

Unburying Treasures: Cartographer Finds Hidden Treasure

How maps help save sunken ships

Dr. E. Lee Spence, a marine archaeologist and modern pioneer of underwater exploration, has had a lifetime fascination with treasures and maps. He describes his maps as the "natural byproduct" of his research to locate sunken ships.

By John Christopher Fine

In 1970, Spence discovered the submarine H. L. Hunley, which sank on 17 February 1864. His maps proved to be more than a natural byproduct. They were a necessary tool for preserving his discovery before souvenir hunters could destroy it.

"I read Treasure Island and was fascinated by its tale of pirates and buried treasure. I started burying coins for others to find, imagining the thrill it would give the finders," Spence says.

His propensity for hiding coins continues to this day: "When we break a cup or plate, we don't throw it out. We bury the pieces outside. Someday someone is going to dig them up."

Spence started drawing maps when he was young. "Not long ago, I went looking for a jar of silver coins that I buried in the dirt floor of our family carport when I was a child and we were living in Georgia. It was money saved from my paper route."

"I still had the map I had drawn showing where I buried those coins, but I still couldn't find them. The house was gone, the carport was gone. All of the locators or signposts I had recorded on my 'treasure map' were long gone," he recalls.

While Spence's paper route money disappeared with the landscape, that was not the case with silver dimes and quarters he had secreted under the corner of his family's home on Sullivan's Island, South Carolina, when he was a teenager.

Decades later, he took his son Matthew to look for them. Using a metal detector, Matthew, then just 10 years old, quickly found his father's buried trove of coins.

still buys antique maps but now pays thousands of dollars for them.

MAPMAKING AS ART

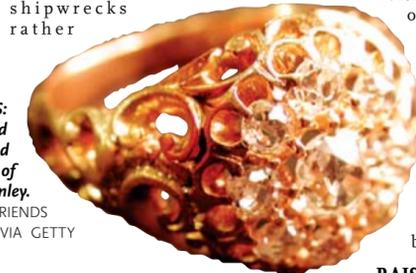
Spence pursued mapmaking studies and eventually a career in finding shipwrecks. However, when he went to college, there were no programmes in underwater archaeology.

"Because I figured I would need mapping skills, I started out in civil engineering. I later took a number of cartography courses, including one in interpretation of aerial photography and another in computer mapping," he says.

Spence says that he loves drawing maps and explains how maps can influence people's perception: "On a flat map of North America, Greenland is gigantic in comparison to the way the same island appears on a globe. Depending on who is drawing a map, it might be used to twist realities and effect political or other goals."

"In the old, days maps were used to convince people to explore and settle the interior of our country. Look at a highway map versus a map made for commercial interests. They can be vastly different."

Spence got inspiration from shipwreck charts in the National Geographic Magazine. Some of his maps show how to get to specific shipwrecks that he has found, while others are based largely on the historical records of shipwrecks rather



(Right) PRECIOUS: A gold and diamond ring found in the wreckage of the submarine Hunley. COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF THE HUNLEY VIA GETTY IMAGES



(Left) TREASURE: A leather wallet recovered from the wreckage of the submarine Hunley. COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF THE HUNLEY VIA GETTY IMAGES

burying treasures and drawing maps, Spence also started collecting maps in his youth. "I could buy antique maps for 25 cents. That was half my weekly allowance," he says.

When Spence went off to college, he went to the National Archives. He found out that the Government Printing Office was still selling 19th century maps for their original-issue price, as long as the Printing Office still had them in its inventory. The original prices used to be 50 cents or a dollar.

"I bought many navigational charts from the 1800s. The most expensive one was US\$2.50 (S\$3.18)," Spence remembers.

