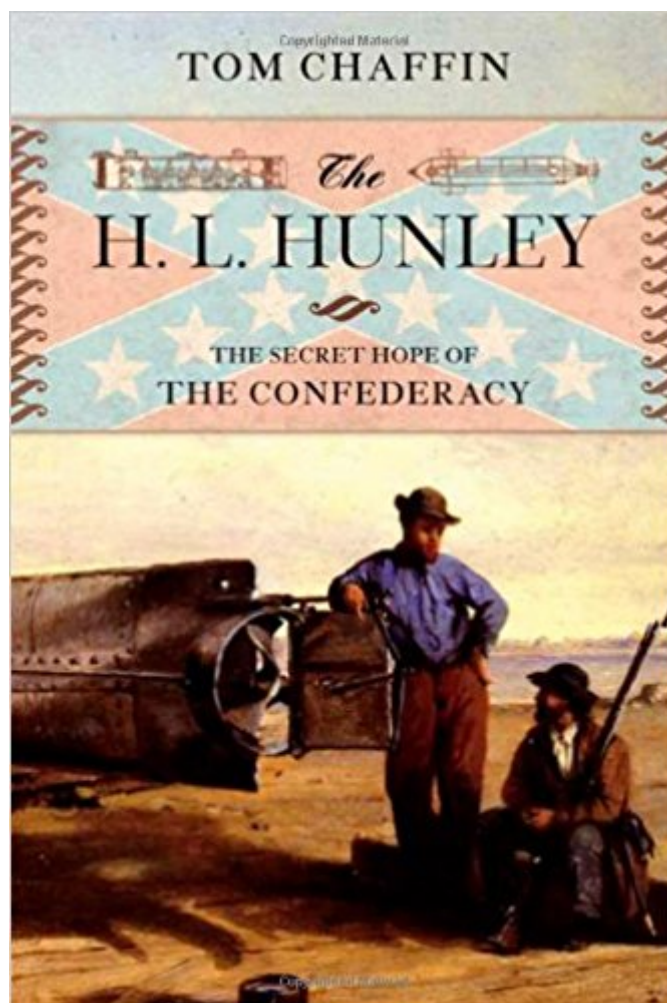


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# The H. L. Hunley: The Secret Hope Of The Confederacy



## Synopsis

On the evening of February 17, 1864, the Confederacy's H. L. Hunley sank the USS Housatonic and became the first submarine in world history to sink an enemy ship. Not until World War I half a century later would a submarine again accomplish such a feat. But also perishing that moonlit night, vanishing beneath the cold Atlantic waters off Charleston, South Carolina, was the Hunley and her entire crew of eight. For generations, searchers prowled Charleston's harbor, looking for the Hunley. And as they hunted, the legends surrounding the boat and its demise continued to grow. Even after the submarine was definitively located in 1995 and recovered five years later, those legends—those barnacles of misinformation—have only multiplied. Now, in a tour de force of document-sleuthing and insights gleaned from the excavation of this remarkable vessel, distinguished Civil War era historian Tom Chaffin presents the most thorough telling of the Hunley's story possible. Of panoramic breadth, this Civil War saga begins long before the submarine was even assembled and follows the tale into the boat's final hours and through its recovery in 2000. Beyond his thorough survey of period documents relating to the submarine, Chaffin also conducted extensive interviews with Maria Jacobsen, senior archaeologist at Clemson University's Warren Lasch Conservation Center, where the Hunley is now being excavated, to complete his portrait of this technological wonder. What emerges is a narrative that casts compelling doubts on many long-held assumptions, particularly those concerning the boat's final hours. Thoroughly engaging and utterly new, *The H. L. Hunley* provides the definitive account of a storied craft.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This lively account of the first submarine to sink an opposing ship is an excellent niche history. Chaffin (*Sea of Gray*) relates that H.L. Hunley was neither soldier nor engineer, but an adventurous New Orleans attorney turned exporter who wanted to make his fortune selling the submarine he developed with several partners to the Confederate Navy. After two unsuccessful tests, in 1863 a third submarine performed decently, but the unenthusiastic local commander extolled its virtues to General Beauregard, who agreed to commission a submarine. It was shipped to Charleston, S.C., where it sank twice during testing, drowning both crews—including Hunley himself. In February 1864, the submarine, named the H.L. Hunley, finally sank a Union blockader with its torpedo but never returned. The event assumed mythic status, culminating in great excitement when divers exhumed the wreck in 2000. Chaffin finishes with a lucid description of the impressive details of this splendid artifact of engineering. Sampling from letters, articles and memoirs, the author succeeds in separating facts from legend in this engrossing examination of a pioneering weapon of war. Maps. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

