

MUSINGS AND RECOLLECTIONS OF AN OLD RELIC HUNTER



By Billy Spedale

Forward

Billy Spedale began hunting the Port Hudson Battlefield as a kid, picking up curiosities and sticking them in his pocket. Back then, strange and wonderful things were found and no one knew what they were. Curious threaded things that lay everywhere were later found to be fuses, little lead balls with lines around them were later identified as "caseshot" from 12 pound Borman shells. There were no reference books, no national relic magazines just farmers who cussed because the cannon balls and shell fragments damaged their plows. Billy soon met farmers who had buckets of minie balls they picked up in the fields and were melting them to make fishing weights! One farmer he met told him about his well. He had thrown all the cannonballs and shells he found in his fields down the well just to get rid of the nuisance they caused. Then there is the "shoebuckle" Billy found one day, only to learn later it was a C.S. Fork tongued buckle. Remember, Billy was hunting when memories of the Civil War had faded and before there was any real interest in digging for Civil war Relics. One day he and a friend pooled their money and bought a Metrotech metal detector and began finding even more relics. You have to appreciate how common relics were back then because a Metrotech could barely penetrate the surface. One detector led to even better detectors and the finds piled up: Rifle barrels, rusted pistols, swords, C.S. and U.S. belt plates, thousands of Union and Confederate buttons and artillery shells by the hundreds. Soon, Billy was being called "The Sultan of Port Hudson". He not only knew where the relics were but where every unit that fought there was positioned. He dug into records, read books and then began writing and publishing his own books about the battle and his finds. I could go on but, then I would be giving away the stories that await our readers; the adventures of my dear friend, Billy Spedale.

Richard Angelico

GENESIS

The most often question I am asked by visitors viewing my private collection or when I give talks, is how did I get started in this hobby, and which item I prize the most--what item do I like best? The most valuable? I usually reply that I was just born with this malady. Hell, I don't know, it was just destiny! I was just born with an innate love for anything of antiquity. Its in my genes. As stated in the Bible: "*Before Moses was, I am!*" That's me. (just ask any of the young students in my classroom lectures *if I was in the Civil War*, which at least one kid would invariably ask me). Although the Civil War is my primary interest, I am also interested in many other categories, such as Indian artifacts--because they are found mostly by accident and no need of a metal detector. I found my first arrowhead when I was attending a Boy Scout meeting. I also harbor an interest in aviation and militaria in general. History is my forte. Now, then, I'm asked what is my favorite item? Like most relic hunters, I am partial to my buckle collection, viz, waist buckles, eagle breast plates, U.S. and C.S. buckles. Because buckles were *personal*. And which of those do I like best and THE MOST VALUABLE? And how much is it worth? To me it's like asking which of my three daughters I love the most . After putting that question to rest, I generally



acknowledge that that my most treasured RELIC is my Louisiana Pelican buckle. I'll discuss how I obtained it later.

When I was in elementary school, during WW II, I had come into possession of an old cannon projectile, which years later, I would identify as a 20-pounder Parrott shell, which would haunt me forever. I can't recall where it came from, I just remember seeing my brothers and friends playing with it, tossing it around the yard like a shot-put. It was then that I conceived the bright idea of contributing this shell to the scrap iron drive. Being wartime, every school had a WW II "Scrap Drive" in progress to support the war effort. The kids would bring old pieces of metal objects to toss on a rising pyramid in the school yard. Some even contributed old automobile bodies. My naïve rationale at the time was that, "here is a cannon shell already made--that could be fired as is." It wouldn't be until many years later, after I had gotten into serious Civil War collecting, that I REALIZED WHAT I HAD DONE! I had contributed to the war drive a *loaded* 20-pounder Parrott shell! I definitely recalled seeing the white fuse in the nose. This realization caused me untold nights of sleepless grief as I conjured up all kinds of visions of tragic repercussions that could have resulted from my over zealous patriotic generosity. I could just visualize the smelting plant blowing up...destroying and killing workers and the cry *SABOTEURS!* It was not a very comfortable feeling to realize that, instead of helping our country, that I actually prolonged the war!



How I Became A Closet Case Relic Collector

Once upon a time, when I was just a kid during WW II, I was walking down the street, dressed in the typical attire of a young kid--short pants, bare feet, no shirt. Not too different from the days of Tom Sawyer. When I passed the neighborhood corner grocery store I did a sudden double take at the big display window. I paused blinking widely at this weird, fascinating looking object standing on an opened newspaper. It was a tall, cylindrical thing with a slightly pointed top. It was coated in a heavy rusty orange encrustation with pieces of rust colored dirt spread around the paper. What the hell was it, I wondered. My enquiries were met with a startling revelation. I was told that it was a Civil War Bomb Shell! And when I was told it was plowed up near by I was immediately captivated. War in this area? Wars were going on in Europe and in the Pacific Islands, as depicted in the Paramount News Reels in theaters everywhere. I recalled seeing the bombing attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. But the only wars that took place in our country was back during the American Revolution and Indian uprisings . But not here, in my hometown, my back yard! Incredible! I would stand for hours, staring intently, in deep thought, pondering the mystery shrouding this object. I was just dazzled, intrigued. Then one day not long after discovering it, it was gone! But since I always roamed the neighborhood, I was taking a short cut home, passing behind the same grocery store when Lo and Behold! I beheld the big rusty bomb laying in a tall trash pile of old wooden and cardboard boxes! Facing imminent danger of being hauled off to the dump, I did the only thing any sensible 10-year old little boy would do when confronted with similar circumstances: Seizing the moment, I rescued it! I could barely lift it up. I would later learn that it was a Union 30-Pounder parrott shell, but I didn't care what it was called. I wanted it! Had to have it. It was destined from the beginning of time to be mine! So I huffed it all the way to my home two blocks away. Now here's where The Civil War and WW II cross paths. During WW II my father was designated an Air Raid Warden for his area. His duties consisted of patrolling the neighborhood during practice "black outs." Sirens would go off alerting everyone to shut off all their lights. My father would walk the neighborhood wearing his white steel helmet, packing a gas mask bag and wearing a Civil Defense logo arm band. Now he took his job very seriously, you understand. When someone put a bug in his ear that Billy Boy was in possession of a live bomb, he acted promptly. He seized the big rusty bomb and ordered all of us kids, standing around witnessing this drama unfold, to lay down! He lifted the bomb high and "chunked it" into a huge sewage ditch nearby. I watched in horror as my cherished bomb slowly vanished into the soft ooze. I was mortified. But I was not to be outdone. During the night I stealthily trudged into the muddy quagmire and retrieved my forlorn shell. But I had to keep it a secret. I hid it under the house where it remained for years. I would crawl under for visitations. Later on, as time

passed, I joined the Air Force for four years. When discharged I boldly crawled under the house and brazenly pulled the shell out. By this time I was an adult and the old man couldn't care less. This was the dawning of my Civil War hobby.



TREASURE TROVE EXTRODINAIRE

When Port Hudson entered my world it marked the beginning of my life as an avid student of the Civil War and a diehard relic collector. I lived in St. Louis, Missouri during my sophomore and freshman years of high school. While there I happened to run across the complete set of Battles and Leaders of the Civil War in the library, which would become the basis and backbone of my collecting career. One of the volumes contained the complete history of the Siege of Port Hudson, La., complete with a detailed battlefield map drawn up by U.S. Gen. N.P. Banks' engineers, which detailed the breastworks, artillery positions and pertinent landmarks, all skillfully superimposed over contemporary layout of the town and surrounding area. It was so detailed that it looked like anyone could use it today as a guide. I made a good copy of it with plans to go reconnoiter the area when I returned to Baton Rouge.

Port Hudson was just a 45 minute drive north of Baton Rouge. I was deeply impressed by the history of the 1863 siege. Eventually, over the following years, I would research, walk and study the entire battlefield and environs. And I got to personally know all the old inhabitants, white and black.

I had the run of the entire place all by myself--for a while anyway. Soon I met a veteran hunter named "Cotton" McCallum who lived right in the middle of the Battlefield. Strangely, of all the folks living in the entire area, he was the only one who collected Civil War relics and he took full advantage of it. He amassed one of the largest collections in the nation (and his son Ronnie would follow in his footsteps). Back then, there were no irresponsible "diggers." The few who pursued the hobby were people of integrity, respectful to the wishes of the landowners.

My first incursions into the wilds of the battlefield consisted of several camping expeditions during my senior high school days. Being six young boys without cars made it imperative that we have a chauffeur drop us off and pick us up a few days later, a job usually handled by someone's brother. We camped along the old bluff line overlooking the tree tops in the vast basin where the Mississippi flowed during the war, where Admiral Farragut's entire naval fleet was almost destroyed. Only two of his ships out of eight actually made the passage past the big guns lining the 80-ft. bluffs. We set up pretty good campsites being city kids. None of the local residents seemed to mind, as long as we didn't cause any harm, didn't break any fences or leave any gates open.

In addition to shooting thousands of rounds of .22 bullets, we roamed the woods, deep ravines and gullies and plowed fields. This was before advent of metal detectors--strictly---"eyeballing." We did quite well. Pickings were plentiful back then. In the evenings when we cooked our meals, we'd display our finds. The sound of "PLUMP!" would indicate another shell was dropped on the ground.

Port Hudson seemed to be a veritable treasure trove of Civil War relics--one that would seemingly last forever. I developed a keen eye for discerning partially exposed items. Like the time I spotted about six inches of a bayonet protruding about 10 inches from the top of the bluff line, across about a 10-foot gap from where I stood. I let my good partner, Harry Barber have it.

