

# E.O. 11593

## DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY NOTIFICATION National Register of Historic Places National Park Service

VLR - 10/19/82  
NRH - DOE 2/24/83

Name of property: *U.S.S. Cumberland*

Location:

State: *VA*

Request submitted by: *DOD/COE/Michael M. Jenks*

Date received: *1-11-83*

Additional information received:

### Opinion of the State Historic Preservation Officer:

- Eligible
  Not Eligible
  No Response

Comments:

### The Secretary of the Interior has determined that this property is:

- Eligible
 Applicable criteria: *D*
 Not Eligible

**Comments:** *The information supplied indicates that positive identification of these remains as the U.S.S. Cumberland is not currently possible. The information does indicate, however, that there is a reasonable probability that they are. The information also indicates that this is a Civil War era war ship that may provide important information regardless of its identification. If further information substantiates that this is the U.S.S. Cumberland it may acquire added significance. It is important for the data it may provide about the U.S.S. Cumberland and about Civil War era navel activities in the James River.*

- Documentation insufficient  
 (Please see accompanying sheet explaining additional materials required)

  
 Keeper of the National Register

Date: *2/24/83*

3-11-82 11:31  
EAT, R/3/84

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only  
received  
date entered

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic 19th CENTURY SHIPWRECK ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE [REDACTED]

and/or common USS Cumberland (Preferred) (VHLC 121-42)

## 2. Location

street & number [REDACTED] XX not for publication

city, town Newport News XX vicinity of [REDACTED]

state Virginia code [REDACTED] county N/A code [REDACTED]

## 3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: (shipping lane)

## 4. Owner of Property

name Department of the Navy

street & number Office of the Judge Advocate General, 200 Stovall Street

city, town Alexandria N/A vicinity of state Virginia 22332

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Newport News Circuit Court

street & number 2501 Huntington Avenue

city, town Newport News state Virginia

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

VHLC Site Survey Form  
title [REDACTED] has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1982  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Research Center for Archaeology, P.O. Box 368

city, town Yorktown state Virginia 23690

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

### SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

\_\_\_\_\_ a mid-19th century shipwreck located in \_\_\_\_\_ Newport News, Virginia, contains military items which indicate that it was a Federal naval vessel sunk during the Civil War. Oral tradition and documentary research strongly suggest that \_\_\_\_\_ is the USS Cumberland, a sloop of war sunk in Hampton Roads on March 8, 1862, with many of its crewmen on board.

### DETAILED ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Archaeologists from Underwater Archaeological Joint Ventures (UAVJ), working under contract to the National Underwater Marine Agency, Inc. (NUMA) conducted a Phase I survey by means of remote sensing and limited on-site testing, in an area oral tradition and documentary research have indicated to be the site of the shipwreck USS Cumberland. \_\_\_\_\_ He straightline recording fathometer was used in survey lanes placed at fifty foot intervals perpendicular to the shoreline. Survey efforts were concentrated \_\_\_\_\_ the specific area in which the USS Cumberland is believed to have sunk. Survey efforts were often hindered by currents with a velocity in excess of two knots and heavy ship traffic which created diving hazards. Archaeological testing focused on those areas not obscured by sediment.

The 1981 NUMA survey concentrated on an area identified by Wilbur Riley, a local waterman, as being the site of a 19th-century warship, a location reaffirmed by the detailed documentary research of amateur historian Dr. Chester Bradley. The fathometer survey detected a major target at the site \_\_\_\_\_ indicated by Mr. Riley.

UAVJ divers located a shipwreck lying at a depth in excess of sixty-three feet, \_\_\_\_\_ Listing at an approximately thirty-five degree angle \_\_\_\_\_ the wreck was obscured by heavy overburden. Despite a lack of good visibility, divers found the ship's decking intact, and the shaft of a large iron anchor and a long section of bilge pump pipe were observed on the site. The ship itself appeared to have sustained considerable damage, not unlike that known to have been inflicted upon the USS Cumberland prior to its sinking. All artifacts discovered during the 1981 survey date to the mid-19th century and consist almost exclusively of military-related items.

A Model 1844 brass cutlass hilt of a type used by the federal Navy was found at \_\_\_\_\_ as well as a single-ringed .38 caliber pistol bullet and a standard three-ringed .69 caliber rifled musket bullet. A brass object consisting of two 1½ inch diameter circles in linear series is believed to be part of a rifle rack.

