

Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable Via Teleconference With Robert S. Neyland, Underwater Archaeologist and Head of the Underwater Archaeology Branch, Naval History and Heritage Command Subject: Excavation of the USS Scorpion, a Navy Ship from the War of 1812 Time: 12:01 p.m. EDT Date: Wednesday, October 19, 2011

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PETTY OFFICER WILLIAM SELBY (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): And hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, October 19th, 2011. My name is Petty Officer William Selby with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating the call today.

We are honored to have as our guest Dr. Bob Neyland, who is an underwater archaeologist for the Navy, who will discuss the excavation process for the USS Scorpion. And sir, with that, if you have an opening statement, the floor is yours. BOB NEYLAND: OK. Well, thank you, Petty Officer Selby.

It's a pleasure to be here and talk about the War of 1812 and underwater archaeology. And just in general, the Department of the Navy -- well, we're still the owner-manager of some 3,000 shipwrecks and some 12,000 aircraft wrecks. And those are managed here under Naval History and Heritage Command and by the Underwater Archaeology Branch, which is -- I'm head of that branch. And so we deal with shipwrecks from Continental Navy well up through World War II.

And also we have a Commemorations Division here that has been stood up to commemorate War of 1812 and other historic events pertaining to the Navy's history.

And with that said, we looked at a project, an archaeological project, you know, specifically for the War of 1812, and the one that stood out was looking at where this scuttled fleet of barges and gunboats is located very near Washington, D.C., in the Patuxent River, and just -- which is about -- it's about 30 minutes -- well, down Pennsylvania Avenue -- it's about 30 minutes from D.C. and probably 20, 30 minutes from Annapolis and about 40 (minutes) from Baltimore.

But to back up a little bit about the history of this, the -- during the War of 1812 the Navy did not have a blue-water navy or sufficient blue-water navy to keep the British off of our shores and out of the Chesapeake Bay, so that the British could come into the bay area, could send landing parties ashore both on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake and Western Shores, and pillage and burn and generally harass the public and make so much as trouble as possible.

And that was -- they -- their mission or their goal was twofold, was to open up a second front, besides the Canadian front, and also to do as much harm as they could to the American economy, making the war not -- not very -- not popular in the Chesapeake.

Of course, you know, it -- and you can imagine the alarm of the citizens along the Chesapeake Bay and -- at having, you know, British troops come ashore, take their property, you know, burn their fields, their -- destroy their houses as well, and take the ships as well too, and capture them, capture their merchant ships and take them away.

Joshua Barney was a hero from the American Revolution, a naval hero, and he came up with a plan to build a flotilla of barges and gunboats, and to help protect the Chesapeake, to -- that would be shallow draft and that could harry the larger British ships, the frigates and sloops and such that couldn't operate well in the shallow waters.

And one advantage of this is these barges could be built fairly -- they were not big ships, so they could be built fairly rapidly. And they could be oared by sailors as well in the shallow waters, thus propelled, you know, without -- without necessarily always needing a sail. And anyway, this plan was accepted by the secretary of the Navy, and a fleet of 13 barges or gunboats were built -- eventually, this -- a fleet of 15.

Some of them were used -- some of the older Jeffersonian gunboats.

His flagship was a converted gunboat, had been built in 1806, been refitted in Norfolk, then refitted again in Baltimore. And it was named the USS Scorpion. And we don't know -- it was called a block sloop, but we really don't know a whole lot about the construction of it other than it was one of the larger sloop brig vessels.

But anyway, they fought a couple of engagements with the British. And the British themselves were also trying to build shallow water vessels, barges so that they could operate in the -- in the rivers along the bay and in shallow waters. They fought a -- an engagement at Cedar Point, which was kind of a running engagement between British -- between Barney's flotilla and the British. It pretty much ended in a stalemate. Barney's flotilla was bottled up in the Patuxent River and then pursued by the British, but Barney successfully eventually fought a battle at -- with his sailors and Marine -- and with a contingent of Marines at St. Leonard's Creek and, you know, eventually escaped out of that creek and then back into the Patuxent River.

But again, he was forced to flee further up that river, eventually up above what's now Highway 4 at an area called -- above Pig Point. Some people know where, oh, the -- that little town of Wayson's Corner is. It's in that area right there. But I think -- but a lot of people probably in this area have crossed Highway 4. I have crossed the Patuxent River at Highway 4.

So there's where he eventually was ordered to scuttle his fleet on the approach of the British navy, and -- which did occur on August the 21st. This is a -- in sort of a prelude of the British landing their forces and then marching eventually to Washington, D.C., to burn Washington, D.C.

So by the time Barney had scuttled his fleet, he had taken most of his sailors and Marines and marched them eventually to the Washington Navy Yard to prepare for the British invasion here and then also eventually to Bladensburg outside -- which is a little town outside of Washington, D.C. There he fought a battle with the British, delaying their advance on Washington. And this was after militia -- the larger American militia had fled. Barney continued to fight and, you know, repulsed the British -- (inaudible) -- three times.