I had the nose for sniffing out good dump sites. Tell-tale signs were broken



glass, shards of crockery and bricks. I dug carefully with a small hatchet, never cutting anything. I found many bullets and buttons--and some buckles (belt & eagle and cartridge plates), And some nice bottles; medicine, large and small blacks, large green champagnes, plenty "Kick Up" bottoms (aka "cheat bumps."), plenty ink wells; blues and greens with pontils. This was just the beginnings. Much more to follow.

Port Hudson - The Debut of the Metal Detector

Sometime back in the late 1950s, I was asked to take Jim Mitchell of Atlanta, to one of my "hot spots" at Port Hudson. I had never met him before, but he had brought a Metrotec metal detector--something unheard of before. None of my hunting buddies owned a detector, including myself. So, this promised to be an exciting hunt; a chance to see for myself how this magical instrument worked. Before this time, hunters relied on the archaic bulky, heavy military surplus mine detector. I was only too happy to oblige Mr. Mitchell. I led him to one of my lucrative places along the edge of the river bluffs--where the old town docks and wharfs and railroad terminus once stood, before the river receded leaving the town high and dry. Actually, this phenomenon was culminating during the siege. And it was on this site where the Confederate garrison was drawn up for the final formation, stacking arms in the surrender ceremony, July 9, 1863. It was an easy place to swing a detector. The grass was always closely manicured by grazing cattle. There were remains of the massive earthen mounds, fortifications which shielded the heavy cannons as they fired on the advancing Union armada.

The area was dotted with many cedar trees and the brick foundations of the old town. There was a well preserved round brick collar protruding from a deep, brick-walled cistern, although dry. There is a story associated with this well--reserved for a later time. It didn't take very long for the Metrotec to show off its magical prowess. Mr. Mitchell did the scoping and I did the digging, and Minie balls began surfacing as fast as I could dig them. Then eagle breast plates and U.S. buckles and cartridge plates began to surface. I dug frantically, as fast as I could, setting world-breaking records for digging the most minie balls! "Pass over there!" I would point, and sure enough the earth yielded more bullets and an occasional buckle. Even now, after the passage of over some 50 years, I still get excited thinking of it. It was an epic event--but traumatic! We continued from sun up to sun down. Our pockets were bulging.

There would never be other days as productive as this one. But one thing for sure: I had to have one of these miracle finders. Eye-balling and usage of crossed sticks were methods of the past. Do you know what that generous guy gave me for; a) leading him there, and b) for doing all the digging? I got EIGHT COTTON PICKING MINIE BALLS! That was all. But you know, although it wasn't fair, I felt contented and lucky to have witnessed this fantastic machine in action. I couldn't ask him where he purchased his detector. It was obvious he was determined to keep it a secret--he had the name and address of the manufacturer covered with tape! However, he made one big mistake by not covering the dealer's logo on top of the coil... Viola! It was just a matter of days before I went into partnership with three friends and bought our own.



As a result, my digging went into O.T and my collection began expanding. I would never be the same again. I had lost my relic hunting virginity for sure. I would become a virtual slave to the hobby.

THE PAPAL VISIT

Off and on, during our relic hunting years, we heard a lot of tales about a seemingly mythical character named Tom Dickey. He was regarded as the Pope of relic hunting, our Founding Father. Everyone, everywhere knew him. No matter where you'd go, he had been there before you. He was legendary. It all began for him in the 1950s, after he had graduated from LSU where he excelled as a track star and who participated in the World Olympics--something which would benefit him in life. Every time we hunted at Port Hudson, when pickings were slim, we'd invariably attribute it to the Grand Reaper of shells, Pope Tom. He must have cleaned the place out. And to think that he earned such an exalted reputation by swinging an antiquated WW II military mine detector! But he was deadly with it. A companion and I once ran across his presence in Fort Desperate--one of the strong points in the Confederate defenses of Port Hudson. This was before the battlefield became a State Park. We didn't actually see him but on closely checking out a blue station wagon parked inside the fortifications, we knew it was his. We quietly examined the vehicle, noting that it appeared heavily laden. Upon seeing the Georgia license plate we knew immediately that it was the Pope-mobile! And we surmised the cause of the weighted appearance must surely have been due to the excess strain on the springs. It HAD TO BE OWEIGHTED WITH ARTILLERY SHELLS ! On another Port Hudson hunt, Tom and a companion were arrested and hauled off, all muddy, to jail. They had just discovered a cache of unfired Ketchum grenades. I remember there appeared an article in TIME Magazine regarding Dickey's hobby of hunting Civil War artillery shells, in which I recall one of his wise tips for a successful hunt which stated, that if a farmer refuses you permission to hunt his property, then go around and come in through the back! But If he allowed you entry, then you knew the place had probably been already hunted out, forget it. I couldn't believe he got away with that one! Making Tom's acquaintance was one of the high points of my life. He was a gentleman and scholar.. I loved his classic Southern accent. I had the honor of hunting with him, touring Atlanta with him, drinking with him. He introduced me to Beverly Debois of Atlanta who allowed me to peruse his awesome collection. On one of our hunts to Port Hudson, Tom whose middle name was--SWIFT-- manifested itself. The hunt was composed of several other of my friends one of whom was a gentleman of the Cloth, a Catholic priest named Father Clem.

When we suddenly broke out into an open field, we realized that we had gone a fence too far and that we were being chased down by an irate land owner. The oncoming truck was bearing down on us, its chrome grill and bumper flashing ominously in the bright sunlight. We all skedaddled, running in every direction for the woods. We wouldn't realize the extent of our miscalculated intrusion for over an hour or so later, when one by one our party trickled back to



Billy and "Pope" Tom Dickey

our vehicles, all torn up and exhausted. And when all were present and accounted for, we learned that the reverend Clem had led the pack! Even surpassing the famed Olympian Track Star Tom Swift Dickey!

The following morning, being Sunday, at Mass I noticed that the face of the officiating priest was severely covered with scratches, like he'd been in a

losing cat fight. But Father Clem looked so pious and angelic... ..From that time on, however, before he accepted an invitation to make another hunt, he'd invariably ask: "This place we're going to, is it....er...is it..a.." And I'd interrupt: "Yes, Father, it's safe."

Moral of story: always get permission from land owner. And learn the correct property boundaries.



Father Clem inspecting a Schenkl Shell

Early Strikes - - the Mother Load!

I began my early days of relic hunting when I formed a partnership with four other Baton Rouge Civil War buffs, Bill Moore, Harry Barber, Dave Hovey, and Bob Reilly. We split the cost of a Metrotec metal detector, the first one bought by a Baton Rougean. Looking back to those days, Dave Hovey and I did the most digging together. Dave, being the senior partner, in his early 70s, had it made. I furnished the transportation, and I did all the digging and hauling. He did the scoping.



We did wonders together! We found a ton of shells! The only flaw in our arrangement was the fact that he lived so far from my house in the heart of town. This was before the advent of the Interstate system. Because it took about 45 minutes to reach Port Hudson, we wanted an early start. So I had to leave early in the morning, about 6 am to make it all worthwhile. And when I'd pull up in his driveway, he would invariably emerge from the kitchen door, drinking a cup of coffee, barefooted, wiggling his toes to greet me. Heck, I wanted him to be fully attired in battlefield dress, ready to hit the road. Every time I saw him so casually standing on his porch, as if we had all the time in the world to get going, I would

always groan thinking of all the more sleep I could have gotten. And his wife would casually remind me that Dave kept his glycerin tablets in the little pouch on his belt, to remember one tablet under his tongue. What a perfect send off! Fortunately, I never had to perform that errand of mercy.

Because I helped Mr. Talmadge Bickham locate a metal property marker, we had permission to hunt what was soon to be the property of the Georgia Pacific Paper Mill Company, which comprised the entire southern end of the Confederate lines which anchored on the Mississippi River. The breastworks were in magnificent condition, massive! We began our search where the Citadel once stood but had long since fallen into the river. Prowling around in such enormous trenches and earthen walls was such an awesome experience. In some parts there were double walls.



Visualizing where the incoming artillery projectiles would impact, we decided to hunt the front side of the large slope behind the Confederate breastworks for the overshots. Our speculation began paying off immediately. The impact area was clear of brush with just a few trees, making for easy hunting on the grassy rising. We began unearthing various sizes of Parrot shells--20-pounders, 30-pounders, both solid bolts and explosives. We dug a couple Flat-top 30-pounder solid Parrot bolts. The ground just seemed light up with readings, mainly because we were the first to use Metrotecs, and because they were just

under the surface. The weather was sultry and hot, and I began to wonder about Dave's heart pills. Then it began to drizzle which soon resulted in a heavy down-pour. Although we were soaking wet, it cooled us off and we never slowed down. I was covered in rust, my white t-shirt was soaking wet with an orange stain. And then it became time, the moment of truth, time to begin hauling out our load of iron missiles.

Luckily for us, I had the forethought to bring along an army surplus B-4 bag, long and deep. It was ideal for hauling such a load. Of course, I had to lug it out. I dug it out by the strap handle. I would drag it out a little at a time, and rest a while, until we reached my car. We would return to the same place and continue to dig shells. On our second expedition, we dug a 10-inch cannon ball from the base of the breastworks, which required a bit of engineering ingenuity to unearth it. Since it was our first-born big shell, I let Dave have it. I would get the next one. Fast forward, in memory of the deceased members of the 'The FIVE METROTECTORS', only Harry and I are still around. Bill, Dave, and Bob have "joined the ages." I will endeavor to continue recollecting some of the incidents and anecdotes from our past.

Bees “Banks”

It was such beautiful spring weather, the sun was shining brightly, and the air was cool and crisp and dry--the kind that makes one feel great and happy just to be alive.. My good friend, Charlie Hinton, and I were chomping at the bit to get going on a relic hunt. We were so excited that we got off to an early start. We selected an area east of the Port Hudson battlefield, about a mile and a half directly across from the center of the Confederate breastworks. It was an area that was crawling with Union troops from the new England states, where they would assemble for assaults, and where the ammunition dumps, field kitchens and field hospitals were scattered about the woods and ravines and pastures.. An area close enough for an occasional round from a Rebel cannon could drop a wake-up shell, and from where a Yankee artilleryist could respond in kind. By lobbing a few rounds into the Rebel bastion.

