

Individuals Who Died on Hilton Head Island During the Civil War

From the onset of the Civil War, it was obvious to the Department of Defense that the Union needed to control the southern coastline and deny the Confederacy use of its harbors. General Thomas Sherman and Commodore Samuel DuPont were given instructions to secure the Atlantic coast. They chose Port Royal Sound and Hilton Head Island as the future headquarters of the effort because of the excellence of the harbor. On Nov.7, 1861, they arrived at the entrance to Port Royal Sound with a fleet of more than 70 warships, transports and supply vessels, and 12,653 troops in what was the largest amphibious operation undertaken by the United States until World War II. Hilton Head was captured early that afternoon and the island was abandoned by its Confederate defenders.

The Confederate Fort Walker was renamed Fort Welles and became the center of a large garrison which at one point had as many as 50,000 occupants. Hilton Head, also called Port Royal, was the Headquarters of the Department of the South and the refueling and supply depot for the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. The garrison included several hospitals to deal with the inevitable casualties. There was a large U.S. Hospital as well as a separate hospital for prisoners of war and one for patients with smallpox. The area controlled by the Union included the city of Beaufort and a number of buildings there also became hospitals.

Burial orders were normally issued for patients who died at Hilton Head and the bodies were interred in the near-by government cemetery on what is now Union Cemetery Road. Eventually most of these bodies were transferred to the National Cemetery in Beaufort. Some were claimed by families and returned to their homes. Unfortunately, not all the remains have been identified and are therefore buried in graves in Beaufort marked "unknown."

In 1991 a small cardboard box was found in the office basement of the Beaufort National Cemetery, containing burial orders from 1862 -1865 for 692 Union soldiers and civilians as well as Confederate POWs. These orders were sent to the Beaufort County Library where they were copied and microfilmed. The Beaufort Cemetery and the City Point Cemetery in Petersburg, VA, are the only two cemeteries where such orders have been found.

Additional information on burials can be found in the Roll of Honor, which was originally published by the government between 1865 and 1871 to honor those Union soldiers who died in the war and to assist those interested in locating their burial places.

This index merges some 1400 names from the burial orders found in Beaufort and the names found in the Roll of Honor along with additional information uncovered by Heritage Library researchers. Entries include the individual's name, with alternate spellings; regiment or other status; date, cause and place of death; and grave sites on Hilton Head and in Beaufort National Cemetery. This is not a complete list of deaths during this period; additional names not in the burial orders or the roll of honor will be published in the future.

The burial orders were compiled by volunteers of The Heritage Library, including Marty and Paul Anthony, Isobel Bitner, John Griffin, and Barbara Vernasco.

[Click here for a listing of these soldiers.](#)