

106 SUCCESS STORY

The Confederate Submarine *H.L. Hunley*: Completing the Journey Charleston, South Carolina



“Ultimately, *Hunley’s* recovery represents a model of federal, state, and private sector united in service to an archaeological resource of extraordinary importance. ... Cooperation, focused on preservation, has produced tangible results and placed this treasure of American and world history in the hands of generations to come.”

— DAVID L. CONLIN
Hunley Recovery Field Manager

THE STORY

With Southern ports blockaded during the Civil War, New Orleans businessman Horace L. Hunley bankrolled development of a secret weapon—a submarine. Named for its promoter, the “torpedo-boat” *H.L. Hunley* was sent to the besieged port of Charleston, South Carolina, where it succeeded in sinking the USS *Housatonic*. This was the first time in history that a submarine sank an enemy warship, a feat that helped earn the *Hunley* its later listing on the National Register of Historic Places. It would prove, however, to be the *Hunley’s* last battle—the submarine never returned to shore. The mystery of its fate launched more than 130 years of speculation, searching, and competing claims to have located the vessel. In 1995, the location of the *Hunley* was confirmed definitively, and, almost immediately, controversy ensued over ownership and how the submarine should be managed for future generations.

THE PROJECT

Federal law states that the General Services Administration (GSA) is responsible for sunken Confederate vessels. Despite this, the states of South Carolina and Alabama (where the vessel was built) argued that they should control the *Hunley*. Eventually, an agreement was brokered wherein the federal government retained title, and South Carolina (represented by the South Carolina Hunley Commission) was given custody of the vessel in perpetuity. With that issue resolved, attention turned to future treatment. Most parties agreed that an effort should be made to recover the *Hunley*, both to protect it from looters and permit scientific study. But how to do so without risking harm to the submarine?

THE 106 PROCESS

The Navy, which assumed principal management responsibility for the *Hunley* from GSA, was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic

Photos: Above, the submarine in its conservation tank; Right, the raising of the *Hunley*. (photos courtesy Friends of the Hunley)

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Photos: Left, the funeral procession for the *Hunley* crew; Right, engraved gold coin found with the captain's remains on the ship. It proves true the legend that he carried a coin which had once saved his life by deflecting a bullet in the Battle of Shiloh. (photos courtesy Friends of the Hunley)

Preservation Act. Section 106 requires that federal agencies identify historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on those properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the fate of the property when adverse effects are likely to ensue. In the case of the *Hunley*, the Navy and the consulting parties had to address several key issues: security for the wreck site; techniques and standards for recovery and conservation; treatment of the remains of the crew; and future curation and exhibition of the submarine and its artifacts. Recognizing completion of the *Hunley* project would be years away, the Section 106 consultation process provided a framework for the Navy to make future decisions that would ensure thorough coordination and transparency. The Navy established an oversight committee to review recovery and treatment proposals and agreed to provide abstracts of such proposals to interested organizations for review and comment. These and other provisions were embodied in a Programmatic Agreement in 1996.

Consulting Parties:

- Department of the Navy
- General Services Administration
- ACHP
- South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office
- South Carolina Hunley Commission

THE SUCCESS

Using the process set forth in the Programmatic Agreement, the Navy and the Hunley Commission chose an innovative recovery scheme that called for rigging a hammock of straps below the submarine and attaching them to a truss that could be lifted to the surface. The plan worked exactly as intended and, in August 2000, the *Hunley* was raised from the seabed and transported to a nearby custom-fitted conservation center. The subsequent excavation of the silt-laden interior of the submarine revealed the remains of the crew and a treasure trove of associated artifacts, including a fabled lucky gold piece that tradition held had been carried by *Hunley* commander Lt. George Dixon. Following burial of the crew with military honors, conservation efforts are proceeding on the excavated artifacts as well as the hull of the submarine itself. As this work proceeds, more than a half million visitors have come to see the *Hunley* in its conservation tank. In 2002, the team responsible for raising the *Hunley* became the first recipient of the joint National Trust for Historic Preservation/ACHP Award for Federal Partnerships in Historic Preservation. The project also was awarded a Save America's Treasures grant in 2005.

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov

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