

The remains of the three vessels, the Undine and the two transports, are considered to meet criteria of eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Furthermore, as a Naval vessel, the Undine is still the property of the U.S. Navy and is protected from destruction and or vandalism (i.e., artifact collecting). Under the auspices of the Army at the time of their loss, the transports are still considered the property of the Federal Government and fall under the purview of the U.S. Navy and, therefore, are afforded the same protection as the *Undine*. For more information on any aspect of the investigation please visit the websites listed below.



Tennessee Wars Commission
2941 Lebanon Rd.
Nashville, TN 37243-0442

www.state.tn.us/environment/hist/TnWarsCom.html



Naval Historical Center
Washington Navy Yard
805 Kidder Breese Street SE
Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5060
www.history.navy.mil



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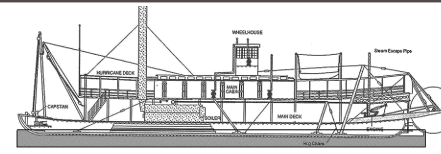
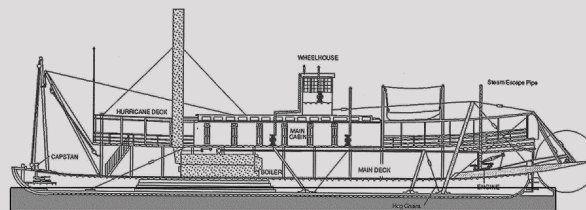


Raise the Gunboats, Inc.
176 Warden Lane
Waverly, TN 37185
www.gunboats.com

For more information about the project please visit:
www.panamconsultants.com/PAGE/

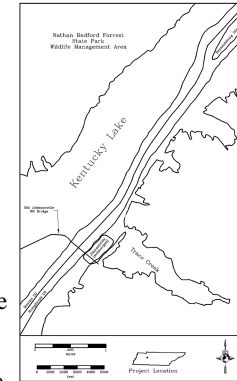
THE BATTLE OF *Johnsonville*

THE FORGOTTEN LEGACY OF THE CIVIL WAR ON THE TENNESSEE RIVER



Introduction

Covered by the waters of the Tennessee River, then subsequently by the murky waters of Kentucky Lake, lie the forgotten remnants of Civil War vessels that represent one of the largest U.S. Naval defeats on our inland waters. Sunk during the little-known Battle of Johnsonville, the search for the wrecks has recently been the focus of local citizen groups, archaeologists, and the State of Tennessee. For the past five years, maritime archaeologists with Panamerican Consultants of Memphis, Tennessee, under the auspices of the Tennessee Historical Commission and Tennessee Wars Commission, have conducted intensive remote sensing surveys and diver investigations on portions of the historic Tennessee River channel in Kentucky Lake off the submerged town of Johnsonville, Tennessee. Performed in concert with Raise the Gunboats, Inc. of Camden, Tennessee, the investigations have been conducted in order to locate and study the remnants of the Union vessels lost at Johnsonville, Tennessee during a daring raid by Confederate forces under General Nathan Bedford Forrest on November 4, 1864.



Situated in West-Central Tennessee in Humphreys County, the Battle of Johnsonville project area is located adjacent to and downriver, or north of the now-submerged historic town of Johnsonville. Prior to construction of a dam across the Tennessee River at Gilbertsville, Kentucky in 1944 and the subsequent creation of Kentucky Lake, Johnsonville lay on the east bank of the Tennessee River. Flowing south to north, and relatively straight at Johnsonville, the river was approximately 400 yards wide at the town.

History

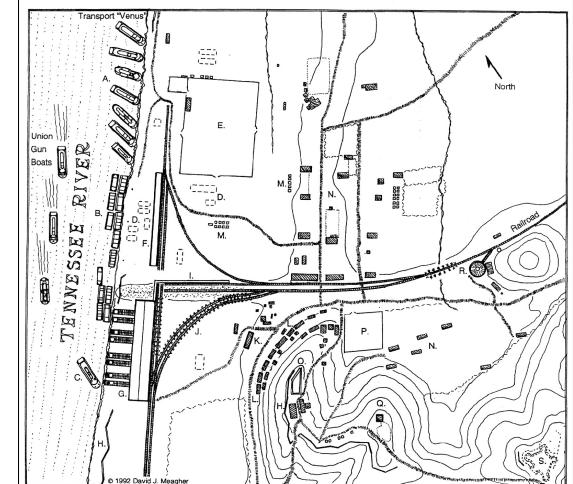
During the Civil War the town of Johnsonville, Tennessee became a strategic supply point for the Union when they selected the ferry town as the western terminus of the Nashville and Northwestern military railroad. In an effort to support General Sherman's siege of Atlanta, the railroad was established to transport military supplies coming up the Tennessee River by steamboat and then transferred on to Nashville by rail.