Spence sits in his treasure-filled office outside Columbia, South Carolina. A bank building with a 3-foot (approximately 1-metre) thick vault door serves as his repository for many of the shipwreck coins and valuable artefacts he has discovered under the oceans of the world. He

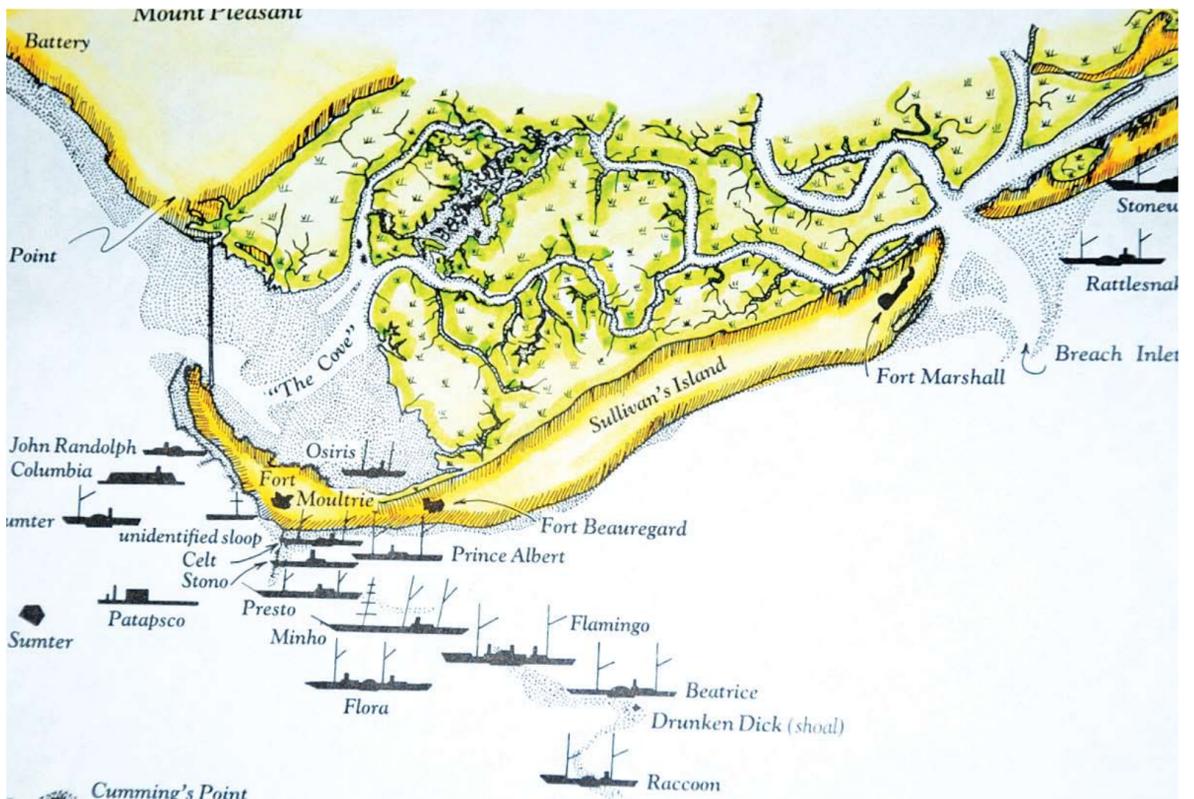
than on fieldwork. Some maps deal with a special period like the Civil War. Others cover hundreds of wrecks spanning hundreds of years.

"Maps I draw for publication are usually decorative and meant for people to hang on a wall," he says.

Some of Spence's most extraordinary maps are those that he hand-colours using techniques that map makers of old used before colour printing. "I use water colours in the antique style. I sell those as limited editions," he says.

One of Spence's most popular maps has sold over 30,000 copies. It is a chart of Civil War shipwrecks near Charleston. "For each wreck on my map Shipwrecks of the Civil War, I used a small, very simple sketch showing the type of ship to represent its location."

