

Union soldier's ID tag found in Hunley

Soldier listed as killed in 1863 on Morris Island

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Either there was a Yankee on board the Hunley, or one of the rebels was wearing the wrong dog tags.

Archaeologists excavating the sub announced Friday they'd discovered the dog tag of a Union soldier hanging around the neck of one of the eight skeletal remains uncovered so far.

The tag — a copper medallion — has the soldier's name on one side and a picture of George Washington on the other.

It was issued in the name of Ezra Chamberlin, a member of Company K, 7th Regiment, Connecticut Volunteers.

Chamberlin was listed as killed in action on July 11, 1863,



A rubber U.S. Navy button (left) and the identification tag of Union soldier Ezra Chamberlin were found in the Hunley. WADE SPEEDS/STAFF

in the Union's first major assault on Fort Wagner, the rebel battery on Morris Island guarding Charleston.

How it got inside the Hunley is anyone's guess. Chamberlin is reportedly buried beneath a headstone in Killingly, Conn.

A number of different scenarios are being explored: Did Chamberlin survive, and his See HUNLEY, Page 11A

The Post and Courier

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Union tag found with Hunley crewman No. 8

HUNLEY from Page 1A

body was misidentified after the fighting? Did he defect? Was he a POW put in the sub against his will? Was he a spy who worked his way onboard?

The most logical answer is that one of the crewmen picked up the tag from Chamberlin's body, or may have traded for it in a soldier's swap. A known Hunley crewman, Cpl. C.F. Carlson, was also a member of the German Light Artillery, a unit that was prominent on Morris Island during the 1863 attack.

The tag was found on the remains of crewman No. 8, who was stationed at the sub's stern. He would have been responsible for working the pumps needed to raise and lower ballast tank water — a job that the captain would not have given to someone he couldn't trust, Yankee or otherwise.

But what doesn't make sense, archaeologists say, is why one man would wear another man's identification around his neck.

"Personally, I found that very unusual," said project manager Bob Neyland, who said that soldiers would have taken extra steps to ensure proper ID so that loved ones could be informed.

The medallion, about the size of a 50-cent piece, was found on the back of the man's skull. A length of material leads down into the sediment where there is apparently a paper card attached to it. Archaeologists hope the card may include more information about the man's identification.

Wearing a dog tag would have been an oddity in the Civil War since the U.S. military didn't officially start issuing dog tags until 1913. But during the Civil War, merchants known as sutlers followed the troops and would offer identification tags for sale just prior to battles.

The archaeologists are also finding other Union articles in the sub, primarily buttons. More than 50 buttons have been found so far in 16 different types. Some even say USN on them, for the U.S. Navy. Another came from a uniform of the Union infantry.

Neyland says the variety shows just how much of a mix of materials rebel uniforms were.

Work at the Warren Lasch Conservation Lab is continuing,



This reverse view shows a rubber button from the 1850s used on pre-Civil War U.S. Navy uniforms. WADE SPEEDS/STAFF



The reverse side of the identification tag of Union soldier Ezra Chamberlin, found on the Confederate submarine Hunley, bears his name, unit designation and enlistment date. WADE SPEEDS/STAFF

and the excavation could take another month to complete.

The team still has not made a move toward the bow of the sub, where the Hunley's captain, Lt. George Dixon, is believed to have been stationed.

The Hunley was the first sub-

marine in history to sink an enemy warship. It sank off Charleston the night of Feb. 17, 1864, shortly after ramming an explosive charge at the end of a spar into the Union blockade ship Housatonic. The sub was raised last year.

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