

Beaufort National Cemetery
1601 Boundary Street
Beaufort, South Carolina 29902

Description

The Beaufort National Cemetery, established in 1863, is located in Beaufort County. The site is laid out in the shape of a half wheel. The cemetery's roads form the spokes, and the large iron gates are set at the hub. The main entrance is at the center of the south side and is protected by a double iron gate, which was constructed in 1940. There is also a gate at the north end of the cemetery, as well as a pedestrian gate to the east of the main entrance. The cemetery is enclosed by a brick wall, constructed circa 1876. The lodge is situated just east of the main entrance, and the utility building is located west of the main entrance gate. The flagpole, constructed in 1931, is located to the direct north as you enter the main gate, and a committal service tent is located just north of the flagpole circle. Graves are marked with upright marble headstones.



The two-story brick and frame lodge was constructed in 1934 and contains six rooms, a bath, and a basement. This lodge was the standard being built in national cemeteries in the early 1930's to replace some of the original Meigs lodges. This design has a Gambrel roof of cement tiles with a four-windowed dormer in the front and a similar but smaller dormer in the rear. The eaves on each side of the building have wood diagonal bracing similar to Tudor style with stucco infill, an unusual style accent. It is a Dutch Colonial influence, popular in this era. The windows are

six-over-six double hung. The original open porch in the left quadrant of the front facade was enclosed in the mid-1960's. This building is now used as the cemetery office.

The brick and stucco maintenance building, with a galvanized metal roof, was constructed in 1894. New garage work space and tool storage, as well as an oil and paint room were added in 1949.

Noted Burials

One Medal of Honor recipient is buried in the Beaufort National Cemetery: Ralph H. Johnson, Private First Class, U. S. Marine Corps, Company A, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division (Rein), FMF – Section 3, Grave 21. His grave is marked with a headstone inscribed with an enlarged gold-leafed replica of the medal of the United States Marine Corps and the words "MEDAL OF HONOR." The Ralph H. Johnson Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Charleston, South Carolina, was named in his honor.

One German World War II prisoner of war, Machinist Mate Gerd Reussel, is buried in Section PB 61, Grave 18. The U. S. Coast Guard cutter Icarus, cruising off Cape Lookout, North Carolina, on May 9, 1942, encountered a German U-Boat, the U-Rathke, and forced it to surface. Thirty-three of the crew members were rescued, and 12 of the U-boat crew went down with their ship. One of the 33, Reussel, suffered a leg wound and died on the way to Charleston. His date of interment was May 15, 1942. The 33 survivors were held in an American prisoner of war camp until they were returned to Germany after the war.

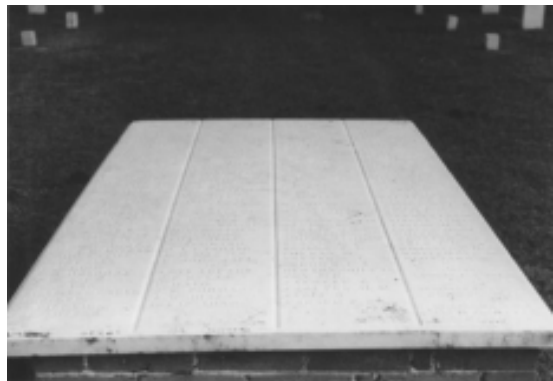
Major General Reuben Henry Rucker, III, one of the four most decorated men of the world, is buried here. He spearheaded General Mark Clark's Army movement from Africa to Europe. He died on January 6, 1970, and was buried in Section 20, Grave 61, on January 9, 1970.

Significant Monuments/Memorials

Union Soldiers Monument - At the end of the center road in the cemetery is a large granite monument, approximately 20 feet in height, erected by the efforts of Mrs. Lorenzo Tucker Potter, and honoring those who died for the Union cause. Mrs. Potter had spent days and nights in the hospitals caring for soldiers with her own hands and giving them words of comfort and cheer. She promised them that, after the war was over, she would erect a fitting monument to their memory.