“The boldest and most powerful book yet written on the saga of the H. L. Hunley. Each detail is sharply etched and dramatically told for a compelling read. The H. L. Hunley is a classic of Civil War history.” —Clive Cussler  
“Tom Chaffin’s study is the most thorough treatment of the subject . . . [This] detailed and entertaining book about early naval submersibles will inform students, scholars, and general readers.” —Joseph G. Dawson III, *Journal of American History*  
“Combining a masterful command of his subject with a novelist’s flair for weaving a good story, Chaffin takes readers on an intriguing journey centered on one of the landmark events in maritime history . . . The preeminent volume on the subject.” —Mike Bunn, Alabama  
Review “Chaffin’s skillful integration of historic documentation and the archaeological materials illuminates how vital both sources are in gaining a clearer understanding of the past . . . An authoritative text on the vessel.” —Michael Christopher Tuttle, *Journal of Military History*  
“Dramatic, well-written and filled perhaps overfilled with fascinating information, Chaffin’s chronicle of the H. L. Hunley belongs on the bookshelf of every military history aficionado.” —Chris Patsilelis, St.

Petersburg Times

“The H. L. Hunley is a revelation.”

•William McKeen, Creative Loafing

“The H. L. Hunley is not only the most up-to-date book about the unusual craft, it is also the most readable and accessible. If there is a Civil War or local history buff on your Christmas list this year, you could hardly do better than to present them with a copy of this book.”

•John Sledge, Mobile Press-Register (Alabama)

“The volume can stand as the best available to date.”

•William H. White, Sea History

“Detailed and fascinating . . . Tom Chaffin has produced what may be considered the most exhaustive and accurate account of the submarine and the men who built her in his new book *The H. L. Hunley: The Secret Hope of the Confederacy*. Given the iron-fisted control the Confederacy exerted over the media to preserve its military secrets and a dearth of official or personal correspondence on the matter, Chaffin faced a daunting task in piecing together his history, but his hard work pays off here in a rich and lively book about visionaries, mercenaries and a technological marvel.”

•John G. Nettles, Flagpole (Athens, GA)

“[A] brisk retelling . . . Civil War historian Chaffin reconstructs the mythic, short journey of the first submarine in world history to sink an enemy ship.”

•Teresa Weaver, Atlanta (A Best of the Georgia Shelf pick)

“A smoothly narrated and comprehensive story of a lost ship in a lost cause.”

•Rob Hardy, U.S. Naval Academy Alumni Association & Foundation

“The H. L. Hunley: The Secret Hope of the Confederacy is narrative history at its most readable and remarkable.”

•Leonard Gill, Memphis Flyer

“[A] grand and sweeping story of the Hunley’s origins and the creative, brave men behind it.”

•Mike Walker, North Florida News Daily

“A captivating history of the Civil War-era Confederate submarine.”

•Myles Hutto and John Stoehr, Charleston City Paper

“Tom Chaffin tells the story of the Hunley’s design and construction, the fateful battle and loss of both [the Hunley and the USS Housatonic], and the discovery and raising of the submarine in *The H. L. Hunley*, composing a narrative that crackles with excitement and suspense.”

•Fredric Koepfel, The Commercial Appeal (Memphis, TN)

“A first-class recounting of the Hunley, from its roots in New Orleans to the first—and failed—submarine at Mobile, Ala., to two foundering during trials and training at Charleston and finally to the submarine itself.”

•Jules Wagman, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

“Avoiding uninformed speculation, Chaffin crafts an exciting narrative of an important innovation in military technology and the political considerations that shaped its development. Insightful and intriguing, meriting a place toward the front of the squadron of Civil War, naval and aquatic archeology titles.”