THE BATTLE OF *Johnsonville*

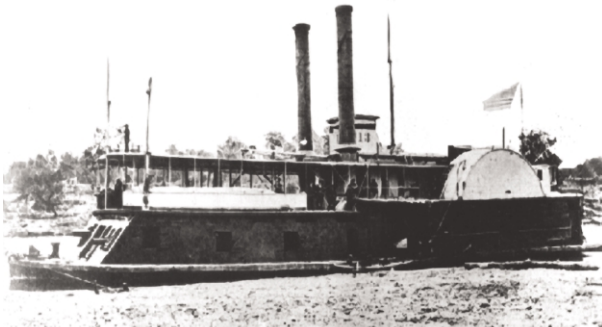
In an effort to cut Union supplies, in November of 1864, Confederate forces under General Nathan Bedford Forrest raided the depot and landing with a surprise artillery bombardment from cannon positioned on the opposite side of the river. The attack caused the destruction of four U.S. Navy tinclads, at least eight supply transport steamboats, a number of barges and 33 pieces of artillery. Along with the vessels, it was estimated that the raid caused the destruction of 75,000-120,000 tons of quartermaster's supplies, and much of the town itself.

Perhaps the most significant vessel types lost at the Battle of Johnsonville were the four Union tinclads, the *Undine*, the *Key West*, the *Elfin*, and the *Tawah*. Tinclad vessels were a class of vessel that very little is known. In general, they were originally civilian steamboats that were bought into government service and hastily converted for their duties. Conversion of these vessels entailed placing light armor on the main deck of the vessels as well as on the pilothouse. The armor on these vessels was intended to deflect light arms fire and not much more. Hence the name "tinclad" versus the more

Johnsonville Tennessee 1864



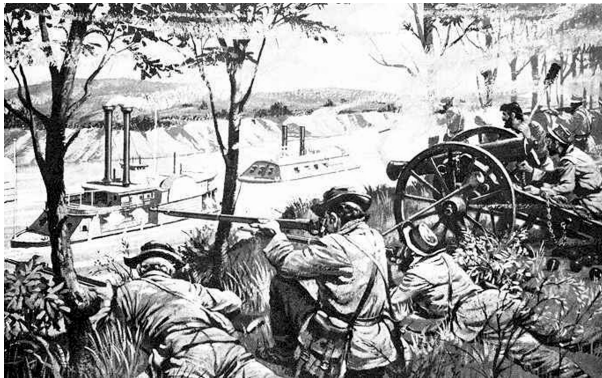
- | | |
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| A. Transports | J. Trestle to Wide Transfer Building |
| B. Barges | K. Sawmill |
| C. Transport | L. Worker Housing |
| D. Open Storage | M. Soldier Huts |
| E. Large Corral | N. Civilian Houses |
| F. Narrow Transfer Building | O. Redoubt/Fort |
| G. Wide Transfer Building (With Lifting Machinery) | P. Small Corral |
| H. Rifle Pits | Q. Blockhouse |
| I. Transfer Sidings | R. Roundhouse/Turntable |
| | S. Upper Redoubt/Fort (Built After Attack) |



The tinclad Fort Hindman No. 13 was very similar in construction to the Tawah, sunk during the attack on Johnsonville.

heavily clad "ironclads." A variety of armament (i.e. cannon) were then placed onboard to aid in defending these vessels.

Captured by Bedford's artillery forces after being disabled downriver from Johnsonville, the Confederates employed the Undine along with land-based artillery in a joint assault against the town. With rebel batteries set at strategic locations along the west bank of the river opposite the town, the Undine was employed to lure the Union tinclads away



Artists rendition of the attack on Union vessels during the Battle of Johnsonville, November 4, 1864 by rebel batteries set at strategic locations along the opposite river bank from the depot.

from Johnsonville and into close range of the batteries. Depositions from the subsequent court martial of Lieutenant E. M. King USN of the late USS Key West offers an interpretation of the events and final disposition and location of the four tinclads lost during the raid. The Undine succeeded in luring the three tinclads, the Tawah, Key West and Elfin away from Johnsonville by approaching the town and shelling it. Upon the approach of the three Union gunboats, the Undine backed under the protection of an artillery battery. But after realizing that six additional gunboats, which had just arrived from Paducah, blocked her escape, her Confederate crew set her afire and abandoned the vessel.

The Tawah, Elfin and Key West engaged the Confederate forces and took numerous artillery hits. All accounts agree that "They returned to Johnsonville - just above the transports. While laying there they continued the engagement until about 3 o'clock - when I saw one of the gunboats on fire which I immediately reported. At about 3:10 I could see the Elfin or Key West on fire. At 3:30 discovered the transports burning."

A stunning Naval defeat for the Union as well as stern reminder of Forrest's abilities, the battle was much too late in the war for the Confederate cause. The Navy for its part sent the USS Kate, during the summer of 1865, to salvage the machinery, cannon and metal belonging to the four tinclads. The vessels were heavily salvaged of everything possible with the exception of the lower hulls. It is unknown if the Army salvaged any of the transports or barges also lost in the conflagration. In 1918, and prior to the depot and battle site being submerged by the construction of Kentucky Lake, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers removed most of the wrecks.

