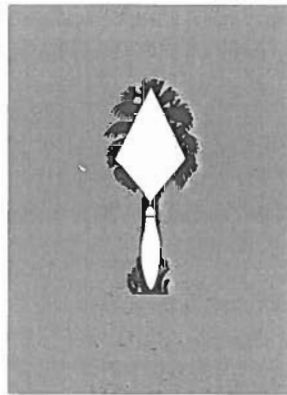
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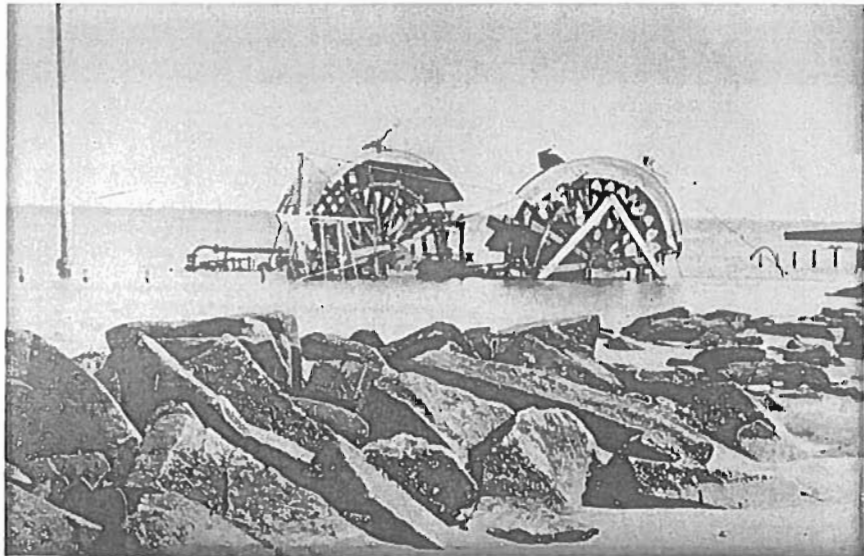
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# The siege of Charleston

Blockade running was a risky business as the crew of the *Colt*, which sank off Sullivan's Island, found out (U. S. Military History Institute).



*What astonishes us here, is that you folks in the North should continue to imagine that we are going to capture Charleston. We have no such ridiculous aspirations. We are content to live on sand hills, eat salt junk and drink dirty water. It is true that the [New York] Herald startles us sometimes by showing some trifling advantages we have unwittingly gained; but I assure you, my dear fellow, that we don't intend to do anything energetic or dashing, and that such little episodes are purely accidental.<sup>4</sup>*

Discouraged by the heat and inactivity, Private Wightman and some twelve thousand other men

were participating in what would become the longest siege of the American Civil War—the siege of Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>5</sup> Most likely, the private was expressing accurately the feelings of many of his comrades who were sweltering on the beaches of Folly Island during that hot August of 1863. Eventually, in February of 1865, Charleston would fall to the Union army. But by then, the events of war would render the city militarily unimportant. For Wightman and Herbert, Yankees baking in the Southern sun, the question might well have been what had brought them to a small, mosquito-infested, barrier island in South Carolina.

## **The Importance of Charleston**

What brought the soldiers to Folly Island was the strategic interest of both the North and the South. It was still early in the Civil War, when Charleston was of critical importance to each side. Without major industrial strength of its own, the South had to rely on European and other nations for rifles, swords, cannon, medicines, even food. Ports like Wilmington, Savannah, and New Orleans were important distribution points where materials arrived from overseas and were shipped to Confederate armies throughout the South. Charleston was the most important South Atlantic seaport. From Charleston, a railroad network ran north to

North Carolina and Virginia, and south to Georgia. It had a protected harbor, many good ships, and willing sailors. Abraham Lincoln had quickly recognized the importance of denying the Confederacy access to Europe's markets and in April of 1861 had ordered a blockage of all Southern ports. During the blockade of Charleston, some sixty-three steam blockade runners operated in and out of this port of call.

Charleston was also of symbolic importance. Secession began there, and the shots heralding the beginning of a four-year war were fired in its harbor. "That viper's nest and breeding place of rebellion" was as crucial to Southern morale to hold as it was to Northern morale to take. The capture of Charleston would be a "deathblow" to the rebellion, according to Thomas Dudley, the United States consul at Liverpool.<sup>6</sup> But the port would not fall easily.