•Kirkus Reviews (starred

review)“ Sampling from letters, articles and memoirs, the author succeeds in separating facts from legend in this engrossing examination of a pioneering weapon of war. Publishers Weekly“ A definitive reading of the submarine’s forensic evidence. Garden & Gun magazine“ This outstanding piece of scholarship and clear writing will answer most questions and lay to rest most legends about the famous Confederate submarine, the first of its kind to sink an enemy warship . . . The research that went into this book was also exhaustive (it is also unbiased), but it doesn’t make the book exhausting. Altogether, “the secret hope of the Confederacy” is now a good deal less secret, and Civil War collections can fill many gaps with a single purchase. Roland Green, Booklist“ Fueled by obsessive scholarship and a boyish sense of wonder, Tom Chaffin takes us deep down into uncharted fathoms of the Civil War and then surfaces with a finny, fascinating tale that’s equal parts Shelby Foote and Jules Verne. Hampton Sides, author of Blood and Thunder“ There is no more compelling human or high-tech story in the annals of the Civil War than the saga of the remarkable H. L. Hunley and its brave, ill-fated crew. Drawing on a vast archive of original sources and an abundance of interpretive skill, Tom Chaffin has crafted an informed, dramatic page-turner. This is authoritative military history that reads like a novel. Harold Holzer, chairman of the USS Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and coauthor of The Confederate Image“ Chronicling this multifaceted story of the Confederacy’s secret hope, Tom Chaffin has answered many of the mysteries surrounding the H. L. Hunley. With an extensive examination of primary documents, he has taken on the mythologizers, offering instead an extraordinary contribution to historical understanding. Orville Vernon Burton, author of The Age of Lincoln“ The author provides a complete history of the Hunley as well as biographical sketches of the individuals involved in its financing, design, construction, and operation . . . Utilizing a variety of published and unpublished source materials, as well as interviews with the Lasch Conservation Center archaeologists tasked with the vessel’s excavation and preservation, Chaffin also dispassionately examines the many myths and mysteries surrounding the Hunley. The relative viability of competing theories, among them inquiries into the mythical “blue light,” the location of the wreck, how the submarine was lost, etc., is addressed, often raising more questions than answers. With well-supported conclusions and appealing writing, The H. L. Hunley will serve as a fine introductory book for the interested general reader, as well as a handy resource for the more dedicated students of the Civil War navies. Andrew Wagenhoffer, Civil War Books and

Authors – “An excellently written and well-documented account of a piece of Civil War history . . . Of the numerous [Hunley] books to appear in recent years, Tom Chaffin’s *The H. L. Hunley: The Secret Hope of the Confederacy* emerges as the best.” – Steven Ramold, *Civil War Book Review* – “A well-written and interesting volume.” – Kenneth D. Williams, *Civil War News* – “A satisfying read for Civil War buffs or naval buffs, for those who know much, or nothing, about the epic tale of the H. L. Hunley.” – *The Valdosta Daily Times* – *The H. L. Hunley* is an alternate selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club, History Book Club, and Military Book Club.

I had a sinking feeling as I read Tom Chaffin’s preface to his “The H.L. Hunley.” He was explaining the lack of archival material that was available for his account of the first submarine in history to sink an enemy warship. From that I expected another fluffy history that would be full of conjecture, exaggeration, and writer-induced fantasy. It turns out that I was pleasantly surprised with a riveting and scholarly tale of enterprise and tragedy that didn’t need embellishment. The “H.L. Hunley” was actually the third submarine constructed by a group of Southern patriots who wanted to produce underwater boats that could effectively break the Federal blockade of southern ports. The first two failed, eventually sinking, before actual engagement was made with Union ships. Fortunately the crew members escaped with their lives, but the mishaps raised questions about the idea and slowed the flow of additional funds for future attempts. The three developers of the “H.L. Hunley,” and the two boats preceding her, were intrepid and strong-willed, never straying from their goal. Horace Hunley was probably the most tenacious and productive, continually pursuing financial backing and political support from a Confederate government that was always short of money. It was his single-mindedness that got his name attached to the last submarine boat manufactured by the group and the chance to command it during one of its trial voyages. It cost him his life. The “Hunley” had its share of misfortunes during its development. Five of the eight crewmen perished when the “Hunley” sank during a trial run in August 1863, apparently from an open hatch. The boat was raised, only to sink again in October 1863 because of operational error. This time all eight crew members, including Hunley, died. The boat was raised once again, retrofitted, and sent out once more, this time for an actual encounter with the enemy. Chaffin’s book is a remarkable study of an effort, seemingly hopeless from the start, that finally achieved its objective with the sinking of the war sloop “USS Housatonic” in the frigid waters off Charleston, South Carolina, on February 17, 1864. The entire crew of eight went down with the boat when it sank, probably due to a mechanical malfunction, after the successful torpedoing. The vessel’s wreckage was found in 1995 and, after