After having, received the all-clear from the land owner of a small trailer park to park and hunt on his land, we drove through two gates and parked near the edge of a heavy forest, which was comprised of high, steep ridges and deep ravines. We began searching in earnest at the location where Union Gen. Nathaniel Banks had set up headquarters in the comfortable home of the William Griffith family---residents of The Griffith Plantation. Nothing remained of the big house except for a scattering of bricks and the small quaint family cemetery in back along the edge of the flat plateau which descended downward to Foster Creek. I was always fascinated by this little cemetery, where the focal point was the burial plot of the Griffith family which was enclosed in an ornately designed cast iron fence. A brass plate attached to the gate stated simply “WILLIAM GRIFFITH,” Master of the plantation. The center piece was the two tall granite grave markers marking the graves of the Master and Mistress of the plantation. On the periphery of the home site I dug a 24-pounder solid ball and a 12-pounder Confederate Reed type projectile with pointed nose, two bands and retaining its thick bronze base sabot. Great finds! But a curse to having to haul them around with you. But a curse we gladly condoned.

When we started out this morning, because of the chilly weather, I was wearing an army fatigue jacket. But about noon it began to warm up considerably. Fortunately, I kept it on, for it would do more than just keeping me warm. We took a noon water break. I stretched out on a gentle rise of turf, relaxing. As I lay there imbibing my cool water I noticed a thousand bees swarming around the top of a nearby tall dead tree, I watched in fascination, trying to guess how much honey there must be stashed inside that rotten hulk. Satiated and rested, I loaded up my back pack, canteen and shovel to begin the final last-ditch effort to locate the fabled camp site loaded with buckles. I did dig a fired Minie ball, but on leaving the tall bee hive, I uttered my most erudite statement of the year, to wit: “As long as you don’t make any sudden movement,

you can walk right up to them and they'll NEVER harm you!" Right on, great entomologist of killer bee knowledge. No sooner had I dug that Minie ball, when one of the bees dove down on me. A scout, no doubt. It circled my head a couple times--nothing unusual about a bug circling your head, that's what they do. But this drone, probably communicating with the Queen Bee, hidden in the dark recesses of the old tree, received final instruction to go for it. The scout bee then increased the tempo and decibels of his buzzer. Which indicated to me that this bug had a bad attitude. Then there appeared more Kamikazes diving, and swishing TORA! TORA! TORA! At this very moment I casted aside my detector and went bananas. I jettisoned my heavy back pack, dropped the shovel and canteen in a futile fight of flight and survival. I figured that if I could run through the thorny thickets (actually black berry bushes) and branches and vines, that, maybe I could brush the swarming bees away. I always thought I could outrun a flimsy damn bee....wrong! Wrong! The attack went on unabated, until Charlie appeared on the scene. He had heard all the commotion and was tracking what he described as "a large animal bearing down on him, intermittently screaming, punctuated with colorful obscenities."

When we met I was all exhausted and out of breath. The only thing I could whisper was "get them off!" He bravely brushed off literally balls of them, in clusters. And then I spotted one aggressive little bee on Charlie's chest



feverishly working his stinger. All I could do was to point at it and Charlie went nuts pounding his chest so furiously that I thought his chest would cave in. Fortunately for me, that I had on the heavy fatigue jacket and gloves, which warded off the full brunt of the attack. Most of my hits were taken on the back of my neck. My neck bristled with black stingers. It took Charlie about 20 minutes to pull out all of them.

But why, what had provoked them, we mused all the way back home. Was it because I was scoping without the use of the headset, relying on the audio speaker to emit audible and more enhanced signals. And I was amazed, that with all the stings I got, I had experienced no adverse effect.

“It had to be a case of Banks’ revenge,” I murmured.

This hunt reflected the imprint of the WW II battles, of Pearl Harbor attack and The Battle of Midway. Comparable to the Kamikaze suicide attacks, with the same outcome as Banks’ killer bees today. The queen bee lost about 30 to 40 of her best pilots (drones). For every stinger lost, a bee died.

THE HOLY GRAIL

The defining moment in my relic hunting career came rather late, almost in the waning days of my hobby. I was trying to wrap up a few items remaining for the completion of my book, entitled *Where Bugles Called and Rifles Gleamed*, my spin on the Battle of Port Hudson, La., in which I blended some of the most significant artifacts recovered from the battlefield with its connection to the battle, along with a commentary on the history of the siege of Port Hudson. And I needed just a few more pictures of the Confederate breastworks located on the southern end on what is now the Georgia Pacific Paper Mill property. I brought along my good friend Gary Blocker, principal of Tara High School in Baton Rouge.

So I was loaded down with my detector, sharp-shooter shovel, and my trusty 35mm Pentax. My plan was to shoot my pictures then do a little scoping with my detector. After the photo shoot, I unraveled my earphones and plugged in. I started exactly where I ended taking pictures, along those Confederate breastworks, still standing almost virtually intact as they had stood during the siege. These massive earthworks follow along an elevated ridgeline, comprising the entire length of the Rebel defensive wall on the south side of the old port town.

I had hunted this area extensively when I had permission from the original owners and later, by permission of the paper mill company. Over the years, I dug a vast array of cannon projectiles, from six-pounder to 10-inch balls, lots of various size Parrott missiles, explosive and solid bolts. I even found a few shells in the bottoms of freshly dug holes, abandoned too quickly and left uncovered. I made it a habit of passing over opened holes, and even kicking some dirt back into it, mostly in an effort to assuage the land owner.

Because of its close proximity to the giant 13-inch mortars mounted on the schooners anchored on the river about 3-miles below, the entire southern area of the battlefield, had been liberally sprinkled with tons of 13-inch mortar fragments. For a long time I hauled many loads of these behemoth iron frags to the car. I now wonder how I managed to hold up under such duress--but I was a young pack-mule. I'm glad that I did because shell frags, once so plentiful that we used to leave stock piles of them behind for later trips, are now on the endangered list. When once my back yard was a veritable iron mine, with stockpiles of fragment and shells laying around, I have since given away most of it. But getting back to my picture taking, I had no sooner wrapped up my camera and packed it away and turned on my detector, when I picked up a signal on the side of a washed out section of the breastworks. A large portion of the works had been slashed out by inclement weather, leaving the perfect profile of the trench where the Rebs had hunkered down. In fact, I had to hang tightly on a small sapling in order to be able to scan the profile of the trench. I really didn't have very much confidence of

finding anything, except for, perhaps, a bullet or small frag, because the entire area was pock-marked with fairly recent un-filled holes. It had to be sterile by now, I thought. But swinging with one hand on the small tree and swinging the detector with the other, I received a very faint reading. Not very excited, I began carefully excising a plug of dirt. A white Minie ball plopped out. On checking the hole, I got another similar reading, and out popped another white bullet. On checking the hole again, I received another signal--this time a little louder, which I immediately surmised it be simply a frag. In fact, when I heard my shovel faintly



Billy with the "Holy Grail" (notice the hole in the background)

striking metal, I was convinced it was a frag. But this time when I removed the dirt, out popped a square shaped lightly green-covered object. And then when my eyes zoomed in, focusing on it, I discerned a sun burst pattern, WHAM! I knew immediately that I had hit the lottery! I then (with trembling hands) picked it up and recognized that I was actually seeing the back side of a thinly stamped brass buckle. And then WHAM! It hit me again, that this was a pelican buckle, with

sunrays emanating from the pelican. When I became conscious again, I gave the customary victory Rebel yell. In fact, I did it a couple times or more before my friend Gary, slowly poked his head up from behind the breastwork, staring in wide-eyed wonder at what, he said, that I must have gotten bitten by some gigantic rattle snake, the way I was carrying on! In fact, my wife--40 miles away swears that the lights in our house blinked and the chandelier tinkled, the burglar alarm went off--all at the same, exact time, so she claimed.



I had found the HOLY GRAIL! Probably dropped by an officer of the 30th Louisiana Infantry who manned that section of the Confederate lines. This is what relic hunting is all about. It makes me feel good to know, that someday, this magnificent artifact will be housed in a proper museum for everyone to view a significant piece of our heritage. And yes, I did check that hole again.

REMEMBERING THE LEGACY OF SIDNEY FRUGE

Sidney was a gifted relic hunter who loved his hobby with a passion and excelled at it. His home was in Venice, La. But he owned and maintained a small trailer located on 4-acres of land near the perimeter of the Port Hudson Park, where he and his wife spent much of their leisure time. I'll never forget the first time I met Sid.

I was heading out of the woods near his trailer. In my backpack I was carrying a bag of mixed bullets and two bayonets. I was almost out of the woods when I heard the sound of a small motor scooter, like a 3-wheeler, putt-putting nearby. I paused, listening intently, trying to discern which way it was headed. I was afraid that I might have inadvertently overstepped a property boundary and the owner was coming after me. The sound grew near, so I just waited to confront whomever it was. Then I saw a mini-bike emerge from a pine thicket. As it pulled up to me and stopped, the engine killed and the woods were once again silent. I saw this fairly young man with a beard, who looked very much like Abraham Lincoln. I wondered if I was having an apparition of the old Emancipator himself,-the man who was indirectly responsible for my hobby. "Doing any good?," he asked with a classic Southern drawl. "Not very much, how about you?"