Potter Monument - In Section 64 of the cemetery is an unfinished marble tablet on a brick base erected by Mrs. Potter on which are inscribed names of nearly 175 soldiers from 18 states, but largely from Massachusetts (where the monument was made) whom Mrs. Potter and her husband had personally served. The soldiers are not identified by other than unknown markers. The Potters devoted their time and means in a most heroic manner, often risking their lives to serve the suffering. The war continued for so long that Mrs. Potter's means were greatly exhausted. She only received \$1,300 from Reverend H. W. Beecher's church to aid her in this work.



Massachusetts Monument - This monument, consisting of two bronze plaques affixed to stone bases, was erected by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and was unveiled after the reinterment of 19 black Union soldiers who had been missing in action since 1863. Governor Michael Dukakis led a group of dignitaries and served as principal speaker at a ceremony held on Memorial Day 1989. The Honor Guard for the service consisted of members of the



base who were filming the movie "Glory" nearby. Dukakis quoted General Sherman: "If it had not been for so much talk in Massachusetts and so much hot blood in Carolina, this war would not have come upon us."

In May 1987, the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology (a research institute and state agency within the University of South Carolina) was notified by Mr. Robert Bohrn and Mr. Eric Croen, relic collectors, of the discovery of an abandoned cemetery on Folly Island, South Carolina. The cemetery was accidentally exposed during the construction of a road within a private development. The Institute gained permission from the landowner and the City of Folly Beach to excavate and study burials prior to their reburial. Over a two-week period, the Institute uncovered 14 burials. Later, additional remains were found and excavated, which brought the total to at least 19. Artifacts and analysis of the remains quickly determined that the remains were of black Union soldiers. Because the cemetery was only part of a large Civil War camp, the State Historic Preservation Office later determined that the entire development needed to be surveyed by archaeologists. Archaeologists determined the project area to be the location of the 1863 winter camp for the Union troops stationed on Folly Island. Through continuing analysis of the archaeological remains and the historic documents, it is believed that the soldiers were members of the 55th Massachusetts Regiment and the 1st North Carolina Colored Infantry Regiment who died of diseases during that winter.

The 55th Massachusetts was organized in Readville, Massachusetts, on June 22, 1863. The regiment was stationed at New Bern, North Carolina, briefly in July before being transferred to Folly Island. From August 1863 to February 1864, the 55th Massachusetts remained on Folly Island doing fatigue and picket duties, and participated in operations against Charleston and John's Island. In November 1863, they moved to the interior of the island where they made winter camp. It was in this camp that many died and were buried in the brigade cemetery. The archaeologists believe it was this cemetery that they excavated in May 1987.

During the third phase of excavations, archaeologists concentrated their efforts on areas of the camp beyond the cemetery. This work revealed wells, latrines, tent sites, and artifacts belonging to the many soldiers, both black and white, who occupied the winter camp. On May 29, 1989, the 19 soldiers were laid to rest at the Beaufort National Cemetery.

Civil War Activity in Area

During the first months of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln believed that the Confederate coastal ports should all be blockaded and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells had the same view. Members of the Navy Blockade Board, which was created for just that purpose, could not make up their minds about the site for the fleet base that must be established. In early September 1861, Wells put the choice in the hands of the two men assigned to lead the amphibious assault which would secure the base. Both were veteran officers—Commodore Samuel Francis Du Pont, and Brigadier General Thomas West Sherman. The site agreed upon was Port Royal Sound, South Carolina, which lay about midway between Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina, on the Atlantic Coast so vital to the Confederacy.

Beaufort, the main town, lay ten miles inland on the river of the same name. It had become the favorite summer resort of the rich planters of the region, and they maintained splendid, spacious mansions there. Port Royal Sound was for the Union a great and tempting prize. To deny

its use by the northerners, fortifications were built at the mouth of the harbor. Two forts were built, the largest being Fort Walker on Hilton Head, which was started in July 1861. A smaller fort, Fort Beauregard, was constructed across the way on Bay Point. The two works were manned by two regiments. The Confederate commander was Brigadier General Thomas Drayton.

