

= Battery White =

Battery White was an artillery battery constructed by the Confederates during the American Civil War . Built in 1862 ? 63 to defend Winyah Bay on the South Carolina coast , the battery was strongly situated and constructed ; however , it was inadequately manned , and was captured without resistance during the final months of the war .

The battery is listed in the National Register of Historic Places . It is located on private land , but is open to the public .

= = Island fortifications = =

Even before the outbreak of the Civil War , the secessionist government of South Carolina was concerned with the possibility of attack by sea in Georgetown County . Shortly after the December 20 , 1860 passage of the Ordinance of Secession , an aide @-@ de @-@ camp to governor Francis Pickens urged Lowcountry planters to " aid in the erection of Batteries to protect and defend the entrance of Winyah Bay and the Santee River " .

The area offered a tempting target to Union forces . Winyah Bay would furnish a sheltered anchorage large enough for the entire United States Navy of 1861 . The city of Georgetown on the bay was the largest on the South Carolina coast north of Charleston . Georgetown County produced nearly half of the rice grown in the United States , amounting to some 54 million pounds (24 @,@ 000 tonnes) in 1860 ; Georgetown exported more rice than any other port in the world . This production and shipping could be disrupted by gunboats moving up the Black , the Pee Dee , the Waccamaw , and the Sampit rivers , which flow into the bay ; and the two distributary channels of the Santee River , whose mouths lie just below the bay . Curtailing rice production would not only damage the local economy , but would impair the Confederacy 's ability to feed its armies .

In May 1861 , General P. G. T. Beauregard ordered the development of coastal defenses for South Carolina , including batteries situated on three islands flanking the mouth of Winyah Bay : North Island , South Island , and Cat Island . The Federal capture of Port Royal in November 1861 lent urgency to the construction and improvement of these works , which was done under Robert E. Lee , the newly appointed commander of the Department of South Carolina , Georgia , and East Florida , with Colonel Arthur Middleton Manigault in charge of the district that included Georgetown and Horry counties .

The island fortifications were never tested against a major Union attack . However , they served a useful purpose in dealing with grounded ships , both Confederate and Federal ; in protecting the entrance to the bay ; and in maintaining Confederate possession of the islands .

= = Withdrawal = =

Matters changed in early 1862 . In March of that year , Lee was recalled to Richmond as military advisor to President Jefferson Davis . He was replaced by General John C. Pemberton , who ordered the withdrawal of troops and artillery from the positions around Georgetown , apparently in order to concentrate his limited manpower on shorter defensive lines .

Union naval forces were quick to take advantage of this new vulnerability . In May 1862 , the gunboats USS Albatross and USS Norwich noted that the island forts were unoccupied . They landed troops to occupy North Island , which became the principal local Union base for much of the war ; and they destroyed the fortifications on South and Cat Islands . They also sailed some 10 miles (16 km) up the Waccamaw River , where they raided a mill and carried off 80 slaves . Settled on North Island , these freed slaves formed the nucleus of a colony of " contrabands " that grew to more than a thousand before being removed to Port Royal for fear of Confederate raids leading to their recapture or massacre .

The Federal forces made no attempt to seize territory up the rivers , and their expeditions were limited by the draft of their vessels . Nevertheless , they conducted a number of raids in which they damaged facilities , seized rice , and released slaves ; and these raids severely disrupted the region

's economy . Rice production in particular suffered , since it depended on a labor force of skilled slaves performing carefully timed tasks .

Pemberton still refused to move artillery and men to the Georgetown area , maintaining that all of his resources were necessary for the protection of Charleston . However , his superiors ordered him to construct new fortifications at Winyah Bay . Since the Union now controlled the islands , it was necessary to find sites further up the bay . On August 3 , 1862 , Pemberton visited the area and selected Mayrant 's Bluff and Frazier 's Point as the sites for the new batteries .

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Later in August 1862 , Pemberton was promoted to lieutenant general and sent to the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana , where he would eventually surrender Vicksburg . He was replaced in the Department of South Carolina and Georgia by Beauregard , who assumed command on September 24 , 1862 . The new commander supported the fortification of Winyah Bay : on October 8 , 1862 , he assured Governor Pickens that he had ordered the construction of a battery of five or six pieces of artillery at Mayrant 's Bluff ; on November 10 , he wrote Colonel James Chesnut , Jr. that the battery was " armed and completed " , and that he had sent a new regiment of the State Reserves to General James H. Trapier , in command of the Georgetown District .

Trapier was less than pleased with the troops and artillery that he had been given . The new regiment , he noted , arrived at the battery without arms and ammunition ; and as Reserves , would only be in service for 90 days , not enough time to make effective soldiers of them even had they been armed . He had also been given fairly light guns ; what he wanted was Columbiads , suitable for defending the battery and the bay against incursions by ironclads .

Despite the paucity of men and weaponry , the new battery proved effective . On November 11 , 1862 , two Union gunboats entered Winyah Bay and began firing on the Mayrant 's Bluff works . The Second South Carolina Artillery , which had set up nine guns in the fortification , responded ; and within a few minutes , the Federal vessels were forced to retire .

In February 1863 , Trapier reported that the Mayrant 's Bluff fortification , now named Battery White , was occupied by only 53 men and nine guns . Even this small force sufficed to stop Federal incursions up the rivers of Winyah Bay . However , rice production in the Georgetown area did not recover : the raids had destroyed too much of the physical plant , carried off too many of the slaves , and created too much uncertainty for planters to return to anything near full production .

