

99-58

Form 10-300
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Virginia	
COUNTY: York	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON: SHIPWRECKS
Yorktown Wrecks
AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: [REDACTED]

CITY OR TOWN:
Yorktown vicinity (Thomas N. Downing First District Congressman)

STATE: Virginia CODE: 51 COUNTY: York CODE: 199

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) none
		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes: Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Commonwealth of Virginia (also see continuation sheet)

STREET AND NUMBER:
Marine Resources Commission, 2401 West Avenue

CITY OR TOWN: Newport News STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: STATE: CODE:

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Survey

DATE OF SURVEY: 1972 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

STREET AND NUMBER:
Room 1116 Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

British warships sunk off Yorktown in the siege of 1781 include the 44 gun fifth rater Charon, 28 gun frigate Guadaloupe, 24 gun frigate Fowey, and an undetermined number of smaller ships and boats. Two contemporary maps - the 1781 Rochambeau French map of Yorktown and the 1782 Bauman American map - show the wrecked fleet, with about fifteen vessels off Gloucester Point and twenty-five or more off the Yorktown shore.

Interest in salvaging the wrecks dates from soon after the battle, when French forces attempted to raise the Guadaloupe and perhaps several other ships, although the success of the French effort is not known. In 1852 Thomas Ashe of Gloucester County petitioned the General Assembly to allow him to salvage brass cannon from an "English frigate of large class", but his success is also unknown. Several wrecks were dug into by the National Park Service and the Mariner's Museum in 1934-35. Numerous small artifacts as well as anchors, cannon, and ship's timbers were recovered at that time. In 1954 Chief Warrant Officer Eugene F. Moran, head of diver training at Fort Eustis, found eleven wooden wrecks near Gloucester Point. The wrecks, said to range from 40 to 100 feet in length, were believed to be part of the British fleet. Moran noted that the ship's timbers were well preserved in the mud. No further investigation was made by the Parks service or Mariner's Museum. Amateur divers have since recovered a variety of ceramics, glass, and metal objects from the wrecks.

No thorough study of the wrecks has been undertaken, but extensive ship structures and quantities of equipment and supplies must lie undisturbed on the bed of the York River. An example of the quality of preservation possible is the head of a salt pork barrel found in the 1934-35 project. Its inscription, "Shaw June 22 '80 S.P.", was still legible.

E.A.C.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1781

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | | <u>history</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | <u>nautical</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | _____ |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The 1781 British wrecks in the York River are significant underwater remains because of their important historical associations and their archaeological potential. The wrecks have great "time capsule" value because of their probable good state of preservation and known date of demise. Careful excavation of the wrecks could provide much information about the British ships and their accoutrements. An extensive array of artifacts was recovered in the limited exploration of 1934-35, but that work was not carried out with the controlled scientific methods now employed in underwater archaeology.

Cornwallis' fleet, largely destroyed in the 1781 action, might have been a key force in saving the British from defeat at Yorktown and prolonging the Revolutionary War. The fleet had transported Cornwallis' troops from Portsmouth to Yorktown in early August to await the arrival of British naval forces under the command of Lord Hood. However, Hood's fleet was driven from the Chesapeake Bay by Admiral de Grasse in the Battle of the Virginia Capes on September 5th. The French fleet, reinforced by Admiral de Barras, controlled the entrance to the Chesapeake and established a blockade of the York River. Washington and Lafayette firmly sealed off any land escape from Yorktown in September, and Cornwallis prepared to withstand a siege, having cannon and supplies removed from the ships to enlarge his land batteries.

The French fleet prevented the British ships from effectively aiding Cornwallis, and on the night of September 21st, the fireship Vulcan was unsuccessful in attempting to set fire to the French fleet. St. George Tucker, a careful observer of the Yorktown Battle, recorded in his journal on September 30th that Cornwallis might transfer his forces by ship up the York to West Point. There were no allied ships up river, but the British did not attempt the move. The American land batteries began bombardment on October 6th, and some of the British ships shifted their anchorage to Gloucester Point across the river. The next day a French battery set fire to the largest British ship, the Charon, and three transports. Cornwallis had a number of the vessels sunk to

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prevent attack from the French fleet down river. The two largest remaining ships, Guadaloupe and Fowey, were scuttled too to prevent capture. On the night of October 16th, Cornwallis attempted to transfer his troops across the river in small boats, but the evacuation was prevented by a violent squall. A British flag of truce was shown the next morning, and on October 19th the articles of capitulation were signed. Remaining British vessels became the property of the French Navy, but the majority of the fleet has been sunk in the York River.

E.A.C.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Ferguson, Homer L., "Salvaging Revolutionary Wrecks from the York River", William and Mary Quarterly, 2nd ser., vol. 19 (1939), pp257-271.
 Frechette, Fred, "Cornwallis Fleet Found", Richmond Times Dispatch, August 2, 1954, pp 1 & 4.
 Hatch, Charles E., Yorktown and the Siege of 1781, National Park Service Historical Handbook, 1957.
 Landers, Howard L., The Virginia Campaign and the Blockade and Siege of Yorktown, 1781, Washington, D.C., 1931.
 Noel Hume, Ivor, Here Lies Virginia, New York, 1963.
 Tucker, St. George, "Journal of the Siege of Yorktown, 1781", William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., vol. 5 (1948) pp.375-395.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW						
NE						
SE						
SW						

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **3,550 acres**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Virginia	51	Gloucester	073
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
 Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

ORGANIZATION: Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission DATE: February, 1973

STREET AND NUMBER:
 Room 1116 Ninth Street State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN: Richmond STATE: Virginia CODE: 51

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name

Junius R. Fishburne, Jr.

Junius R. Fishburne, Jr., Director
 Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

Title

FEB 20 1973

Date

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date

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4. U. S. Department of the Army
Norfolk Office, Corps of Engineers
803 Front Street, Fort Norfolk
Norfolk, Virginia 23510