Commodore Du Pont was chosen to lead the Union attack. The Army supplied 14,000 men under the command of Sherman and, for good measure, a battalion of Marines was thrown in. The fleet of 75 vessels left Hampton Roads, Virginia in late October 1861. Du Pont led his flagship, the steam frigate Wabash to station at the head of the first echelon of inverted V's which was the fleet formation. The established speed was seven knots. There were 15 warships, including the Wabash, and 31 transports and supply craft.

The Confederacy had been aware almost from the beginning where the expedition was headed. Southern spies had watched loading operations in the Chesapeake and had seen the transports gather, form, and leave for sea. Detailed and accurate reports were in the hands of President Jefferson Davis and Judah P. Benjamin, the Acting Secretary of State, very soon after the fleet sailed. Benjamin conferred with Davis and obtained permission to withdraw General Robert E. Lee from duty in western Virginia and assign him to coastal defense command of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. General Lee planned to set up headquarters at Coosawhatchie, but was only able to get there on the day that the battle for Port Royal Sound was fought. Precious time was gained for the Confederacy, though, because Commodore Du Pont's fleet had been caught by storm at sea. The fleet was scattered for miles. Four ships were lost. Ships were scattered over 50 miles of ocean, and each captain shaped his own course for Port Royal Sound.

The Confederates were ready to defend themselves. The orders to proceed were issued and, under the command of Flag Captain John Rodgers, the vessels crossed the Port Royal Sound bar at 6:40 a.m. on November 5. They were met inside by Flag Officer Joseph Tattnall. Tattnall's ship let go a ranging shot, and the Union ships replied. This had been no more than a skirmish with nobody badly hurt. Now the enemies knew each other and could estimate the other's strength. Battle would be the answer.

On November 7, 1861, one of the most important battles of the war began. Du Pont, on board his flagship Wabash, led his warships into battle. Once inside the harbor, the majority of the vessels stopped off Fort Walker's western flank and began pounding the fort. Only the flagship and two other warships steamed back and forth in front of Walker, ignoring Beauregard. The Federal gunboat Pocahontas, whose commander was Captain Percival Drayton, brother of the Confederate commander, arrived off Fort Walker's other flank and added shells from her guns. The fire of the Federal ships was devastating and was too much for the defenders of Fort Walker. Seeing a number of his men fleeing the fort, Drayton ordered a withdrawal. When the Confederates in Fort Beauregard realized that their companions on Hilton Head had abandoned their position, they too began a retreat that would take them through Beaufort and to the safety of the mainland. Du Pont, seeing the Confederates pulling out of Fort Walker, immediately sent his fleet captain ashore to raise the American flag. He wanted to make sure that the battle of Port Royal would be recorded as a Navy victory.

While the Federals were trying to establish a base at Port Royal, the southerners were working to stabilize their military situation. The man in charge of organizing the Confederate

defense was General Robert E. Lee, who arrived in Port Royal the day after Du Pont's attack. Lee orchestrated a defense system based around the Savannah and Charleston Railroad and went on to construct a series of fortifications guarding the railroad. The Port Royal area was its own district, commanded by Brigadier General William S. Walker. Walker had his headquarters at McPhersonville. In a very short time, the North turned Port Royal into one of the largest military bases in the world.

On Hilton Head, Fort Walker was renamed Fort Welles, in honor of the Secretary of the Navy, and was enlarged and encircled with extensive trench works. Across the sound on Bay Point, Fort Beauregard was strengthened and renamed Fort Seward. On St. Helena Island was constructed a large foundry and a huge quartermaster depot complete with a railroad and dock complex. In Station Creek, a naval repair facility was constructed, and farther inland, signal towers were built on top of live pine trees. What all these installations guarded and supported was the South Atlantic blockading squadron, which was in charge of watching the coastline from the North Carolina-South Carolina border to the Florida Keys. The squadron was made up of over 100 warships.