I CAME VERY CLOSE TO ADDING "MR. PRESIDENT." I kinda dodged his question, not knowing who I was talking with and taking the chance of having my stuff confiscated. He slowly eased off his scooter, appearing much taller and leaner than I thought. He slowly untied two potato sacks, hanging like saddle bags over the rear fender. When the sacks hit the ground with a loud thud. I swear, I felt the earth move under my feet. What the hell, I wondered as he began dumping out both sacks. As they plummeted to the ground, a cloud of dry dust emanated from the pile of dirty, rust covered cannon projectiles of nearly every variety fired in the battle of Port Hudson. I was dazzled and speechless for a few minutes but I knew then and there that this dude was OK. With his easy-going attitude we struck up a friendly conversation which signaled the beginning of a life-long friendship. He slowly pulled out a pack of Marlboro cigarettes, and I watched in fascination as he tapped one out, then pulled out his pocket knife, and in what would become a customary ritual, a trade mark habit of his, he slowly, surgically excised the filter from the body of the tobacco tube. After discarding the filter, he lit the filterless cigarette-- a terrible habit which would ultimately do him in.

He explained the secret of his phenomenal success, by attributing it to his metal detector, a Whites Manufacture (I forget the model). He certainly converted me. When I conveyed this incident to Charlie, his first reply was skeptical as usual; "I donno if I believe that or not, Billy." But I eventually prevailed upon him and it wasn't very long before we both put our Metrotecs to pasture and

purchased our own Whites. Charlie went on to become one of the top-scoring
aces of cannon projectiles in the country. He added an extensive shaft thus
enabling him to scope the high ravine walls where most coils could not reach. I
have always maintained that his uncanny success was due to his hearing
impairment. He always hunted with the sound so high that, even though he wore



ear phones, it was audible to those around him. Sid and Charlie continued to find
shells and I did pretty good for myself. I found many shells, including that
awesome stash of unfired Sawyers. David Perdue of Pinebluff, Arkansas, who
made frequent relic hunts with me at Port Hudson, has fond memories of olde
Sidney. David will never forget the "VMM" buckle Sidney presented him. But that

was the way he was. You just couldn't help but love the guy. Eventually Sidney sold his camp to Charlie, which opened up new horizons for many relic hunters. Not long after that, Sid passed away. His spirit and mine will always haunt the woods and battlefield of the Port Hudson area, till the end of time.

Sequel: Long after Sidney's death, Hurricane Katrina struck south Louisiana wreaking havoc and devastation in its path. Hit hardest were the towns and communities along the Mississippi River, which caught the brunt of the hurricane force, which included Venice, where Sidney Fruge's widow wife was still living. She lost everything. However, being heir to her family's tug boat company in Venice, she was far from destitute. She did mourn the loss of all of her personal treasures, especially family photos and Sidney's vast collection of relics. The site of their homestead was transformed into a desolate, flat mud landscape. In a telephone conversation with Sid's wife, Joyce, who had taken refuge near Baton Rouge, she told me about the horror she went through. In the course of the conversation she mentioned that Sidney's entire relic collection, consisting of Civil War relics, an extensive coin collection, and Indian arrowhead collection, were all buried beneath a deep sediment of mud. I asked if she would like to salvage what was left, that I could connect her with one of the most knowledgeable and prestigious relic hunter who lived in New Orleans. I assured her that he was honest and dependable. She readily acquiesced. I wasted no time reporting this news back to Richard Angelico, great grand pupah of the Southern Historical and Recovery Association, an elite organization composed of the most advanced metal detectorists in the country. Which he soon acted on with aplomb, vigor and phenomenal success, and the rest is history. Rich not only was able to resurrect Sidney's extensive shell collection but also the buckles, coins and arrowheads! Joyce was exhilarated! And surely, Sid was pleased.

So, in years to come, make a pilgrimage to the old Port Hudson battlefield and seek out our ghosts. We will be able to direct you to all the hot spots that have been overlooked and are still activated. We'll invite Tom Dickey and many other relic hunter icons to join us. All you have to do, as you stroll through the park, is call out: "MARCO...." and we'll answer "POLO!"

MY FIRST TIME

Most people can recall a particular incident in their lives, especially something of epic proportion. I can vividly recall finding my very first "C. S." buckle--not that I have found a glut of them. But this is about my first born Confederate States belt buckle.

On a hunt with Bob (one of the notorious BIG FIVE METROTECTORS cartel) we hunted the north side of the old town site of Port Hudson where the old railroad maintenance shop was once located, where the beleaguered Confederates had rigged up the train engine in a last-ditch effort to run the grist mill. And close to the area referred to as Commissary Hill. We concentrated on the edge of the plateau where land dropped down to valley in which Foster Creek meandered. I remember digging about 6-inches of a gun barrel with two Minie Balls fused together inside, which had been blown off by internal combustion. Obviously, an unwary Rebel, thinking he had fired the first round, when in fact had rammed two bullets down the barrel, causing a premature explosion. Then we found a large chunk of an exploded bronze cannon. I didn't think too much about it until much later on, when I read about a Confederate bronze cannon that exploded during the 1863 siege. And I wish I had kept it. I let Bob to keep it without flipping for it. I often find myself wondering what became of it.



We found a great number of fired Minie balls and several small rusted grape shot balls, and a near perfect bayonet. And I can still hear Bob exclaiming, as he often did: "Christ, I don't know what I'd do with another Minie ball!" I kept reminding him that the bullets were symptomatic, vital signs of a camp site. Just be patient. He always wanted to steer away from such trash. Henceforth, when

referring to Bob, we named him "CHRIST." Or simply "The Christ Child." Now, whenever I hunted with Dave, we found buckets of Minies. Dave Hovey was one of the original of the Metrotec Five gang. He was in his early 70s, I guess, and since he had heart trouble. his wife always reminded me where he kept his nitroglycerin pills--so that I could pluck it out and put it behind his upper lip. So naturally, when he and I hunted together, I had to do all the digging and hauling while he did all the detecting. But unlike The Christ Child, Dave and I were delighted to find Minies and fragments.

And then it happened. While scoping the ravines extending down the slopes of the plateau, with Bob, we dug a heavy brass cast "C. S." buckle! Unbelievable! Except for missing one of the hooks on back, it was dark green and absolutely perfect! I can't adequately describe how I felt. It was almost surrealistic to think that this was truly the personal item of a Confederate soldier; that Bob and I were the first eyes to behold it and our hands were the very first to hold it since it was dropped in 1863. I found it bewildering to realize that this was for real, that they were really here!! They were actually here, participating in the epic American Civil War---right here...in these now silent woods. This buckle was DEFINITIVE proof.It was so thought-provoking.

And now for the real moment of truth. Still using just one detector, as per our bylaws, we flipped a coin for FIRST CHOICE of our finds. But first, I reminded The Christ Child that we must be strong and brave now, that whatever the outcome, to not begrudge the winner, that the next buckle would automatically be his but that the ride home for one of us would be a very long trip. And so it came to pass that, in the almost religious silence of those tranquil woods, we flipped the fateful coin. And I won! I don't mean to be sacrilegious to say this, but I had beat the Christ Child. And for that I thank God!

CANNONBALL CACHE

During the roaming days of my early quest for relics, several outstanding forays come readily to mind. Perhaps the most outstanding one took place in Demopolis, Alabama. Bill Moore and I got wrapped up in the idea finding where Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest surrendered his command in Gainesville, Alabama, May 9, 1865. When Forrest found out that Lee had surrendered he wasted no time in following suit. Thinking that his troops must have dumped a ton of arms in holes or ravines in that vicinity, we conceived the idea of searching for Forrest's lost arms and ammunition. In retrospect, it was like looking for the proverbial needle in the haystack. But it is said that the Lord works in mysterious ways. As we would find out, it is true, that He does, indeed.

Before we reached our destination, on passing through Demopolis we paused at the bridge spanning the Tombigbee River to read a historical marker which indicated this was the site of an early frontier post, Fort Tombigbee. It also stated that the entire population had been massacred in an Indian uprising. We gave the site a quick once-over with our trusty Metrotec. Located atop a high bluff overlooking the river, the area was completely barren of even grass, but basically just rock-solid stone like surface. I made the only finds of the hunt: one early brass button with a French manufacturer's name printed around the shank and one round .58-cal bullet.

Continuing on our way to Gainesville, we had no trouble in locating the alleged location of where The Wizard in the Saddle's men had lined up in ranks to stack arms and formerly surrender, and to listen to their fearless leader's farewell address. But that location, where it was and who to talk to. Sure enough, we followed his explicit instructions: we turned off the highway, to the right, just before the Tombigbee bridge, and there was farmer Jones' house.

Mr. Jones, on hearing of our recommendation from the old codger, allowed *us* free rein of his property, only asking that we close the two gates of his pasture. Sure enough, just as the old man described, there was this high hill overlooking a large panoramic bend in the big river. We parked at the foot of the mountain-like hill, quickly retrieved the Metrotec and began climbing. On reaching the summit, covered with pine trees, we took in the spectacular view of the surrounding scenery. The only sound was the wind whistling through the pine trees. We quickly got a reading and began digging in the soft sandy soil. I pulled out a rusty piece of barb wire. Always check your hole. The reading was still there but not as strong at first. But the deeper we dug, the louder it sounded. Soon we heard metal striking metal--always a good sign!

Now here is the climaxing finish to this saga. To make a long story short, we unearthed *two pyramid* stacks of 12-pounder balls--some fused, some solid, still stacked as they were when the Confederate artillerymen, on retreating, had

covered the trench containing the ammunition with river sand. We simply rolled the balls down the hill to the our station wagon and loaded them up. Now, we had to rent a U-Haul trailer to haul the load back to Baton Rouge. We got around a little over 300 balls.



Yes, the Lord does work in mysterious ways.