With his books and charts, Spence mainly wants to share his knowledge. "People buying my Civil War shipwreck maps are not just



HANDCOLOURED: A close-up of Spence's map "Shipwrecks of the Civil War" shows simple sketches that indicate the type of ship and its location. COURTESY OF MYRIAM MORAN

buying my art. Most of them like my maps for the history they portray. The inclusion of shipwrecks, with their lure of sunken treasure, is usually a large part of their appeal," he explains.

Spence's charts titled Shipwrecks of Hilton Head and Vicinity and Shipwrecks of Wreck Valley: New York and New Jersey are majestically framed and include bits of artifacts he has recovered from specific shipwrecks. His charts are not only collector's pieces but are also coveted by museums.

RAISING A SUNKEN SUBMARINE

Spence was the first person to discover the Confederate submarine H. L. Hunley. The little submarine attacked and sank the Housatonic, a U.S. steam sloop of war, on 17 February 1864.

After the attack, the Hunley and its crew of nine men disappeared without a trace until Spence found the wreck 106 years later. The Hunley was the first submarine to sink an enemy ship in the history of the world.

The day Spence found the wreck, it was almost entirely buried. He could still view a narrow portion of the upper hull. Fortunately, it was enough to identify it. Lee went swimming to the surface, literally screaming underwater: "I have found the Hunley! I have found the Hunley!"

Spence carefully plotted the location of his discovery and shared his maps with various government officials to seek permission for digging up and raising the submarine.

A map, which Spence published well before anyone else had gone to the site, is proof of his discovery. An "X" is at the exact position where the Hunley was eventually raised.

"Just like on the old pirate maps, I used an 'X' to mark my spot and sent copies to the government and even included it in my 1995 book,"

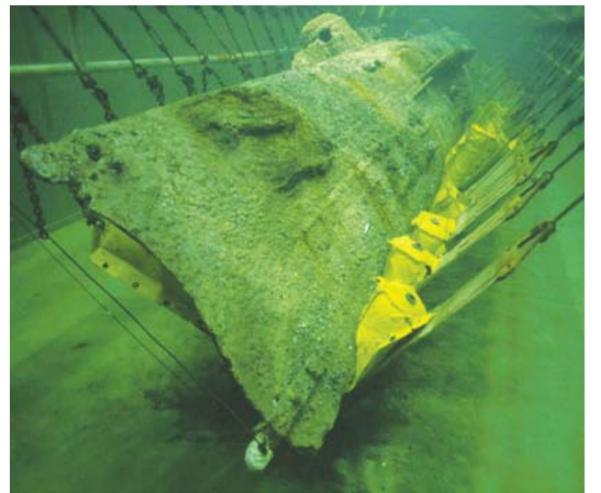
Spence says.

A wreck is only eligible for the National Register for Historic Places if its actual location is known, so Spence's maps turned out to be crucial in preserving the Hunley.

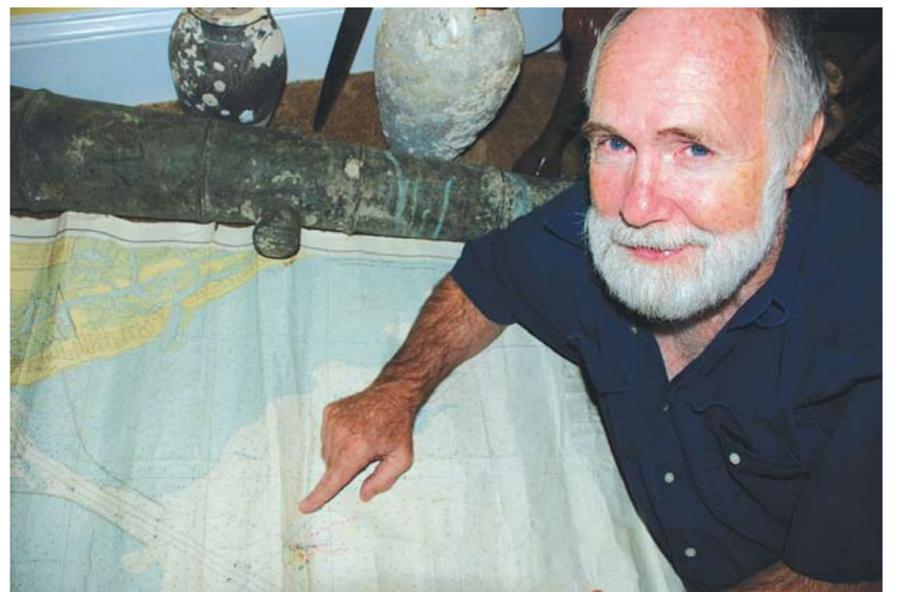
In 1976, based on Spence's mapped location, the National Park Service nominated the Hunley to be placed on the Register for Historic Places, and it was placed on the Register in 1978.