Several artifacts were found at \_\_\_\_\_ relating to the use of heavy ordnance. Two cannon fuses measuring two inches in length, identical in shape to a type manufactured for the Navy's Ordnance Department, 1857-1864, were found aboard \_\_\_\_\_. A wooden sabot, a cylindrically-shaped wooden block with a flat base and concave upper surface, measured three inches high and nine inches in diameter. It would have been used to properly seat a shell in a cannon bore with its fuse facing muzzleward, thereby preventing explosion within the cannon's tubing. A set of gunner's calipers, consisting of two sheet brass strips connected with a brass rivet, comprised a graduated circle which fits

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		Maritime architecture

Specific dates Builder/Architect

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

██████████ a mid-19th century shipwreck situated in the ██████████ at Newport News, Virginia, is believed to be the wreck of the USS Cumberland, sunk on March 8, 1864, as a result of extensive damage sustained during an encounter with the ironclad CSS Virginia (Merrimac). Scientific archaeological excavation at ██████████ should positively identify this shipwreck and determine whether it is the USS Cumberland, ██████████. It should also yield new research data on Civil War-era naval architecture.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The USS Cumberland, a full ship-rigged sailing sloop built at the Boston Navy Yard, was launched in May, 1842. For over twenty years she served as a U.S. naval vessel. In 1856 she was razed at the New York Navy Yard and her armament refitted. At the beginning of Pres. Abraham Lincoln's administration in 1861, she was one of five sailing vessels which, with seven steamers, comprised the Federal Navy's home squadron.

In April, 1861 the USS Cumberland was towed out of Norfolk's Gosport Navy Yard when federal forces burned and abandoned the port. On August 27, 1861, the ship was instrumental in the capture of Hatteras Island, North Carolina. At that time she was under the command of Capt. John Marston.

Early in 1862 the USS Cumberland was stationed off Camp Butler in Newport News, Virginia, as part of the Union blockade of the James River. At that time she was carrying a seventy pound rifle and a broadside battery of twenty-two, nine inch Dahlgrens. A ten inch smooth bore Dahlgren pivot gun was mounted fore and aft.

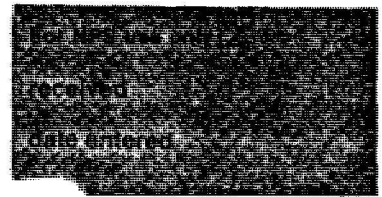
According to the eyewitness account of John Taylor Wood, C.S.A., a lieutenant aboard the CSS Virginia, at midday on March 8, 1864, when the CSS Virginia entered Hampton Roads, the USS Cumberland lay at anchor with other boats suspended from her lower booms and her crew's laundry drying on her rigging. There was no indication that the CSS Virginia was expected. When the CSS Virginia came within 3/4 mile of the USS Cumberland, she was sighted and the crew quickly opened fire with her pivot guns, in unison with those of the USS Congress, which was anchored nearby. The CSS Virginia reserved her fire until within easy range and discharged her forward pivot gun, killing most of the crew of the USS Cumberland's pivot. The ironclad then "steered directly for the USS Cumberland, striking her almost at right angles, under the forerigging on the starboard side...backing clear of her, we went ahead again, heading up river, helm hard-a-starboard, and turned slowly...the Cumberland continued to fight though our ram had opened her side wide enough to drive in a horse and cart."<sup>1</sup>

(See Continuation Sheet #1)



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USS CUMBERLAND [REDACTED] NEWPORT NEWS, VA

Continuation sheet 1

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7. DESCRIPTION -- Detailed Archaeological Analysis

around a projectile or cannon bore. The words "Shot Dial" and the caliper's numbers and calibration mark are preserved legibly on their interior surface, probably because the instrument was deposited in a closed position. A copper rectangular alloy gunlock cover, measuring 6 5/8" x 3 1/2" and 3 inches deep, recovered from [REDACTED] is inscribed "USNY 30" whereas a larger, triangular cover of similar composition and measuring 1 foot on one side and 6 inches on the other sides and 3 1/2 inches deep is inscribed "USNY, 1856 Ord. Dept. J.A.D. 32."

A small, oval fragment of thin, corrugated brass, believed to be part of an epaulet, and a piece of mirror glass set in a 7 1/2" x 6" wooden frame, are the only personal items found aboard [REDACTED] during the 1981 survey. Several sherds of white ironstone plates were found at the site including one base marked with the name and trademark of its manufacturer, John Alcock, who operated a pottery factory in Staffordshire, England, between 1853 and 1861.

A massive copper alloy ship's bell, measuring 1 foot 6 inches in height and having a maximum base diameter of 19 inches, was found at [REDACTED]. The exterior surface of the bell was marked during casting by twelve raised rings.

The presence of the ca. 1856 copper alloy lock cover, the Alcock plate fragment, and the Civil War period military items suggest that artifacts recovered during the 1981 survey were derived from the wreckage of [REDACTED] and do not represent subsequent intrusion. The preponderance of federal origin, military related artifacts, such as the cutlass hilt, copper alloy lock covers, fuses, bullets, sabot, and calipers, strongly suggest that [REDACTED] is a vessel of the U.S. Navy. Because the wreck lies in the area where the USS Cumberland is known to have been sunk, it has been tentatively identified as such.