THE SANDS OF DAUPHIN ISLAND

Sometime ago in the 1960s, I introduced my wife Theresa and my three little darling girls to the beaches of Dauphin Island, Alabama. It was a family vacation trip for us. Little did we know that we would be spending the next two vacations at Dauphin Island. On the first trip, we struck up a life-long friendship with the William Armistead family. What first caught my attention was their family-owned museum located on the Mobile causeway. It was a two story wood frame building with a log-wood facade resembling a frontier fort. My car turned in the parking lot, automatically, since it was programmed to seek out museums, just as a good bird-dog could flush out a quail.

The proprietor of this privately owned edifice was Doctor BILL Armistead, a pharmacist by profession and relic hunter by the grace of God! The entire downstairs was filled with showcases filled with a plethora of Civil War artifacts, most of which he found and some by others. Everything was painstakingly arranged and labeled professionally. I even contributed artifacts to his museum.

We stayed in contact with the Armisteads for many years. The following year we slept at their house, behind the museum and right on Mobile Bay. And of course, the object of this trip was to hunt relics on the Island. On the tip of the east end of the long sandy island stood old Fort Gaines, among the many similar masonry fortresses erected in 1825 around the entire coast line of the United States.

The next morning, Bill and his wife transported my wife and I and our three little girls, by dune buggy across sand dunes to the open beach. It was a wide, treeless desert. After dropping the women off with ice chests, Bill and I drove to the palmetto patch which bordered a golf course. We plugged in and began swinging our detectors. For a change I had totally dismissed the idea of coming across any snakes, reasoning that since the island stood far out in the salty water, it would repulse all reptiles. Wrong again, professor emeritus of snakeology. After I had zigzagged my way brushing through the large palmetto leaves, I began picking up dropped Minie balls and brass eagle buttons. They were all intact, in sound condition. Except for a slight brownish discoloration caused by pine needles, they were perfect. Then I found a U.S. belt buckle, also in perfect condition! All I had to do was brush it off on my clothes and it looked bright as new! And then I dug a silver dollar! Also in mint condition. It had a prewar date, so there was no doubt about having been the property of a Yankee soldier. In those days, that was a lot of money! And the strange thing about this hunt was that one didn't need a shovel to dig with! All you had to do was pluck your hand through the pine needles into the soft, moist sand! In no time I had a small jar full of perfect eagle buttons and unfired bullets.

And then it happened. Mister Copperhead made his sudden appearance!! You gotta be kidding! A snake in this salty environment? To make a long story

short, I decided to capture it for Bill's museum, since it contained a serpentine exhibit. But how? I spotted an old rusted square five gallon cooking oil can, still retaining its screw top. Next, I found a good strong, long stick. Pinning its head down, I grabbed it behind the head, dropped it tail-first into the can, screwed the top back on, and voila! I presented a live copperhead snake to the Armistead museum. Yeah, I know, I know--I can boast it was about 15-feet long, you'd know I was lying. So for setting the record straight, let's just say it was a long s.o.b. I gave the silver dollar to Bill. This story has a somewhat grim ending. On returning to our abandoned women on that barren desert beach, we found them in wretched condition---all sun-burned--We were so wrapped up in our quest for relics that we had forgotten all about them. They looked like survivors of a ship wreck, who had languished on some lonesome, lost South Pacific island. They were cooked to a crisp! Needless to say, they were not a very happy bunch of campers. Goes to show you, how stupid one can be to allow digging relics stand in the way of common sense....



So much for family vacations...

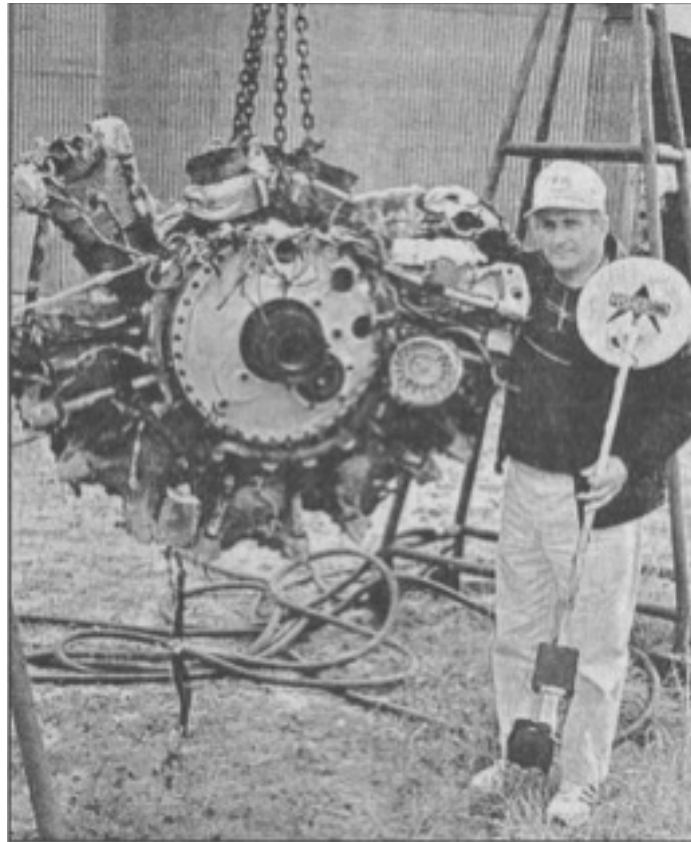
FORT DESPERATE

I can't recall the exact date when I first saw Fort Desperate, which was one of the major links of the long winding 4.5 mile long earthen wall erected by the Confederate defenders of Port Hudson. During the hot summer months of May, June, and July, 1863, the Federals launched several grand but ill-fated charges which involved hand to hand combat on the walls of Fort Desperate, which was surrounded on three sides, resulting in the deaths of some 300 Rebels, plus some 300 attacking Yankees. After suffering the loss of so many comrades, the Confederates vowed to defend the fortification to the end. And they did, naming it Fort Desperate. One of my early acquaintances of the area was Mr. Tom Mills, landowner of a vast portion of property on the northern part of Port Hudson, which took in the Fort Desperate breastworks, property which had been in the Mills family since the early days of Spanish land grants. Mr. Mills and I struck up friendship lasting into the manhood of his two sons.



The old Mill's home, located at the very end of a long, winding, gravel road (really more like a very long driveway). After traversing several creeks, ravines and open plains, there stood a large two-story wood frame house surrounded by massive oak trees. Mister Tom showed me a collection of various shells laying on the ground next to the porch, one of which was a massive 13-inch mortar ball, a Schenkl, and several other interesting shells.

Following his pickup truck he led me down the gravel road, then crossing several more adjoining fields, we manipulated through a wooded area where we came to a stop facing a massive earthen wall. We parked and crossed the deep moat, partially filled with water, and scampered up the steep wall and peered around, viewing for the first time Fort Desperate. The breastworks were covered in a heavy growth of weeds and the interior was filled with a heavy growth of thorny brush thickets, interspersed in a mixture of tall trees and small saplings. It was like a veritable jungle, but otherwise in pristine condition. Mr. Tom pointed out the exact spot where some man, with a home-made metal detector, had located and dug a shell. Mills demonstrated how the man had marked the spot by describing a large "X" with the toe of his boot. The outcome of this amicable meeting was permission to hunt his property. Talk about excited! Later on, when



Billy with the P47 Aircraft Engine he helped recover

I was researching for material for my book on **HEROES OF HARDING FIELD**, the WW II fighter bomber training base, he would lead me to the spot where he found one of the missing pilots, who while engaged in practice dogfighting, had a midair collision with another P-47. He had witnessed the decent of one of the pilots who had landed on his property. I took of picture of Mister Tom pointing at the tree: "He was laying against this trunk, all covered with blood, with a partially

unfolded tourniquet, one end hanging from his mouth and partly around one arm, apparently trying to cut off the circulation...but he had lost too much blood, I guess...No, he was dead." He continued: "I led the search party here." Taking advantage of Mr. Tom's generous offer, I escorted my three Metrotec buddies-- Bill, Harry, and Bob-- to Fort Desperate. We were not the very first to hunt the place. Cotton McCallum and Tom Dickey were the real pioneers. But my team reaped an awesome harvest. The walls were heavily imbedded with impacted Minie Balls! We dug pockets full of them! Most of the time we hunted in shifts: While one scoped, the other would dig, and what you detected, you kept. I think we worked in 30-minute intervals.

We dug shells, bayonets, and a few U.S. and C.S. buckles, VMM buckles, gun parts, pieces of sword scabbards. I dug a hand-made Bowie knife atop the wall, fashioned by a Rebel from a sheep-shear scissors blade. And even one complete musket, sans wood. I dug about six inches of the end of a musket barrel, showing a perfect Minie ball puncture, and the bevel marks of a pipe cutter, indicating it was a battlefield improvisation, removing the damaged end in order to keep the gun usable, as a sawed-off shotgun. Apparently, a wary yankee sharp shooter spotted the movement of a Rebel's gun protruding from a loop hole in the logs or sand bags and fired, striking the barrel. We hunted the place off and on for years with great success. Everyone got "got their limit." I have a magnificent heavy cast C.S. buckle found on the west wall of the fort, of which I am very proud .. Sometimes we would arrive at 4:30 am to beat the heat and



Billy with a part of the WWII P47 Fighter

hunt until dark. On one cold rainy winter January day, I got my station wagon inextricably stuck in a mud hole at the very wall of Ft. Desperate. I had Bill and Bob with me. We had no alternative but to make the long hike back to the main roads to seek help. It was a bleak, cloudy, soggy cold hike. It looked as if it would never stop raining. We finally found an African-American who agreed to pull us out with his truck. On the way back to my car, we were all huddled together on the front seat next to the driver of the truck, which had a large gaping hole in the floorboard which allowed a strong flow of cold air inside. Of course, we gratefully tipped him. We survived to hunt another day. Down the slopes of the northwest wall of Ft. Desperate were the deep ravines and high ridges where the Federals were dug in, a place heavily pockmarked with rifle pits and trench works--a place I named "**BUCKLE ALLEY!**" It would yield many wonderful things, predominately U.S. buckles and U.S. cartridge box plates, and eagle breast plates, gun barrels canteens and buttons. Comprised of sandy loam soil, made for easy digging. In fact, the soil was so tightly packed that it helped preserve most of the items we found. For instance, one of the canteens I dug was in unusually sound condition--and, incredibly, still retaining its original--but now ossified --cork stopper, and, amazingly, ***it still was filled with the same water which was filled by some Yankee soldier!*** Thus we named one ridge "**SANDY HILL.**"

MY CROWNING MOMENT

Once, back in the day, I led a group of my close buddies on a safari into the wilds of Port Hudson, with permission of the African-American land owner. I cannot recall the names of all who made this trip. However, I can still see the faces and recall the names of a particular father and son, Bill Moore and young son Chico. We were working the slopes on the northern side of the former town. I directed the party to an area that had produced a lot of artillery projectiles. Almost as soon as we arrived there, the guys began digging shells, except me. I actually helped "birth" a 10-inch ball, using my sharpshooter. When the depth of the hole was about 2.5 feet I turned my shovel over to one of the others. I had to sit astride the back of his legs as he bent down from the waist into the opening to dig and pull out loose dirt, but the hard part was extracting the 10-inch ball from the hole. A cannonball is round and has no handles. It involved a lot of grunting and sweating and widening the hole, but we got it out.

