



SEARCH FOR THE SCORPION

MARYLAND ONE STEP CLOSER TO IDENTIFICATION OF WAR OF 1812 VESSEL

Archaeologists Explore Patuxent River for Joshua Barney's USS Scorpion; Part of War of 1812 Bicentennial Celebration

(Wednesday, August 3, 2011) - Along the hushed waters and peaceful wetlands just upstream from the MD 4 Bridge over the Patuxent River, a barge with archaeologists donned in scuba gear is the only visible evidence of the turmoil wrought by the British nearly two centuries ago. Today researchers are one step closer to identifying a War of 1812 shipwreck as Commodore Joshua Barney's flagship, USS Scorpion. After scuttling his flotilla, Barney marched on to defend our nation's capital in the Battle of Bladensburg. In phase II of the Search for Scorpion, US Navy and Maryland archaeologists are excavating, mapping, and filming the vessel thought to be Barney's flagship-- a veritable time capsule as Maryland prepares for the War of 1812 Bicentennial.

In partnership with the Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission, archaeologists from the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT), the US Navy (USN) and Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) have initiated a second season of surveying for a War of 1812 shipwreck in the shallows of the Patuxent River near Upper Marlboro in Prince George's County. The Commission, formed by Governor Martin O'Malley, is planning a multi-year cultural tourism and educational initiative to commemorate Maryland's contributions to the defense and heritage of the nation.

The survey began last summer as the archaeologists employed a magnetometer, an instrument that detects metal objects, to relocate the 200-year-old submerged ship. Archaeologists then used a more precision-based instrument called a hydroprobe to pinpoint the wreck location and further delineate the site. For the last several weeks, through the dense, dark waters, archaeologists have been dredging off the thick layer of sand overlying the wreck in order to locate the bow, stern, and dimensions of the shipwreck. These measurements will help direct the placement of a cofferdam in 2012 or 2013. At that time, the dam will be dewatered and archaeologists will be able to dig the wreck as a dry site. The full excavation of the ship and the retrieval of personal belongings will reveal whether this artifact is indeed

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USS Scorpion or one of Barney's gun barges. Whichever the case, it will be the first time this symbolic vessel has been seen since its deliberate sinking 200 years ago.

"The story of Joshua Barney and his flotilla men is among the most inspirational, but little-known stories of the War of 1812 in the Chesapeake," said Bill Pencek, Executive Director of the Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission. "Heroic Marylanders-- native, foreign born, and African American—fought side by side and were the last to stand in the defense of the nation's capital at Bladensburg."

In August 1814, Barney's flotilla retreated to the shallow waters of the Patuxent River, where the British Navy set up a blockade trapping them. Rather than allow British capture and use of the vessels against American troops, Barney issued the order to scuttle or sink the boats, which were left to their watery grave beneath the brown waters.

"We know that the Revolutionary War hero Joshua Barney led a flotilla of 18 ships, and Scorpion was eventually scuttled and burned to prevent British capture when a British fleet blockaded the flotilla. Making a bold decision following scuttling his flotilla Barney marched his men to the Battle of Bladensburg as the final bastion of resistance prior to the eventual conflagration of Washington on August 24-25, 1814 by British forces. The engagement with the British near Bladensburg ended with the crews from the flotilla running out of ammunition and Joshua Barney's capture as a prisoner after suffering a bullet wound," said retired Rear Adm. Jay Deloach, Director of Naval History and Heritage Command. The War of 1812 ended with the signing of The Treaty of Ghent in 1815.

The search for the USS Scorpion project is partially funded through the federal Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP), which funds non-traditional, community-based transportation-related projects. Findings from the excavation will support the Star Spangled Banner Byway, as well as other heritage tourism efforts throughout the State. The Governor determines which projects qualify for funding based on need and potential benefit to the public. The Maryland Department of Transportation's State Highway Administration oversees the federal program, which has awarded more than \$185 million for 232 projects in Maryland since the TEP program began in 1991.

Follow the search <http://www.scorpionarchaeology.blogspot.com/>

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Editor's Note: Reporters are invited to meet with archaeologists at the site on Thursday, August 4th and Friday, August 5th. Availability is extremely limited, first come first serve, by appointment only.

Arrangements made only through SHA's Office of Communications at 410-545-0303.