But by the end of that he had been outflanked. He was, himself, was seriously wounded, and most of his ammunition had spent. So he was -- but Barney was noted as a hero of the War of 1812 for his actions at Bladensburg as well as some of his actions -- naval actions at the Patuxent River.

Having said -- given this historical background, we -- one of the -- one of the ships from the flotilla -- of the scuttled flotilla of 15 -- of, well, 13 or more vessels was located back in the late '70s by a person, Don -- amateur archaeologists Don Schomette and Ralph Eshelman had located it, the vessel.

They verified that it was a War of 1812 vessel from -- because they recovered the parts of a surgeon's kit, of materials that were -- you know, were appropriate to the War of 1812. And they found a -- significantly, a cup, a grog cup, from one of the sailors in the flotilla, and the initials "C.W." were on that cup. And the only C.W. listed with Barney was an African-American sailor named Caesar Wentworth. And he was also assigned to a vessel -- to Barney's flagship, called The Scorpion. So, hence, that's part of the evidence that suggests the wreck we are looking at today is that of the -- of the Scorpion -- that and the surgeon's kit onboard.

We have been on the site two summers and have been doing some preliminary excavations of the wreck. And, you know, we discovered that the vessel itself is at least 75 feet in length, which is one of the larger vessels in the flotilla. It appears to be almost completely decked, and we were expecting -- which was a surprise, because we were expecting a -- kind of an open barge for the -- for rowers as well. Again, this may be another indication this is one of the larger vessels, such as the flagship. But -- and we recovered some more interesting artifacts, portions of the surgeon's kit and some of the -- some of the

crockery and things that would have been used, and bottles associated with that surgeon's kit.

We know that the scuttled -- when they scuttled the fleet, that the sailors did not have time to take their personal possessions and belongings. They were told to leave them in place because they were, you know, on a hurried march to Washington. And then Barney later tried to get his sailors compensated for the loss of their personal possessions.

So I think one interesting thing about this is that -- you know, being able to recover and look at these possessions and these artifacts, that we can say a lot about, you know, the average sailor who was serving with Barney, such as in the case of the cup that was found that had the C.W. initials and belonged to one of the African-American sailors.

Our plan for the commemoration of the War of 1812, which starts in 2012 and we go through 2014, is that in the year 2013, we will put a steel structure around the shipwreck, called a cofferdam, and then the water will be pumped out and then the excavation will take place. Instead of underwater, it will take place like a dry land excavation, which will perhaps allow, you know, more detailed recording of artifacts and the hull, but also allow for public viewing both on the site and by web camera as well. So what should be available -- should be viewable in 2013 is the entire 75-foot shipwreck from the War of 1812.

And with that, I'll stop and take some questions.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you very much, sir.

And did somebody else join?

Q: Yeah. John McCandless from Navy Log joined late. Sorry.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Oh, that's all right, John. Thank you very much for joining.

Well, you guys know the rules. Please remember to clearly state your name and blogger organization, and please keep your questions succinct. And if you're not asking a question, please keep your phone on mute.

Chuck, you were first, so you can go ahead with your questions.

Q: Thank you for taking our call, Doctor. Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal.

The naval engagement that the flotilla took part in, did they help in the sinking of any British vessels or any American vessels?

MR. NEYLAND: Well, the engagement took place at St. Leonard's Creek, which -- a tributary in the Patuxent. There were -- Barney left behind two gunboats. He left behind the two gunboats that

were the -- I think the slowest vessels; he had trouble with them previously. So those two vessels were lost.

They also -- and when Barney attacked the British fleet they had had (embattled ?) -- and he did seriously hold one of the vessels. Now what happened to that vessel is -- (inaudible) -- but what happened to it after that when it went back for repairs or it was latter scuttled, we don't know. I would assume, though, it was probably refloated and repaired.

Q: And when he scuttled the remaining 13 ships, were the cannons removed and used as part of his ashore fighting, or do you expect the cannon will be in the wreckage?

MR. NEYLAND: Well, I mean -- good question. It's a little uncertain. He did take some of the cannon with him, I believe, but he had -- and he had to get carriages from -- borrow carriages to mount them on as well.

The Marines, when they joined him at St. Leonard's Creek, they also brought out cannon(s) on carriages, light 18-pounders, I believe, or light 12-pounders. So he may have used those at Bladensburg. I think there -- you know, I'm a little fuzzy on if he actually used his Navy cannon or used some other -- because obviously the Navy guns would have been on naval carriages which would, you know, not have been conducive for using at Bladensburg, so he would have had to take his guns off and then mount them on more like a cavalry or more on wheeled carriages for that purpose.

So -- but we also know that after the battle that there was some salvage on the vessels, and principally they were trying to salvage things like the cannon, and I guess iron ballast was one of the things mentioned that they did salvage. The Navy came back and did some salvage on the vessels, and then there was a private salver that also came back and did some salvage, but apparently stopped when the Navy did not pay him for his trouble.