Farther inland, the North established a fortified base at Beaufort, which was occupied in early December 1861. Beaufort served as an advanced outpost for Hilton Head. The water front was used by light-drafted steamers that patrolled the shallow waterways around the islands. Troops were camped throughout the city and the grand houses were used for barracks, offices, warehouses and, whenever needed, hospitals. The old arsenal, built in the 1790's, was turned into an ordnance depot. Beaufort was also home to Samuel Cooley, the self-proclaimed photographer of the Department of the South.

Lee kept his headquarters at Coosawhatchie and hastened to build up his defenses and close the gap left dangerously open when, on the night of November 7 after the Port Royal Sound battle, Beaufort had been deserted. Captain Daniel Ammen in the United States Navy gunboat Seneca sailed up the sound on November 9, took in a landing party at Beaufort and succeeded in blowing up the town's arsenal without being fired at or hindered in any way. Then, a month later, General Sherman roused from his logistical stupor and gave General Stevens of the Second Brigade orders to occupy Beaufort. Stevens did this at once, fully realizing the importance of the place. Now Lee threatened it, and Sherman became worried. He finally resolved that he must send troops into action against Lee, and he asked for volunteers at Hilton Head. Lee had pondered the Federal lack of action for weeks. It had been over a month since the Port Royal Sound battle, and still General Sherman refused to bring any sort of firm pressure against the Confederate lines perched in defense of Charleston, Savannah, and the connecting railroad. Lee devoted nearly all his energy to the assembly of a force that might save the coast from capture. Richmond gave him five regiments and a battalion. He hurried to establish them along the railroad, fortify it, and put obstacles in the rivers that led to the Savannah River. At the heart of the strategy that Lee adopted was not just his artillery weakness but the fact that the Union lines, as put forth by General Stevens outside Beaufort on Port Royal Island, were only eight miles from his headquarters at Pocotaligo and the railroad. Stevens had occupied Beaufort on the evening of December 11, 1861. His brigade followed and members were surprised to find that the town had been wholly deserted by its citizens. Stevens marched through and then called a staff meeting. One of his first orders was that the town should be evacuated, cleared of looters at once, and kept cleared. He had plans for crossing the Coosaw perfected weeks before Sherman, at Hilton Head, authorized the attack and sent him support troops. The obstacles that Lee had placed in

the river could impede progress of Federal gunboats, but Stevens had foreseen that and had been collecting flatboats of shallow draft to carry his troops. On December 31, 1861, he loaded his troops aboard the flatboats with two Navy howitzers and started them around Port Royal Island to the ferry station and Seabrook Landing. With dawn, Stevens got two columns of Highland Guard skirmishers ashore on the mainland side of the river. Then, from the pine woods, came the first Confederate volley. Lee had given field command to Colonel James Jones of the 14th South Carolina Regiment. Jones abandoned the earthworks, hauled out the guns as best he could, and retreated through the woods to Seabrook Landing. The Federal troops came after him when they had leveled the earthworks and taken care of their dead and wounded. They seized the battery position at the landing with Jones in calculated retreat and, as a final gesture on the part of the Navy, the gunboats tossed some of their big-caliber shells in to the few houses that made up Gardens Corner.

General Lee was transferred to Richmond on March 2, 1862, at the command of President Davis, and Major General John C. Pemberton took his place. After Lee's departure, regiment after regiment was taken away and sent to either Corinth or Richmond. It became apparent to Pemberton that he could not maintain his headquarters at Pocotaligo and began on April 20 to withdraw his men towards Charleston.

Stevens had a great deal to occupy his energy right in the Beaufort area. He brought his family south to be with him. He had done a great deal to restore Beaufort to its pre-war condition. The town of some 7,000 people had become in the last two decades the favorite spa and summer gathering place of the wealthy planters from most of the coastal area. Stevens then gave himself entirely to his military duties. He was first and foremost a soldier.