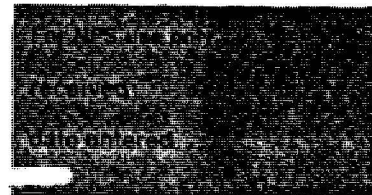
8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Historical Background

Lt. George U. Morris, temporary commander of the USS Cumberland, later wrote that "at thirty minutes past three the water had gained upon us, notwithstanding the pumps were kept actively employed."<sup>2</sup> Rising water inundated the forward powder magazine and the USS Cumberland's men were forced to rely upon its counterpart aft. By 3:35 PM, "the water had risen to the main hatchway, and the ship canted to port...we delivered a parting fire--each man trying to save himself by jumping overboard."<sup>3</sup> All ambulatory wounded men were ordered out of the cockpit but, according to Morris, "those wounded who had been carried into the sickbay and on the berth-deck, were so mangled that it was impossible to save them...I should judge we have lost upwards of one hundred men."<sup>4</sup>

A.B. Smith, the USS Cumberland's pilot, wrote that the CSS Virginia left her ram in the side of the USS Cumberland. "After about three quarters of an hour of the most severe fighting, our vessel sank, the stars and stripes still waving. That flag was finally submerged, but after the hull grounded on the sands, 54 feet below...our pennant was still flying from the topmast above the waves." The CSS Virginia's Lt. John Wood noted that the USS Cumberland "went down with a roar, the colors still flying. No ship was ever fought more gallantly."<sup>5</sup>

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USS CUMBERLAND. [REDACTED] NEWPORT NEWS, VA



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8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Historical Background

R.E. Colton, a Confederate Brigadier General, watched the confrontation between the CSS Virginia and the U.S. ships Cumberland and Congress from Ragged Island, directly across the James River in Isle of Wight County. He wrote that the CSS Virginia made "straight for the Cumberland, at which she made a dash, firing her bow guns as she struck the doomed vessel with her prow. I could hardly believe my senses when I saw the masts of the Cumberland begin to sway wildly. After one or two lurches her hull disappeared beneath the water, guns firing to the last moment...the Union flag still floated defiantly from the masts, which projected obliquely...after the vessel had settled unevenly upon the river bottom."<sup>6</sup> At the time the USS Cumberland sank, she was fully manned and ready for sea, with orders for Vera Cruz.

George Benjamin West, a Newport News native who lived near the town's piers immediately after the Civil War, wrote in his journal that the federal government "tried to raise her (the Cumberland) although she was sunk in a very deep hole in the channel...I understand she was raised to near the surface between boats; then the beams holding her broke, and she went down again."<sup>7</sup> According to the April 2, 1864 issue of Harper's Weekly "all efforts to raise the five vessels sunk at Norfolk and vicinity have ceased, rumor says, not to be resumed again. The Cumberland, which was struck by the Virginia, cannot be raised under any circumstances."

George B. West's account states that after the war, a German diver named Captain William West and a Detroit, Michigan salvage company, successively purchased salvage rights to the USS Cumberland, probably in an effort "to secure the \$40,000 in gold said to be in an iron chest in the paymaster's stateroom."<sup>8</sup> An article in the May 30, 1876 edition of the Norfolk Virginian refers to the work of the German diver aboard the CSS Virginia, indicating his presence in the Newport News area at that time.

George B. West, in his account, wrote that he had visited the wreck of the USS Cumberland in the company of the salvagers and that it lay near [REDACTED], a structure replaced after its destruction in an 1897 fire and now known as [REDACTED]. Its location corresponds to that shown on C.H. Worrett's "Sheet #1, Military Reconnaissance, Dept. of Virginia, 1864," as the wreck of the USS Cumberland.

<sup>1</sup>C.C. Buel and R.N. Johnson, eds. Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, 4 vols. (New York: Castle Books and Thomas Yoseloff, Inc., 1956), vol. 1: From Sumter to Shiloh, p. 696.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 700.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 701.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 698.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 696.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 712.

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USS CUMBERLAND [REDACTED] NEWPORT NEWS, VA

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Continuation sheet #3

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

West, George Benjamin. When the Yankees Came: Civil War and Reconstruction on the Virginia Peninsula. Edited by Parke Rouse. Richmond: Dietz Press, 1977.  
Worrett, C.H. "Military Reconnaissance, Department of Virginia," 1864.

8. SIGNIFICANCE -- Footnotes

<sup>7</sup>George Benjamin West, When the Yankees Came: Civil War and Reconstruction on the Virginia Peninsula, ed. Parke Rouse (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1977), p. 153.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 154.