

W. G. BUTLER

In June of 2011, Tracey McNeill, a representative of Sea Pines Plantation Community Services Associates office, called the Heritage library to report that a "tomb stone" had been unearthed by a resident. The stone was actually a military marker, impressive in that it was made of stone, in very good condition, and engraved with the following inscription:

W. G. Butler
Co. II. 4. F. Bat.

Richard (Rick) Graves, of 8 Sweet Gum Lane, Greenwood Forest, was excavating his densely wooded backyard in preparation to create a more manicured lawn and plantings when he came upon the stone marker. His find had apparently occurred 7 years earlier, in 2004. Mr. and Mrs. Graves are part time Hilton Head residents who have been coming to the island for over 30 years.

John Griffin, Heritage Library's in-house Civil War expert, learned of the discovery and set to work. The very next day, W.G. Butler's stone marker was in the Heritage Library's offices being oohed and aaahed over by the staff. Armed with the relatively nominal bit of information on the marker (no states, no dates), John theorized that Butler was wounded and/or captured when the Union forces stationed on Hilton Head Island attacked Jacksonville, Florida. Prisoners would have been taken to a prison/field hospital located in what is now the Greenwood Forest area of Sea Pines. When a soldier fell, or died of disease, the military placed a marker on the spot. Often these were made of wood, but luckily this was made of stone. In addition, John also knew that this battle took place during the summer months, when bodies had to be buried quickly. After the war, the bodies were moved to more appropriate cemeteries but the heavy stone markers were left behind. John searched the Confederate Grave Database with his name, and the assumption that he was a Florida recruit. He believed he had located "our" W.G. Butler, and placed a call to the Magnolia Cemetery in Charleston, S.C. The suggestion that he had been moved was news to them; and so offered no useful information. The online photograph of the tomb stone in Magnolia Cemetery reads:

W. G. Butler
Co. H
4 FLA BATT
5 CSA
6 Aug 29 1864

It is Find A Grave Memorial # 20716272 and was added to the Find A Grave Memorial site July 31, 2007. His date of birth is, for now, unknown. John has located 2 possible W. G. Butlers from the 1860 Census, both from Florida, one aged 19, the other aged 26. Both "fit" age-wise into the Civil War timeline of 1861 to 1865. If the W.G. Butler who was age 26 in 1860 is the soldier we're looking for, he would have left a widow named Rachel (age 23 in 1864) and a young daughter (age 6 in 1864). Their home, as of 1860, is listed as Quincy, Gadsden, Florida.

In the weeks following our discovery of the Sea Pines military marker, Heritage Library's Barbara Fleischmann paid a visit to the backyard of 8 Sweet Gum Lane and spoke to Rick Graves. The yard was beautifully manicured and bore no resemblance to the "woods" Rick said had been there before. Beyond the fence was still a dense natural area, with a dirt walking trail behind that.