In late May 1862, Stevens with some 1,000 men, were brought out of Beaufort on flatboats and landed at Port Royal Ferry. Some 500 men pushed on through Confederate pickets to Pocotaligo where they overran the Confederate defenses. Stevens considered pulling up reinforcements and pressing on to the railroad, but his men were low on ammunition and black spies reported that another regiment of Confederates was arriving by rail, so the northerners withdrew back to Port Royal Island. Stevens felt that the reconnaissance justified further advances, but developments would take Stevens and his command first to outside Charleston and then, with a large number of Hunter's command, Stevens and his men were transferred to Virginia. Stevens was subsequently killed on September 1, 1862, at the Battle of Chantilly.

General Hunter ceased active operations and contented himself with supporting the Navy and occupying additional sea islands. Hunter was eventually recalled and replaced with Major General Ormsby McKnight Mitchel, who began to organize a series of attacks against the railway. Even though the attacks had failed to reach their objectives, Mitchel was encouraged and felt his demonstration against the railroad justified further strikes. He began to plan for new offensives, but before any could be put into motion, he contracted yellow fever and died. General Hunter was then returned to command. During the summer of 1862, the Federal Government authorized the raising of black troops at Port Royal, and Hunter's original African regiment became the nucleus for the 1st South Carolina, which received its colors and was officially taken into Federal service on January 1, 1863. Since this unit could trace its lineage back to March 1862, it was the first black regiment raised in the Civil War. Under Hunter's watchful eye, the black regiments began to carry out raids against military and economic sites.

The war was taking a grim turn. Federal attacks now went after the economic and social structure of the low country. Union raids were designed to free slaves and destroy southern property. One raid, carried out by Colonel James Montgomery, one of the Union commanders, was directed against rice plantations along the Combahee River. Assisting Montgomery was Harriet Tubman, a former slave who served as a spy for the northerners in the Port Royal region. In early June 1863, Montgomery's regiment swept into the river, destroyed a number of plantations, and returned with 800 freed slaves, of which 150 joined his regiment.

In the spring of 1863, new northern troops arrived at Port Royal for an attack on Charleston. Along with them came Clara Barton, the future founder of the American Red Cross, who came to Port Royal to serve as a nurse. She wrote that the natural, haunting beauty of the island, combined with the dashing young officers almost turned her from the life of public service. She was, however, not swayed and joined the army in its assault on Charleston.

Time and again during the spring and summer of 1863, squadrons of United States Navy ships had steamed from their anchorage off Hilton Head up the coast to bombard Charleston and come back with their dead and wounded. Many of the ships were badly battered by the powerful Confederate fire.

Departmental headquarters continued with the belief that Beaufort was really a rest area. A new fine structure, to be used for the entertainment of the officers and men, was built in the town and opened with a formal ball on the evening of February 23, 1864. During this evening, General Rufus B. Saxton spoke before the crowd, advising that the transport *Cosmopolitan*, with 250 wounded aboard, had just come up the river from Port Royal Sound. The wounded would go to the hospital in Beaufort.

In early 1864, both sides sent troops into Florida and, in May, General Quincy Gillmore, who replaced Hunter, was sent to Virginia, along with the majority of his command.

The war may well have ended this way in the Port Royal area, had not General William T. Sherman marched his Army of 60,000 men across Georgia. His final objective was the city of Savannah where he hoped to join the Navy and refit his army. For nearly a month, battles raged along the Savannah and Charleston Railroad.

In late 1864, the war was shifting to its final scene in the South Carolina low country. Sherman's men reached Columbia in mid-January and captured the South Carolina capital. Left behind were Confederate troops who moved toward Charleston. By February 1865, the Confederates were forced by Union troops to evacuate that city.

The war in the low country ended as quickly as it began. The majority of the troops were transferred to Charleston for occupation duty and, by 1867, the Navy and Army had left Hilton Head. The buildings, warehouses, and forts on Hilton Head were left to the remaining freed men who took the lumber and fixtures to build their new homes. The graveyards of the soldiers and sailors were the only evidence of Federal occupation of Hilton Head, and those buried there would later be removed to the Beaufort National Cemetery.