After that, I watched as one after another found a shell--just about every size and shape. I moved further away and descended the slope again, and this time I began digging a lot of indiscriminate trash--pieces of iron chains and chunks of metal trash. I soon tired of this fruitless game and moved back to the top of the slope with Bill and Chico. I told them that I had found a place that I felt sure had potential but that they would have to dig through a lot of trashy readings too. They took me up on my offer. I hadn't gone very far before I heard Chico cutting up. As I wondered what all the commotion was about, Chico came dashing up the slope towards me, frantically waving something in his hand for me to see. My eyes focused on a magnificent VMM belt buckle! Extremely rare!. It was the small oval shaped waist buckle. It was absolutely perfect, with a beautiful green patina and hook on the back. Being the young immature kid he was, Chico was laughing hysterically. This was the beginning of the discovery of the big dump sites--both civilian and military--on the northern slopes of the extinct town that would attract a new specie of relic hunters-- THE DAWNING OF THE ERA OF THE BOTTLE HUNTERS. Instead of being grateful and thanking the Lord for his good fortune, Chico opted instead, like a kid, for stressing how he had pulled one over on the great buckle slayer Billy Spedale! I was actually happy for Bill. By this time it was getting late, so I moved on working slowly back to the field where our vehicles were parked.

On emerging from the woods onto the open field. I could see our vehicles parked on the far side of the wide open plain next to the fence. As I slowly angled over that way I continued swinging the detector. This is what I call my last ditch tactic, because realizing the hunt was basically over, I would give lady luck one more chance to be nice to me. I would zigzag slowly to my station wagon where I would terminate my search by unplugging my head set and putting the Metrotec to bed. It was a period of intensive concentration, listening to

every nuance of sound emitting from the ear phones for that winning sound. Come on, come on, Metrotec, SPEAK TO ME! As I approached the station wagon of Les Hopper, an obese, mirthless, grumpy relic hunting wannabe, I saw him sitting alone at the wheel. He probably never uncoiled his head set. As I moved closer to his vehicle I got a clear signal. Was it the signal from Heaven?? Indeed it was! He probably never uncoiled his head set. As I moved closer to his vehicle I got a clear signal. Was it the signal from Heaven?? Indeed it was! Remembering that I had left behind my sharp-shooter with the guys digging the shells, I called out to Les to loan me his shovel. With his usual grumpy look he tossed me his GI foxhole shovel. The ground looked like a freshly manicured lawn, thanks to the grazing cattle. I dropped to my knees and the first probe I made into the green turf, flipping the sod over MY EYE BUGGED OUT. I BEHELD A HEAVY CAST C.S. BUCKLE!! Wanting to share this rare moment with someone I yelled out to Les: " I'VE GOT A C.S.! I GOT A C.S.! I'VE GOT A C.S.!" Instead of sharing this special moment with me he merely sat there,



motionless with the look of YEAH, SURE!... As the rest of the party began slowly trickling in under the heavy weight of cannon shells, I greeted each one with an outstretched closed fist. As they neared me I would pop open my fist TADAH! THE LOOK ON THEIR FACES WAS PRICELESS. One of the guys told me that Chico never stopped boasting how Billy Spedale didn't find anything! Even though I suspect that Les probably thought I brought the C.S. buckle with me, I just couldn't care less. This was MY MOMENT! How does the old saying go about he who laughs last, laughs longest ! And how about: VENGEANCE IS MINE SAYETH THE LORD!

As customary, every time I found a C.S. I would memorialize the sacred spot with some kind of monument dedicated to the unknown Rebel who graciously left his buckle there for me. In this case, I gathered some old bricks and fashioned an altar atop the covered hole. It's been many years since then. I'm sure the bricks have long ago sunken out of sight by now. This is what relic hunting is all about.

Mister No Shoulders

The rumor going around today that the reason that the poisonous snake population of Port Hudson has diminished is attributed to my deadly marksmanship. I guess that would make me the St. Patrick of Louisiana. I don't deny the fact that I have contributed my fair share to their demise, realizing that my confession will come to haunt me by wild life preservationists. I do feel some remorsefulness when I dwell on it today. However, back then, I felt that I was actually making the world a little bit safer place -especially for me and my fellow nature lovers. I admit that I eradicated at least one rattlesnake or copperhead a week for several years. Like Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley, I thought the bison were in unlimited numbers and would last forever. Let me delve into some snake tales--or, as we referred to them, "Mister No-shoulders," for obvious reasons.

Perhaps the most memorable event was the time a 5-foot long serpent dropped on the head of Bill Moore. We were ducking through a dense thicket in the vicinity of Slaughter's Field. I was trailing close behind Bill and witnessed the entire melee. The snake draped around his neck, snapping at his face, as Bill tried to pull it off. It continued to wrap around his arms as he pulled and tugged at it to get it away. When we finally emerged from the thicket the snake had had enough and vanished. I thought Bill was going into cardiac arrest! He was trembling and staggering. His face and ears had bloody bite marks.

All the way home he simply would not believe me when I told him it was a harmless King snake. But his survival was proof enough. I used to love catching King snakes for fun, then releasing them. On one trip, I brought one home in a highway department soil sample canvas sack. On the drive home in Speedy Allen's car as we were traveling at a high rate of speed on highway 61, the snake got out the bag and created pandemonium among the four of us cooped up in the car. Even though we knew it was a harmless king snake, when the frenzied snake slithered up Speedy's pants leg, he went berserk! We thought it would be the end for us. However, after a few zigzags and bumping on the shoulder of the road, he did a heck of a job keeping the car from having a head-on collision. On another occasion I tangled with an irate Cottonmouth Moccasin. I had made my way down into a deep ravine in which there was a little stream trickling through it. As I was scoping along the stream bed, I spotted a dark moccasin coiled up, motionless. Since it appeared to dare me to move it away, it sprang into a striking mode, I whipped out my trusty .22 target pistol (with many victorious hash-marks on the grips). I fired once and missed. This only provoked it. It made a lunge at me. I immediately turned to dash up the slope of the ravine

from whence I came but ran smack-dab into an entanglement of briars from which I could not extricate myself, just waiting for the snake to start biting on me.



Then suddenly I realized that the snake had disappeared. Whew!

Such were the vicissitudes and dangers one must encounter to find the elusive relics. No guts, no glory. Just remember: Either get use to it, or stay out of the woods.

Valley Of The Balls

Located approximately behind the left center of the Confederate breast works, where the level plateau drops off into a wide, deep valley, dissected by a narrow, deep, winding stream at the bottom, where the land rises sharply to the high, level plateau on the other side. The plateau on the west side at the time of the Civil War was an open field, marking the border of the business district of the old town of Port Hudson. The open field was packed with Confederate camps. The town at that time resembled a typical southern port town on the Mississippi River. It's claim to fame was the Clinton-Port Hudson railroad which delivered live-stock, farm produce, cotton and sugar to its wharves, where steamboats delivered cargo to ports around the world. But the town was actually in its death throes at the time of the war, as the river was in its closing stages of moving westward and would soon leave the busy docks high and dry.

A good friend and I had permission from the land owner, Mr. Crochet to hunt this vast tract of property. Gerald and I began our hunt in the bottom of the valley where the little stream hardly trickled. The stream was deceiving in looks. While it appeared to be just a typical, shallow cut, it was actually about two-feet deep with a hard bottom. Or, an iron bottom, as we soon found out. Gerald was packing a Whites Metal Detector and knew how to use it. (I found the Whites to be too temperamental). After finding the first shell, Gerald began wading in the waist deep water, trolling the bottoms with the head submerged. In a short time, he had pulled out several shells, one of which was a 100-pounder Parrott shell (fired from one of Farragut's ships that ran the batteries the night of March 14, 1863, It probably was the USS HARTFORD, since it was one of the only two, out of eight, to successively make the passage). I know there were some common 20 and 30-pdr Parrotts, and 12-pounder Napoleons, and a Sawyer in the mix, but all I can recall was the big Parrott shell (which the Rebels named "Limping Toms," because they seemed to summersault or tumble before going into the ground. I remember a 100-pdr that I found, was nose-down). What had happened in this Valley of The Balls was, that after the war, the farmers tilling the ground for crops over the years, would plow up so many "bombs" they simply tossed them down the slopes of the valley where they came to rest in the bottom of the stream. It was much easier than hauling them away. Some were stuffed down wells and privy cess pools--where some are occasionally found today. I remember for sure that Gerald skunked me on this hunt. I also remember that it was such a hot day that we broiled in the bright sun shine. And with our strength fast fading away, we discovered a complete 18-foot long rail of the Clinton-Port Hudson railroad. This segment was a very significant discovery because it happened to be from the earlier railroad which had used the **FLAT** rail, which preceded the "I" beams. The "I" rails came into use just before the Civil War.

