

The Little David Project

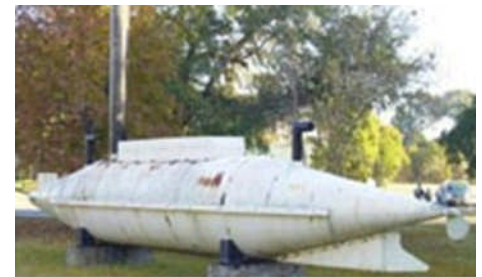


In 2004 the Charleston Base took over responsibility for the CSS David replica located in front of the Berkeley Museum in Moncks Corner, SC.

The CSS David was a low-profile steam-powered spar torpedo boat used in the defense of Charleston, SC during The War Between the States. It attacked and damaged the USS New Ironsides, a first-line Union warship, on October 5, 1863. Although the CSS David failed to sink it the ship was replaced in the blockade and dry-docked in Philadelphia, PA, where a fire subsequently destroyed it.

Mr. Theodore Stoney and David Chenowith Ebaugh built the CSS David near the Berkeley Museum location at Stoney Landing. It was designed by Dr. St. Julian Ravenel. It is 50 feet long and about 6 feet in diameter. A 25 foot spar with a gunpowder contact mine (called a torpedo) on the end is mounted on the bow. Pulling the lanyard that goes to the cockpit could also fire the torpedo.

The David had a crew of four. The captain and the pilot sat in the cockpit and steered the ship. The captain was to manually set off the torpedo if it failed to fire on contact with the target. Inside the ship was a boiler tender, who kept the small boiler producing steam, and an engineer, who tended the single piston steam engine and the propulsion drive train. The engineer also was to shift the drive train linkage to allow the ship to go astern (reverse).



CSS David before

The tactic used by the CSS David was to launch the attack on a dark (no moon or overcast) night. Moving as quietly as possible the ship would close on the target vessel. Because only three or four feet of the ship were above the surface of the water it was difficult to see. As soon as an alarm was raised on the target, the captain would signal and the ship's speed would be increased as much as possible. The pilot would steer for the target ship while the captain fired pistols at the target to help reduce the return fire. By the time the David was noticed it had moved so close that the ship's cannon could not be lowered enough to fire on it. Once the torpedo had been detonated the David would reverse and move away as quickly as possible to the safety of Charleston Harbor.

The attack on the USS New Ironsides went as planned until the torpedo exploded. The wave from the explosion washed over the cockpit and into the hull of the David, putting out the boiler. The captain, boiler tender and engineer abandoned the ship but the pilot remained aboard. The engineer returned to the ship when he saw it wasn't sinking and was able to re-start the boiler and return the ship to Charleston Harbor.

The CSS David made two more attacks. On March 6, 1864 she attacked the USS Memphis and on April 18, she attacked the USS Wabash.

The CSS David also has a relationship with the Confederate Submarine, the H. L. Hunley. The David was used to tow the Hunley out into Charleston Harbor for the submarines initial Trials. Also, after of the damage on the New Ironsides, Union ships in the first line of the blockade were protected by timbers and chains on the Charleston side of the ships. This prevented most of the torpedo blast from reaching the ship's hull, limiting the damage. Because of this tactic, the H. L. Hunley had to choose a target that was in the second line of the blockade.

Ten to twenty David-type torpedo boats were built as well as a 160-foot version that was to be used to move goods and supplies from the Confederate ports to ships waiting beyond the blockade. This version did not have a spar torpedo.

The students and staff of Trident Technical College built the replica in 1970 for the South Carolina Tri-centennial.



CSS David after

It was overhauled in 2004 by the United States Submarine Veterans Incorporated, Charleston Base (USSVICB). The overhaul took six month and several thousand man-hours to complete. During the overhaul, the hull was sandblasted to bare metal, the portions of the bottom were cut out and new sections welded in, and the hull was re-painted. The original design was modified by the installation of planking and a new cockpit to more resemble existing pictures of the Davids. A new torpedo was fabricated and bell housings were installed on the ventilation stacks.

Charleston Base is responsible for the upkeep of the replica and has a working party every spring, late March or early April, to get the replica ready for the tourist season. Charleston Base is also responsible for giving presentations during scheduled tours at the museum and during the Antique Tractor and Engine Show annually in early September.

Description of work done by Charleston Base.

1. About 75% of the bottom was removed and new sections rolled and welded in.
2. Entire hull was sandblasted and painted, inside and out.
3. Most of hull was sheathed in wood to more resemble the actual construction.
4. A new torpedo was manufactured.
5. A new cockpit was manufactured with the ability to install a canvas cover to keep rain out.

You can see a slideshow of the 2004 overhaul and the 2006 upkeep working parties at:

<http://www.ussvicb.org/littledavid/index.html>