

HUNLEY CONSERVATORS TO SAVE CSS PEE DEE CANNONS

The Hunley isn't the only large-scale historic weapon being conserved at Clemson University's Warren Lasch Conservation Center.

Three mighty Civil War cannons—each weighing upwards of 15,000 pounds—were recently raised from South Carolina's Great Pee Dee River by a team of USC archaeologists. They were promptly delivered to the *Hunley* lab for a conservation treatment to help ensure they last at least another century.

Over 150 years ago, the cannons served as the weapons onboard the short-lived gunboat *CSS Pee Dee*. The ship was first launched in January 1865 in defense of the Confederacy. In that same month, Union General William Sherman began his march through the Carolinas that ultimately devastated that region and helped lead to the end of the War a few short months later.

With only three months in action, the *Pee Dee* had an abrupt ending. In hopes of avoiding enemy capture, the crew threw their cannons overboard and set the ship ablaze. Over time, the remains of the ship scattered and the exact location of the cannons became lost. Then a search and recovery effort that spanned several decades finally resulted in their successful recovery on September 29th, 2015 in Florence, South Carolina.

"The recovery of these three cannons,—the complete armament of a Confederate gunboat—offers unique insight in the arming and intended role of this warship to contest the Union blockade off the coast of South Carolina and to perhaps engage in high seas raiding against Northern merchant vessels," says James Spirek, an underwater archaeologist with South Carolina Institute for Archaeology and Anthropology (SCIAA).

The Clemson conservation team estimates it will take two years to conserve the cannons. Once completed, the cannons will return to Florence for display at the newly constructed U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs facility.

Images courtesy of the U.S. General Services Administration



SCIAA team poses in front of VII-inch, l to r: Dan Brown, Joe Beatty, Jim Spirek, Jon Leader, Nate Fulmer, and Jessica Irwin. In background, Ted Gragg, Glenn Dutton, and Bob Butler. (SCIAA).



ABOVE: Jon Leader and Tanner Dutton position VII-inch into position with other guns—VI.4-inch in foreground and IX-Dahlgren in the middle. Virginie Ternisien, WLCC conservator, in foreground. (Image courtesy of Luke Spirek).

BELOW: The cannons arrive at the Lasch Conservation Center.



The CSS *Pee Dee*'s Cannons

The three cannons—the premiere naval weapons from the Civil War.

VI.4-inch Brooke Rifle

- No. S-53, cast in Selma, Alabama on 29 April 1864, shipped to Peedee, S.C. on July 13, 1864 and arrived there on 24 September 1864.
- **Overall Length:** 11.8 feet
- **Bore Length:** 9.75 feet
- **Weight:** 10,600 pounds

VII-inch Brooke Rifle

- No. S-46, cast in Selma, Alabama on 12 April 1864, shipped to Peedee, S.C. on July 3, 1864 and arrived there on 24 September 1864.
- **Overall Length:** 12.25 feet
- **Bore Length:** 10.8-11.3 feet
- **Weight:** 15,000 lbs

IX-inch Dahlgren Smoothbore

- Serial Number: FP-513—Cast in Fort Pitt, PA. Based on inspector mark cast mid-1862.
- **Marks:** On Trunnion-JMB; On Breech Serial No.
- **Overall Length:** 10.9 feet
- **Bore Length:** 8.9 feet
- **Weight:** 9,193 lbs