The entire wreck was eventually excavated and raised in 2000. The remains of the crew were removed and buried with military honours.

Named for General Robert E. Lee, a distant relative, E. Lee Spence has family roots as far back as American history can be traced. Spence is a Southern gentleman who has become a legend in his own time.



PRESERVED: The submarine Hunley lies in a preservation tank. After sinking an enemy ship during the Civil War, the Hunley and its crew disappeared. The wreckage was raised in 2000. The crew's remains were given a funeral in Charleston, South Carolina, on 17 April 2004. COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF THE HUNLEY VIA GETTY IMAGES



SPOT OF COMBAT: Spence points to the "X" on his early chart where he marked the spot of his discovery of the Confederate submarine H. L. Hunley in 1970. The Hunley was the first submarine to sink a ship in combat. It was named to the National Register for Historic Places in 1976 based on Spence's discovery and research. COURTESY OF MYRIAM MORAN

Integrity and Virtue Help to Keep the Peace



During the Xijin Dynasty (265-316 A.D.), there was a general named Yang Gu who was known for his great integrity, such that it won him the favour of the people of his rival State, Dongwu. If he had to engage in battle with Dongwu, General

Yang Gu would decide on a date with Dongwu, and never betray that date, nor mount a surprise attack. If any of his assistants tried to provide tricky battle plans, he always treated them with very tasty wine, and made them too drunk to bring up their trickery.

If General Yang Gu's army harvested grain inside Dongwu's boundaries, they recorded the amount of grain harvested, and later sent an equal value of silk and

cotton fabric to pay it back. When Yang Gu and his army were hunting in the area of Changjiang or Gaishui Rivers, they never crossed over the border. If Yang Gu saw injured game escaping from Dongwu's hunters to Jin's land, he would order his soldiers to send the game back. Such acts helped General Yang Gu win the respect of the Dongwu folk who lived near the borders.

General Yang Gu's counterpart was Lu Kang from Dongwu. They

often sent ambassadors to each other. Whenever Lu Kang sent wine to Yang Gu, he would drink it immediately, without any hesitation. If Lu Kang was sick, Yang Gu would send some herbal tea over, and Lu Kang would drink it immediately without hesitation. Lu Kang's servant tried to stop him, but he said, "He did not mistrust my wine, why should I doubt his herbal tea?"

Lu Kang often taught his soldiers, "If others are always doing

good deeds, but we always do bad deeds, that would be the same as disintegrating our army before going to the battlefield."

An official named Sun Hao of Dongwu State heard that Lu Kang was maintaining a good relationship with Yang Gu, and sent someone over to criticise Lu Kang. Lu Kang replied, "Even interactions among individuals should be based on integrity, let alone between States!" The Xijin and Dongwu armies each

watched their own boundaries and maintained a peaceful relationship. -Clearwisdom.net

Story from Zizhitongjian—"The Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government," compiled by Sima Guang between the years 1067 and 1084 during the Song Dynasty, and first printed at Hangzhou City in 1086. The whole work comprises 294 chapters, and it covers the period from 403 BC to 959 AD.