long wrangling over ownership rights, was raised from the depths of Charleston's waters in 2000. Excavation was commenced and the crew members' remains were slowly found and removed, the final body being exhumed by the end of 2002. In April 2004, a stately funeral procession was held through downtown Charleston. The remains of the eight crew members were interred in Magnolia Cemetery, joining the bodies of Hunley and his seven sailors who were buried there after they perished in the second sinking. Subsequently all of them were joined by the five crew members who died in the first sinking of the "H.L. Hunley" whose bodies were relocated from a cemetery that was displaced by urban sprawl. Tom Chaffin does a wonderful job of accumulating the available information, assembling it into a lucid format, delving into the many details about its development, and providing a fascinating story of Civil War times not familiar to most of us. I recommend this book for those interested in Civil War history, enterprise, and human perseverance. It's engrossing, entertaining, and extremely readable. Schuyler T Wallace Author of TIN LIZARD TALES

Not quite my favorite book on the fascinating subject of the Hunley, but definitely belongs in the reading list of anyone with an interest in the subject. The frontispiece has some really cool diagrams of the Hunley's actual construction based on modern measurements, which differ substantially from the various models & pictures of the past. To my dismay, Chaffin debunks some of the widely accepted & romantic myths (especially the role of Queenie Bennett) surrounding the Hunley, but at the same time provides more up-to-date information than that provided in Hick's version. The two authors take a totally different approach to the subject, & their different styles & opposing attitudes provide fresh insight for any devotee. While both Chaffin & Hick's books provide maps of the Charleston area, including locations of the sinkings, their maps do not agree. Having visited Fort Sumter myself, I prefer the maps in Hicks' book. In my opinion neither author gives enough credit to the full story of how the wreck was discovered by famed nautical author Clive Cussler. Fortunately Cussler has written his own account of the discovery, which should rank alongside the works of both Hicks & Chaffin for any aficionado of the Hunley saga.

By far the most in depth study of the total background of the early development of submersibles as a war weapon to be used against surface vessels. This book covers early concepts and attempts in the development of the "submarine" variously known by other labels that describe a weapon that travels beneath the waves. It does an excellent job of providing the reader with an in depth study of the men and circumstances that developed a submersible that was capable of transporting men and an explosive device that was successfully used against a Federal Blockade vessel causing both the

Federal ship's destruction and the still mysterious circumstances whereby the Confederate submarine and its crew being lost at sea. It provides very interesting reading about the final relocation, recovery, and archeological investigation of the Hunley today. A must read for anyone interested in the Civil War's little known aspect of combat.

This is a great recap of the complete story from concept and development of the Confederate Sub during the Civil War to the discovery and recovery of the vessel after being sunk in Charleston harbor for nearly 150 years. Had to have this book after visiting the research facility in North Charleston that now houses the H.L. Hunley and includes an excellent related museum presentation.

The Hunley was one of the first submarines and it was developed in Mobile, AL by the Confederate States. Then loaded on a train and taken to South Carolina. Hunley invented the sub and tested it...costing him his life. Then another crew of eight men tried to make this Hunley work and destroyed a Union warship...the Hunley was damaged and sank killing its crew of eight. Recently the sub was found and is on display in SC. The crew members were finally buried with military honors recently and these were some of the bravest men I have heard of. To get in this sub that had killed its crew before...was a scary and risky adventure at best. This sub was far ahead of its time and the beginning of the modern submarines in America.

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