The battery continued to lose manpower , despite Trapier 's ongoing calls for more troops and guns . In October 1864 , a body of eleven deserters from the Confederate German Artillery reached the gunboat USS Potomska ; they reported that there was great discontent among the troops , and that many would desert were they not so strongly guarded . They also reported that there were ten guns at the battery ; the captain of the Potomska concluded that the bay was too well defended for him to render aid to prospective deserters .

= = Capture = =

In November 1864 , Trapier was ordered to bring most of his forces to Mount Pleasant , just north of Charleston . Only a company of the German Artillery was left to defend the Georgetown district . By the end of January 1865 , only a small crew commanded by a lieutenant remained at Battery White .

In January and early February 1865 , Union forces under General William Tecumseh Sherman moved northward from Georgia into South Carolina . On February 2 and 3 , they defeated a Confederate force in the Battle of Rivers ' Bridge , clearing their pathway into the state . After a feint at Charleston , they marched to Columbia , which they entered on February 17 ; on the same day , Charleston was evacuated , and on the 18th , it was surrendered .

From Charleston , Union naval forces under Admiral John A. Dahlgren moved up the coast to Georgetown , which Dahlgren thought might be a useful point of communication with Sherman 's land forces . On February 23 , deserters told the captain of the gunboat USS Mingoe that Battery

White had been or would soon be evacuated . The Mingoe fired four rounds into the battery . When no response was made , a party was sent ashore ; they found the battery abandoned and its guns spiked . The sloop @-@ of @-@ war USS Pawnee and the gunboat USS Nipsic continued up the bay and landed a party of Marines to take possession of Georgetown ; the intendant and wardens of the city formally surrendered it on February 25 .

Soon thereafter , Dahlgren inspected the battery , and was impressed . The fortification , he wrote , was well situated and designed , laid out to defend against both shipborne bombardment and attack by landing parties . Eleven guns bore on the channel : two 10 @-@ inch (254 mm) Columbiads , three banded rifled 32 @-@ pounders , four smoothbore 24 @-@ pounders , and two banded rifled 12 @-@ pounders . A 6 @-@ pound smoothbore flanked the ditch . The rear was defended by a " formidable " rampart and ditch , with a 24 @-@ pound smoothbore at either end ; in the fort were numerous traverses and magazines . The approach along the beach to the battery 's right flank was covered by a 24 @-@ pound and a 12 @-@ pound smoothbore . " If the works had been sufficiently manned " , wrote Dahlgren , " it would have required good troops to take the work . "

= = = Sinking of the USS Harvest Moon = = =

By the fall of 1864 , the Union fleet had effectively closed Winyah Bay to blockade runners . Accordingly , the Confederate command had elected to lay mines , at the time known as " torpedoes " , in the bay . Eighteen mines had been constructed in Georgetown by Captain Thomas West Daggett and Stephen W. Rouquie and placed strategically in the bay .

As early as January 1865 , Union sympathizers in Georgetown had warned Dahlgren 's forces about the existence of mines in the channel . While approaching Battery White , the Mingoe had sent its boats out to sweep for such devices . However , their efforts may have been perfunctory : according to Dahlgren 's report , " ... so much has been said in ridicule of torpedoes that very little precautions are deemed necessary , and if resorted to are probably taken with less care than if due weight was attached to the existence of these mischievous things . "

On the morning of March 1 , 1865 , Dahlgren 's flagship , the side @-@ wheel steamer USS Harvest Moon , sailed from Georgetown toward Battery White , which Dahlgren intended to inspect . En route , the vessel struck one of Daggett and Rouquie 's mines , which blew a large hole in it , killing one sailor ; the boat quickly sank in two and a half fathoms of water .

= = Battery White postbellum = =

For over a century after the Civil War , the grounds on which Battery White stood were part of the Belle Isle Plantation . During the late 19th century , extensive landscaping was undertaken on the plantation . The United Daughters of the Confederacy erected a memorial stone on the site in 1929 . In about 1946 , the plantation gardens , including the battery , were opened to the public , and remained thus until 1974 .

In the 1970s , the plantation was developed as a condominium complex . Portions of the 100 @-@ acre (40 ha) complex of fortifications were lost to construction . However , the owners elected to preserve Battery White itself . In 1977 , a 3 @-@ acre (1 @-@ 2 ha) area encompassing the battery was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places . In 2008 , the site was re @-@ opened to the public .

The battery 's earthworks are for the most part well preserved . The powder magazines have deteriorated , owing to collapse of the earth mounds following decay of their wooden interior shoring . The two Columbiads have been re @-@ mounted and once again point out over Winyah Bay .

Three of the battery 's guns have been placed in Georgetown . A 24 @-@ pound gun has been mounted in front of the National Guard Armory , and two cannon are displayed in Constitution Park on the Georgetown waterfront .

The Harvest Moon was never salvaged , and has gradually sunk deeper into the mud of the bay . In the mid @-@ 1960s , the top deck lay under an estimated six feet (1 @-@ 8 m) of mud . A Georgetown group attempted to salvage and restore the vessel as a tourist attraction , and in 1964

the U.S. Navy formally abandoned it , rendering it eligible for private salvage ; but the attempt failed for lack of funds . As of 2011 , the ship 's boiler stack was still visible at low tide .