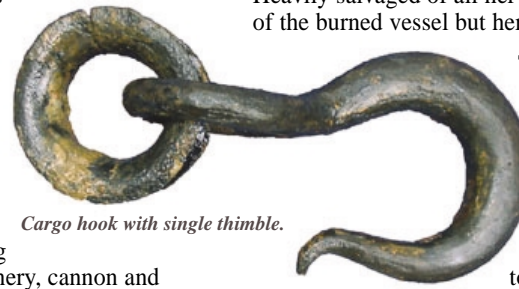
Archaeological Investigations

Together with Raise the Gunboats, Inc., and under the auspices of the Tennessee Historical Commission, the Tennessee Wars Commission, and the Naval Historical Center, archaeologists with Panamerican Consultants have spent the last five years locating and recording the remnants of the Union gunboats and transports lost during the stunning raid by the Confederate forces. Believed to be all that remains of the numerous vessels lost during the conflagration, to date, only the tinclad Undine, and two transports have been located. Burned to the water line and subsequently salvaged, little remains of the actual vessels but the lower hull. However, the vessel types and the battle they fought and lost in are reflected in the numerous artifacts that still exist within the hulls.

The Wreck Sites

To date, the remains of three vessels associated with the Union defeat have been located. These include the remains of the tinclad Undine, and two transports. Originally

a 140-foot sternwheel steamboat built in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1863, the remains of the Undine are buried under eight feet of sediment downstream from the depot in an area identified on an historic after-battle map as the location of the vessel. Heavily salvaged of all her guns and armor, very little remains of the burned vessel but her lower hull.



Cargo hook with single thimble.

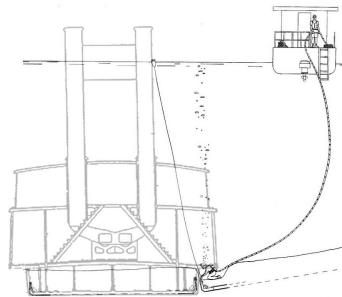
Two vessels identified as transports and most likely sternwheelers were also located. The two vessels sit side by side as if they had been tied together during the battle. Buried under three feet of sediment, the vessels are burned to the waterline.

Artifacts recovered during the investigation

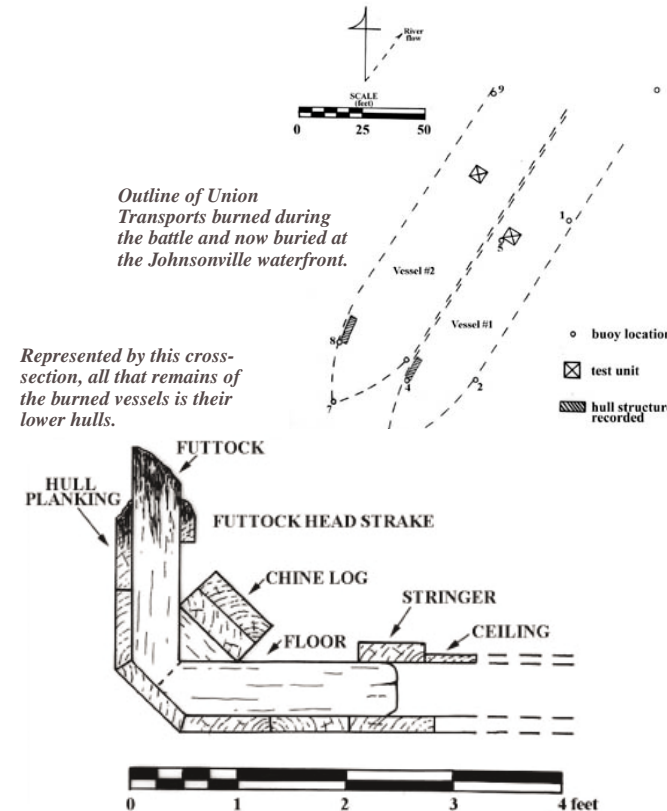
Although very limited excavation has been conducted on the vessel remains, numerous artifact types have been recovered from the shipwrecks. Representing various aspects of the Battle, the Civil War, or the vessels themselves, these include military uniform buttons, rigging elements, food items such as coffee beans, corn, and hardtack, munitions, leather shoes, include coal, bricks with maker's marks, fasteners, a lock, a



Diver preparing to investigate one of the shipwrecks at Johnsonville.



Artist rendition of the diver examination of the Johnsonville wreck sites. Note what actually remains of the burned vessel versus its pre-battle profile.



Represented by this cross-section, all that remains of the burned vessels is their lower hulls.



Hardtack, a type of flour biscuit used to feed troops during the Civil War, recovered during the Johnsonville investigation.

rope monkey's fist, as well as metal labels/tags. All artifacts are mute testimony to the conflagration that took place during the November 1864 raid. In order to preserve the artifacts they are currently undergoing chemical conservation treatments. These objects will eventually serve as museum displays or as educational objects.



Fire bricks helped protect wood steamboats from the heat of the steam boilers. The stamped maker's marks help archaeologists identify the vessels.



Numerous uniform button types have been found in the hulls. The button shown here has an Eagle insignia representative of a general service button dating from the 1840s to 1865.



Intact monkey's fist knot typically used to heave lines from a boat.