### **Protecting Charleston**

Charleston was well protected from naval attack by both natural features and a string of key forts built long before the war. Central to its defense was Fort Sumter, sitting formidably on the south side of the main channel and in Confederate hands. Castle Pinckney on Shutes Island and Fort Moultrie on Sullivans Island completed the picture. Around the harbor, General P. G. T. Beauregard added earthen batteries—works at Fort Moultrie, Battery Beauregard on Sullivans Island, Fort Johnson on James Island, and Batteries Wagner and Gregg on Morris Island.

Protection from a land attack was more difficult. With too few troops to cover all angles of attack, General John C. Pemberton, who replaced Beauregard, left the outer islands like Edisto, John's, Folly, and Coles uncontested and concentrated on protecting Charleston from James Island, where he built an extensive line of earthworks, then awaited the arrival of the Union forces.

### **Capture from sea?**

When Lincoln ordered the blockade of the Southern ports in April 1861, the Union lacked the naval muscle to patrol a shoreline 3,549 miles long. Later that year, the Union established a base for operations in the southern Atlantic by sending the Federal navy to occupy Port Royal and the Federal army to land on Hilton Head. Soldiers, sailors, and supplies crowded into these bases in preparation for the capture of Charleston.

Despite the importance of sealing Charleston Harbor from incoming and outgoing steamers loaded with Confederate supplies, the Union could not begin its campaign to capture the port until 20 December 1861. It was a weak beginning. In an attempt to block entry to the harbor, its navy sank a number of otherwise useless old whaling ships and merchantmen in the main channel. This action and a similar one a month later, however, proved counterproductive. For the wooden wrecks, which were sunk in place with stone, eventually gave way,

and when they did, the current rushing against the stone scoured the channel and actually improved navigation.

### **Capture from land?**

With stout defenses against naval attack surrounding Charleston Harbor and prepared defenses at likely approaches from land, a protracted siege appeared to be the only course of action left to the Federals. But Lincoln, needing a victory to strengthen Northern resolve, demanded quick action. So General Henry W. Benham led a 7,500 man force up the Stono River and landed on James Island on 2 June 1862.<sup>7</sup> He camped and began skirmishing but failed to attack the Confederate lines in force. General Hunter, Commander of the Department of the South, apparently was holding Benham back, awaiting reinforcements. Thus, the initiative passed to the Confederates who launched a small, unsuccessful attack of their own on 10 June—an action that accomplished little except to raise Federal hopes for an easy victory.

Finally on 16 June 1863, Benham made a reconnaissance in force, ramming his army against the Confederate fort at Secessionville. In a furious three-and-one-half hour battle, the Federals suffered some six hundred eighty-three casualties and the Confederates some two hundred four. One Confederate, who toured the battlefield afterward, wrote his mother, "such a sight I do not wish to see again. I saw men laying in all kinds of postures, some in the very

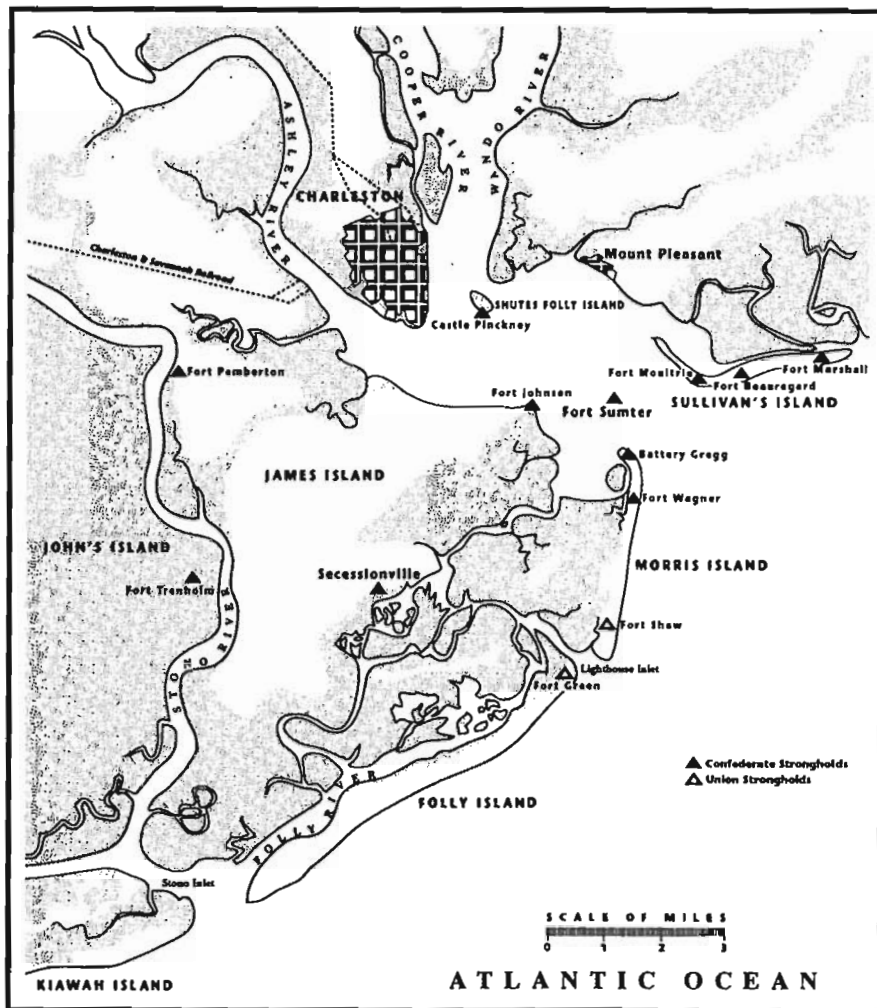
Some of the defenses of Charleston city and harbor (adapted from *Official Records Atlas*, Plate IV-1).