We donated this historic piece of railroad to the Republic of West Florida Historical Association in Jackson. La.



I can recall many other hunts on the Crochet's property which continued to yield more shells and personal mementoes. On one particular hunt with Charlie, we had to duck carefully under a live electric fence. As I slid under the low live wire I heard the damndest bellowing I ever heard emitted by a human. Charlie, unfortunately, made contact with the live wire. The high voltage blew a hole in his side where a trickle of smoke slowly exited from an open wound. And if my memory is correct, it blew out his detector!

Sawyer Cache

When I hunted Artillery Ridge, a long winding ridge, located on the north west corner of the Port Hudson battlefield, I used to pass a particular area with a low depression, about 15 x 15 ft. square, which always caught my attention. Located approximately half way down the ridge, we used to hunt the Union rifle pits which dotted the lofty end of the ridge overlooking the junction of Sandy Creek with Foster creek. It was a section that was crawling with Union troops.

They hunkered down in rifle pits and bunkers, facing southward to the Confederate lines, just over the deep basin in which Foster Creek flowed. The rifle pits held a commanding overview out over the tree tops to the vast territory beyond the junction of the two creeks. The back side was loaded with an inordinate amount of dropped bullets, belt, cartridge box and eagle breast plates, buttons, gun parts, nice bottles and all kinds of personal objects. I found my first "S.N.Y." belt plate there (after I had a brisk encounter with a huge rattler. Its 13 rattles now grace my collection. I'm tempted to say it was a 25-ft-long snake, but that would be over-exaggeration by 10-feet) ahem...

As I stated earlier, on returning to our vehicle, we always passed the section which contained the mysterious indenture in the ground. It was even more pronounced after a rain, when it ponded over. So I decided to check it out to ease my mind. It contained a small growth of young saplings with hanging vines infested with curtains of moss. After clearing the brush and vines away, I began probing with my sharp-shooter. There was just enough of a faint reading to warrant an investigative probe. And the deeper I dug, the louder the signal. Now this is that definitive moment when your heart starts pounding faster! You realize that it has to be something good, to have survived so long. After I had opened a square hole about 2.5 ft deep, came the sound of metal striking metal. This is when you slow down, taking deep breaths, trying to stay cool and calm. Can't let your hobby kill you. Soon I could make out three white lead-coated cannon projectiles with a greenish looking patina. Then, my hunting partner, Charlie, came bounding over and getting caught up in the excitement of the moment, took over the digging as I sat and drank water, sweating and pulsating. "There're a bunch of unfired Sawyers," I said. "Four of them!" he said. No doubt, we had discovered the remnants of a Union artillery emplacement, one of 22 which ringed the Confederate bastion of Port Hudson. I have unearthed Sawyer shells and fragments from every quarter within the Confederate interior.

Now, what is unique about this cache of Sawyers is that each of these was encased in a very thin coat of copper sheathing. Something new to most of us. And another significant factor was the discovery of some very fine wordage on one. Several years before this, Don Albarado, Principal of Plaquemine High School, and an ardent relic hunter, had found a similar Sawyer in that same general area. His relic contained the ominous warning, clearly etched in a spiral

sentence around the lead coated shell was the inscription “LAY LOW FOR HARD TACK.” An apparent humorous attempt to warn the Rebels to keep a low profile while having lunch on hard tack, the GI-ration of the Civil War era.



Billy “Birthing a Sawyer”

On returning home, after I had gingerly cleaned my newborn shells, I noticed the faint, very faint inscription on one of them. It looked like someone was trying to say something about “Louisiana,” because the clearest I could discern was “La.” Then I remembered Don’s shell with that ubiquitous inscription. No doubt about it, The inscription was the handy work of the SAME artillerist. And he used the same tool, for each had the identical striations, the markings of a brass Sawyer fuse! Except that the faint inscription on my specimen was hardly legible.

THE EXPERT

Whenever someone introduces me as a *Civil War Expert*, I quickly interject: “you really meant to say, NUT, didn’t you? I’ve spent most of my life studying and delving into Civil War history and some of it had to stick. But I definitely do not know *EVERYTHING* about the subject. We learn a lot from making mistakes.

I vividly recall a hunt I made with a good friend and the young son of a fellow I worked with. We were way back in the woods once occupied by Col. Ben Grierson’s famous cavalry when they were guarding the rear of Gen. N.P. Banks army during the Siege of Port Hudson. We unearthed some neat finds, one of which was a perfect brass Union Eagle button, the eagle was perfect with the letter “I” in the center of the shield (infantry) complete with shank. I passed it around thus bringing into play the unwary charge of violating Rule No. 1 of the Relic Hunting Code, which specifically states that all accompanying hunters *must refrain from the urge of cleaning another’s relic*. It is the God-given right of the *finder to clean his own finds*. How many times have you seen this rule violated? The friend with whom I was hunting with, being somewhat of a neophyte, took the aged delicate button and, with the air of a big time hunter, within a second, had spit on it and commenced to roughly rubbing the face of it on his pants leg! OMG! The young kid with me watched in fascination as these expert Civil War hunters gave so much attention to this small ancient artifact. Big deal! I watched in horror as this guy vigorously rubbed the button , which by now was saturated with spittle, *until it simply popped apart*, disappearing before our very eyes; this venerable old Yankee button, which had survived the war, ravages of time, protected all this time---over 120 years--by Zeus, the god of militaria, saving it for the nice home I had for it. In a split second it was gone for ever! Poof!!

Now this next one was entirely my fault. Before I learned the professional method of cleaning rusty artifacts I tried my hand at using the water--zinc-lye solution. I had a perfectly dug bulls-eye canteen, complete with strap loops and spout. It was beautiful, in sound condition when I immersed it in the solution. And a short while later, when I checked on it--it was gone! Vanished! The only thing left was a beautiful spout. I grieved for several days--until I realized that wars are won by fighting and killing, not by mournful grieving, said N.B. Forrest.

And then I distinctly remember the hunt we made into an impact area within the Confederate lines of Port Hudson, in a cluster of ravines, where tons of sent shells had lodged. There must have been at least five of us close buddies, one of whom was Ted, a country boy from Mississippi, who possessed a classic slow, Southern drawl. You couldn’t help but love the guy. As this hunt progressed I had found a nice 30-pound. Parrott shell, with brass sabot and percussion fuse. Shortly after that Ted got a good reading. I assisted him in digging it out, when Lo and behold, to everyone’s surprise it turned out to be one of the rarest of

Confederate shells--a solid Archer! When the excitement subsided, I jokingly asked if he would swap his small shell for my huge 30-pound Parrott. The big Parrott looked like a huge naval torpedo beside the petit Archer. Ted, who was rather new at the hobby, was amazed at my sudden proposal. "you willlll ?" he asked bewildered. He would have made the swap until I confessed that what he had was worth more significantly, historically and monetarily wise. Just how did a Confederate shell end up amongst a mixture of Union projectiles.. I deduced that, since we found so many Federal Hotchkiss shells on those slopes, that the Archer was probably captured by Federals, who in turn had fired the captured Archer, along with the 3-inch Hotchkiss shells, into the Rebel lines. It worked perfectly. If so, the Yankee artillerymen must have felt some measure of poetic justice.



And then I recall one of the many hunts I shared with Charlie Hinton. We were hunting a section of the Port Hudson area known for the abundance of shells. Charlie had brought along a friend to witness his prowess at finding so many shells in the past. "Now here is a reading you *do not want to dig!* He passed his coil over the spot and we could all hear the return. "YOU DON'T WANT TO DIG THIS ONE," he reiterated. Within a few seconds Charlie had dirt flying followed by the unmistakable sound of scraping metal on metal. As we gaped in silence, he pulled out a PERFECT 3-INCH HOTCHKISS SHELL, COMPLETELY INTACT!

I remember the first live "bomb" I tried to purge. I brought a 12-Pounder Napoleon cannonball to the LA. DOTD Testing and Research lab, where I was employed, and performed my first procedure on a live shell. The clean ball with a slight rusty covering contained a lead Borman fuse indicating that it had been punctured, fired, A DUD. As my patient lay on the lab table, with three fellow employees looking on, I went in. I began by puncturing a small hole through the lead-pewter fuse. As all four of us were deeply engrossed, intensely observing, we suddenly heard the loud *fizzzssh!* The last dying breath of the old shell--a sound so familiar to anyone who has punctured into live shells, a sound of pent-up escaping gasses, you will never forget. When I punched through the fuse and heard the loud fizzing sound, all four of us rose in unison in the air. And when we looked at ourselves we beheld faces sprinkled with black freckles of spewed gunpowder!

Springfield Landing

Ever since the celebration of the Civil War Centennial, historians, scholars, the generic relic hunter and collector and basic Civil War nut, have had one thing in common: Where was the location of old Springfield Landing, Union General Nathaniel P. Banks' supply dump for his Port Hudson Campaign, of 1863? There were many futile attempts to locate the long-lost landing from aircraft but, there was just no way to identify any distinguishing land marks. About the only "given" was that it was located on the Mississippi River across from Prophet Island, about 4-miles below Port Hudson. That is a mighty big island, standing high above ground during low river stage and almost completely inundated during high water season. With Prophet Island chute flowing southward on the east side, the shore line of both, the island and river were constantly being scoured by the strong swift current. The swift current was exacerbated by the erection of higher levees, especially since the end of the Civil War. There are still no direct roads leading to the landing. Only a long, winding driveway.

