



Md. Seeks War of 1812 Time Capsule in Search for USS Scorpion

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Archaeologists Explore Patuxent River in Prince George's County for Joshua Barney's Flotilla; Part of War of 1812 Bicentennial Celebration

(August 4, 2010) – Beneath the waters made murky by recent heavy rains, archaeologists are uncovering remnants of the dramatic events preceding the bloody four-hour Battle of Bladensburg during the War of 1812. Archaeologists from the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT), the US Navy (USN) and Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) are surveying for a War of 1812 shipwreck in the shallows of the Patuxent River upstream from Pig Point (now Bristol), near Upper Marlboro in Prince George's County.

With high-tech equipment, archaeologists are mapping an underwater area thought to be the resting place of the USS Scorpion or other War of 1812 vessel that was deliberately sank or "scuttled" to prevent British capture and use against American forces. First the teams used a magnetometer, an instrument that detects metal objects such as cannons and anchors, to locate the general area of the wreck. Archaeologists then used a more precision-based piece of equipment called a hydroprobe, which pinpoints the wreck location using a linear series of one inch diameter jets of water to further delineate the site.

On June 1, 1814, Barney's Chesapeake Flotilla came face-to-face with ships from the British Navy. After pursuing the lead British ship, the HMS St. Lawrence, Barney's flotilla retreated to the shallow waters of the Patuxent River, where the British Navy set up a blockade trapping them. "We know that the Revolutionary War hero Joshua Barney led a flotilla of eighteen ships, and that 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," stated Admiral Jay DeLoach, Director of Naval History and Heritage Command. The War of 1812 ended with the signing of The Treaty of Ghent in 1815.

Underwater archaeologists are now excavating two, six ft by ten ft test units in an attempt to identify what part of the shipwreck they are on. Over the next two years, the archaeologists will continue their testing of the site to help direct the placement of a coffer dam in 2012. The cofferdam, a temporary watertight enclosure, will allow the archaeologists to excavate the wreck as a dry site. The information gleaned from the excavation will be incorporated into the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail and Byway as America commemorates the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812. These findings will further supplement Maryland's extensive contributions to the international celebration, estimated to

draw hundreds of thousands of visitors to Maryland and generate more than \$1 billion in tourism spending over the 32-month bicentennial period. An up-to-date blog follows the progress of operations at <http://www.scorpionarchaeology.blogspot.com/>.

"Commodore Joshua Barney was a bright light of both America's fight for independence and the War of 1812 and the archeological investigation of his flagship, Scorpion, provides an unparalleled opportunity to reach into the past and bring him into the 21st century. The knowledge gained from this project will endure beyond the bicentennial commemoration of the War of 1812 and enrich both present and future generations," said J. Rodney Little, State Historic Preservation Officer and Director of the Maryland Historical Trust.

"The story of Joshua Barney and his flotillamen 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." Governor Martin O'Malley issued an Executive Order September 8, 2007 to create the Maryland War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission. The Commission is planning a multi-year cultural tourism and educational initiative to commemorate Maryland's unique contributions to the defense and heritage of the nation including the pivotal clash that ensured American victory, an iconic flag, and our national anthem, The Star-Spangled Banner.

Archaeologists and project managers convened at Mount Calvert Historical and Archaeological Park to introduce the project and launch a boat tour to the Search for the Scorpion excavation site. One of the most significant historical and archaeological sites in Prince George's County, the site represents more than 8000 years of human culture, including the War of 1812 period.

"One of the most significant discoveries we hope to complete during the 2012 War of 1812 bicentennial is the documentation of the ship's unknown architecture. Historically, Scorpion was redesigned and reconstructed several times yet the final configuration of the ship remains undocumented. Our underwater archeology team hopes to recover lanterns, early surgical instruments, personnel effects, and ship supplies. Indeed, this project will greatly broaden our comprehensive understanding concerning the advancement of naval warship technology during the War of 1812," said Admiral Jay DeLoach, Director of Naval History and Heritage Command.

The search for the USS Scorpion project is partially funded through the Transportation Enhancement Program (TEP), which funds non-traditional, community-based transportation-related projects. 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.

Source: Maryland State Highway Administration