act of shooting off their Guns, some loading & some looked as though they were praying after they were wounded & died.”<sup>8</sup>

### Capture from land and sea?

Ten months later, the Union forces tried again. Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus V. Fox almost made the classic military mistake of attacking a foe unsupported by ordering Admiral Samuel F. Du Pont to run his squadron of ironclads into Charleston Harbor past the ring of Confederate fortifications. Du Pont, recognizing the madness of such a move, delayed, and Fox finally agreed to support the attack with a simultaneous landing of troops. General John G. Foster then laid a plan for a massive attack by land and sea. Foster, supported by gunboats, would land troops on Morris Island and attack Battery Wagner; Du Pont would concentrate the firepower of the ironclads against Fort Sumter. Without Fort Sumter, Charleston would fall.

But the plan fell apart. The Navy doubted it could support the



amphibious landing on Morris Island. And Foster, after a reconnaissance of Morris Island from Folly Island on 7 February 1863, began to question the merits of his ambitious plan himself. As an alternative, he suggested landing in force on Folly Island and from the north end of that island, pounding Morris Island with cannons. This would soften up

the Confederate positions in preparation for landing. Admiral Du Pont, on the other hand, begged for another landing on James Island, but Foster, remembering Secessionville, demurred. Back in Washington, Assistant Secretary Fox and Lincoln wanted a victory—any victory—and soon. The pressure to act continued to build until Foster finally resigned.



General Gillmore's headquarters near where a modern hotel now stands (National Archives).

With Foster out of the way, the attack against Charleston became once more a primarily navy mission. On 6 and 7 April 1863, however, Colonel Joshua B. Howell's XVIII Army Corps and part of General Alfred Terry's X Army Corps—some ten thousand soldiers—landed on Folly Island.<sup>9</sup> They marched at once to the north end to prepare for an assault against Morris Island, set for the following day after a naval attack by Du Pont. Despite the Federals' attempt to keep hidden, Confederates saw the entire affair and prepared their forces accordingly.

Du Pont, still unconvinced by the plan for the naval assault, soon had his expectations fulfilled. In less than two hours, the battle was over. From protected positions, guns

ranged and sited, the Confederate's cannon registered 520 hits against Du Pont's hesitant fleet and severely damaged five of his seven ironclads. The Confederates outmatched the Federals' 139 shots with at least fifteen times as many blasts. Du Pont, in an understatement, was left to write, "I have attempted to take the bull by the horns, but he was too much for us."<sup>10</sup> With the defeat of the ironclads, the Union infantry on Folly Island was unable to cross Lighthouse Inlet to Morris Island. Like countless foot soldiers in similar situations throughout history, they were told to dig in, hold, and await further orders.

### **To lay siege**

The order to take the offensive

would not come again until July. By then General Quincy A. Gillmore was heading the Department of the South, and General Israel Vogdes (pronounced vog-days) had charge of the troops building defensive positions on Folly Island. Units continued to land on Folly Island, Coles Island, and North Edisto Island, and Gillmore placed his headquarters on Folly Island near the spot where a modern hotel now stands. Later he would move to the "White house," probably the only prominent structure on Folly Island before the Union forces arrived. Today, the "Seabrook house," stands where the "White house" stood during the siege of Charleston.

General Gillmore came to Folly Island with a plan. In actuality, however, it was only a variation of General Foster's old plan. The Federals, supported by masked batteries on the north end of Folly Island, would cross over to Morris Island in force. Meanwhile a detachment of troops would feint an attack on James Island to keep the Confederates guessing. When they landed on Morris Island, the detachment would move northeast along the