I'm not exactly sure who "discovered" Springfield Landing, but I have a gut feeling that it had to be one of the relic hunters. No one else would have cared about it. My guess would be Ron McCallum and Larry Hewitt. Ron grew up on the Port Hudson battlefield, following in his dad's "Cotton's" footsteps, becoming one of the most proficient relic hunters in this country. Dr. Larry Hewitt, a professional historian, was Superintendent of the Port Hudson State Commemorative Park, at this time. Larry made one of the most significant finds of the Port Hudson Campaign. He eyeballed An "S.N.Y." belt buckle! It was in perfect condition, covered with a heavy light green patina, retaining its three hooks on the back ("puppy paw" type). On subsequent trips they would find more good things. I'm happy to claim that I now have ownership to Hewitt's fabulous SNY buckle, and have plans to donate it to the Port Hudson museum--where it rightfully belongs. This New York buckle was worn by a member of the 162nd New Yorkers who was guarding the landing when it was raided by Confederate Col. John L. Logan's cavalry force which proceeded in destroying and burning tons of vital ammunition, medicine, clothing and food stuff, worth thousands of dollars, supplies destined for the for the hard-pressed Yankees surrounding the Rebel garrison. In fact, it hurt the Federals so bad that Banks strongly considered retreating back to New Orleans. Witnesses described how the freed slaves, doing duty with the Yankees at the landing, fled panic -stricken into the river. It was pandemonium!

I made several trips to Springfield Landing, but found only a lot of dropped Minie balls. I was able to simply drive through the plant's private lane to the river, a lane that traversed swamps and several streams enroute. But this routine came to an abrupt end, so we had to devise alternate means of reaching the old

landing. One time we hiked through jungle-like woods but that was a long, laborious feat.

I contacted my good friend Rich Angelico, a founding father, and patriarch of the Southern Historical Research and Recovery Association (SHRRA) of south Louisiana and National Aficionado of Metal Detectorists. A recently retired Investigative Reporter for Station WDSU-TV New Orleans, to invite him on an hunt to Springfield Landing, with one stipulation, that he would have to furnish a boat to take us there via river. It would have to be an Amphibious Landing a la D-Day Normandy Invasion. "Not a problem," he replied--like he knew what he was saying. Well, it turned out that he was truly a man of his word. On the designated "D-Day," he pulled up in Baton Rouge hauling the biggest bateau I've ever seen! It was owned by fellow club member, John Lee, also an avid relic hunter, I thought it was Aristotle Onassis with one of his luxury yachts, big enough for a jet bomber to land on. We headed up the Mississippi River cruising like the Queen Mary. On arriving at the site, circumstances were ideal. The water had dropped precipitously, exposing a lot of bluff, allowing lot of space to cover, since most of the finds have been on the lower shelves--about ten feet from the top of the existing bluffs. On the first few hunts, there was no need for a detector. Most items could be eyeballed! Like Hewitt's fabulous SNY. A detector actually slowed one down while the others were steadily plucking buckles and plates and Minie balls.. It was like picking strawberries. There were a lot of other cool relics picked up, some with and some without the aid of a detector.



I don't quite recall exactly what we found on the hunt with Rich, mostly Mine balls I'm sure. We worked the different levels of the bluff while keeping in touch with the aid of small radio transmitters. They really came in handy.

When I was preparing this entry, I phoned Rich to see what he remembered most about our amphibious assault on the bluffs of Springfield landing, and he immediately replied: "Whew, man! It was hot as hell ! That was the hottest day of my life, thought I was 'gonna die!"

Snow Birds

Neither rain, nor sleet, nor snow or heat is too great an obstacle for an avid relic collector. A case in point is the expedition made in the snow by Don Albarado and myself. Since the schools were all closed in south Louisiana due to snow and ice conditions, Don--who was Principal of Plaquemine High School, and I, rather than sit at home idle, concocted a spur-of-the-moment relic hunt at Port Hudson. There would be no chiggers or snakes to worry about, and no stalkers trying to tail us. We were all decked out in our heaviest winter attire with gloves and knit pull-over stocking hats with slits to see and nostril holes for breathing. We resembled a couple of hard-core Middle-Eastern Terrorists.

Having procured permission from one of our frequent and friendly African-America_females to park and hunt her property, we explored the snow covered gullies and ravines behind the center of the Confederate breastworks. Normally, this area would be thickly covered with thick vegetation; however, the freeze had stunted and killed all forms of trees and brush, leaving the entire landscape covered in a white mantle of snow. Let me tell you, how pleasant it is when roaming the wild kingdom and not have to worry or watch for "Mister No-Shoulders!" Dressed warmly we moved along crunching through snow covered grass and weeds, when suddenly, I broke through a thin white layer of ice covering over a deep hole, created over the years by erosion, so typical of the area. I was more surprised than injured, but I had a difficult time emerging from my entrapment.

It wasn't long after that when I unearthed a nice bayonet. It was complete. With hardly any rust and only a slight trace of pitting on the iron tri-bladed bayonet. In fact, when I got home, all I had to do was clean it off with water and brush, and insert it on the muzzle end of a Springfield musket hanging on my wall. It was a perfect fit.

After a short while, after we had hunkered down to go for broke, we discovered that we had wandered apart from each other during our intensive concentration on hunting. All the while snow was slowly falling, and we became somewhat disoriented in the snow covered forest. The terrain took on an eerie aspect in its winter coating. The silence was deafening. As anyone who has lived sometime in a snow covered environment can tell you, a blanket of snow acts like a foam-covered ceiling, absorbing all sounds. It produced a pleasant quietness. After about a half-hour later, still separated, we spotted what we each conceived to be a white polar bear, slowly moving down the hill toward us. As we neared one another we were stunned to see just how much we had been covered with a heavy white crust. Icicles were hanging from our frost-covered nostril outlets, like stalagmites, from our knit caps. We stared awe-struck at one

another not quite sure if it was actually us, and not some abominable snowman. When it finally dawned on us that it was truly us, we had a good laugh.



Billy holding a still loaded Civil War Revolver

Slip Of The Lip

The old WW II admonition regarding the consequences of spreading loose information and its disastrous affect on the war effort. There was always the deadly possibility of sinking ships, as depicted in one of the most famous of patriotic posters of the war. A colorful art work showing a flailing seaman trying desperately to stay afloat as his torpedoed ship burns, sinking into the ocean. This ersatz biblical parable is applicable to relic hunting as well. Just as fishermen and game hunters maintain secrecy regarding their hot spots, not because of greed, but simply because their “glory holes” would not last very long if the news got out. So it is with relic hunting. There is the unwritten law which dictates that, when a party discovers a good hunting place, everyone *in that party* was bound in conscience to maintain the Mafia’s Code of OMERTA ! “SILENCE!”

No one in that party is allowed to return to the site without the consent of the others and no one is allowed to return with a guest. However, there will always be an unscrupulous jerk lurking in the background, biding his time. While no one would be whacked for violations, there is the chance of being black balled, banished from the club or party. They faced the possibility of being *excommunicated*. I’ll give you the basics of this reasoning based on my personal experiences and observation.

Forgive my boasting, but I acquired the good fortune of possessing an uncanny penchant for locating quite a few lucrative camping, skirmishing and “dump sites” in the Port Hudson area. Old dump sites and Glory Holes were like time capsules. I possessed an innate penchant for discovering a potential camp sites, rifle pits or small niches where a sharpshooter may have been hunkered down. It must have been the gift of Zeus the mythical Greek god of war but I was good at it. Case in point: I had studied the route of the Confederate lines of Port Hudson on paper and on foot. I was familiar with the missing parts that were destroyed by roadways and houses and buildings.

One particular area I recall was a small patch of woods behind Vince’s old store that intrigued me; I could tell that the center of the Confederate breastworks ended abruptly just across the road from the store. A few houses were clustered in a small compact area behind the store, occupied mostly by African-Americans. After carefully reconnoitering that area, I discovered a small network of massive breastworks, in pristine condition, sitting almost on top of a couple houses. *It was so well hidden* very few knew it even existed. I took one of my favorite hunting partners there. To make a long story short, my detector was acting up and my friend reaped a harvested a bumper crop of U.S. Sawyer shells--hen’s teeth in the relic world. He dug solid bolts and explosive type, about six all together. They were in perfect condition. Lead coated with a white patina, they resembled quart bottles filled with milk. The first thing my friend did was to haul ass to another

relic hunter--who lived nearby--to display his trophies! What's wrong with that, my friend insisted? OMG!

On another occasion I took a different friend to one of the big dump sites. I knew he was an avid bottle collector and that this place had potential. On a subsequent hunt, with other friend I made the startling discovery that "my dump" was over-run by a drove of bottle hunters. At first, the slope resembled an Indian dwelling: smoke rising from several camp fires had laid a fine thin, low hanging mist over the area; men, women and children were scurrying about. But there existed a strange silence, further adding to the surrealistic scenario. They spoke in almost whispers. As I took in the bizarre spectacle, a woman's head popped up from a deep freshly dug hole like a Meerkat. Astonishingly, she had a fresh looking meticulously manicured beehive hairdo. With just her head poking from the hole she glowered at me as if I was an intruder. No one spoke to me. And I knew some of them. Especially my friend whom I had introduced the place to. The traumatic part was seeing how they had partialled out the various categories of their finds, like a medical triad: one pile held perfect bottles, another held pieces, another held Civil War relics. The relics caught my full attention. There were bayonets, pieces of guns, canteens and some buckles, a bunch of epaulettes, and shells (I don't know how many). This dedicated group of bottles collectors would mine this site for over a month with phenomenal success. My good friend had nothing to say to me. I just had to suck it in and live with it. And remember who my true friends were.



Billy with his extremely rare Louisiana "Sunray" Pelican Plate