Q: OK, thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And John.

Q: John McCandless from the Navy blog. Thank you, Doctor.

MR. NEYLAND: (Inaudible.)

Q: The War of 1812, of course, was very much fought in Lake Erie and around. Last week we salvaged an iron cannon that the British had been transporting over to Windsor in lieu of not losing them. So it had been down there for 200 years. Have you done any exploration for ships in the Lake Erie area?

MR. NEYLAND: No, we haven't. I mean, we -- you know, as kind of the managers of the Navy shipwrecks, we're involved with the people that want to look at Navy wrecks. There has been some of that.

We've advised some with Parks Canada and the city of Hamilton on the two vessels that are in Lake Ontario, which is the Hamilton and the Scourge. I don't -- these are -- these were two vessels that -- oh, they were caught in a storm and they -- you know, they flipped over and sank in now about 300 -- eventually about -- settled in 300 feet of water in Lake Ontario.

And for whatever reason, they were transferred to the city of Hamilton in Canada, you know, back during the Carter administration, these -- except for the human remains that are onboard. And these vessels, we know that their -- you know, the crews -- most of the crews perished with them, and some of the remains of the crews are visible -- were visible on the bottom of the lake.

Q: Hmm.

MR. NEYLAND: And -- yeah. And these are -- these are beautiful. If no one's ever seen -- knows of these and are familiar with the history of them, if you go to the Web and look up, you know, the Hamilton and the Scourge and Lake Ontario, you'll see these amazing pictures of these perfectly -- perfect shipwrecks, what you expect to see when you, you know -- you know, you see -- (chuckles) -- a fantasy movie about underwater archaeology and sunken ships. Because they're sitting on their -- sitting on their keels, the decks are still in place, cannon -- carronades are still on the decks. Cutlasses are visible, stowed along the deck; (masters still ?) on the ships. And along some of the -- some of the wrecks, at least back in the -- I think it was back in the '70s when they were looked at, there are still human remains visible on the bottom.

Q: However --

Q: (Inaudible) -- these were obtained by remote submarine, rather than divers, because it was 300 feet?

MR. NEYLAND: Initially. Initially, Cousteau visited the site and -- with ROVs, we're told, as well, too. More recently, with the advance of technical diving, people can now dive --

Q: Right. MR. NEYLAND: -- on mixed gas to 300 feet, and so there have been some mixed-gas dives to this site. Parks Canada and the Canadian Navy and the city of Hamilton have mounted some expeditions to these sites over the last few years, using a Royal Navy ship -- I mean, I'm sorry, a Canadian Navy ship as a platform, and -- you know, and gone down with ROVs and gotten more documentation on the sites.

And one of the -- and of course, the commemoration is one reason for this. But also, there's a sense of urgency because the invasive species of Quagga mussels are now covering these shipwrecks.

Q: Oh. Thank you, sir.

MR. NEYLAND: OK.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And back to Chuck.

Q: Yes. Doctor, the presumed Scorpion wreck, is that in salt water or fresh water?

MR. NEYLAND: It's brackish. It is -- it's brackish water. So it's, you know, kind of the upper part of the Patuxent River, but the --

Q: You still get the tidal --

MR. NEYLAND: You do -- oh, yeah. Yeah, you got pretty -- pretty significant tides in there.

Q: OK. Is there a drawing or an illustration of the Scorpion available at all?

MR. NEYLAND: Well, there's not a good one. There's no -- you know, there's -- basically, no. There's no accurate representations of them. I think that's going to be one of the interesting things to discover about this is, you know, how these vessels were constructed, the hull form, hull dimensions, the framing as well. Even I know, in speaking with some of the Navy's -- NAVSEA's model builders, they were -- they were quite interested because there's a -- there's really not any good plans or models of these vessels. And so there's lots of questions about, you know, how some of these Chesapeake Bay vessels were built initially. So I think this will definitely answer for those interested in naval architecture, and I think this will certainly -- this vessel will certainly answer a lot of those questions.

Q: I see you've got a website on blogspot. Are those photos public domain, or are they copyrighted?

MR. NEYLAND: They would be -- they would be public domain -- (inaudible) -- anything on our --

Q: So I would be -- MR. NEYLAND: -- anything on our blogspot.

Q: I could use one in a story, then?

MR. NEYLAND: Yeah, mm-hmm. And if you need any others, just contact -- well, you can contact me or contact us here.

Q: OK. And one additional question. Any idea how many cannon in total were part of the flotilla, or how they were divided up?

MR. NEYLAND: Well, OK. Yeah, some of the smaller vessels maybe had a bow -- you know, just a bow and stern gun. Larger vessels maybe had -- having up to four guns, I believe. And this is -- I could be wrong. I expect I have to go back and check the facts. There was a mixture of guns.

There were both carronades and long guns. And I think some of the long guns went up to 12 -- from 12-pounders to as large as 42-pounders. And then I think some of the carronades were 24 to 42-

pounders. Some of those seem quite big to be on what you would think of as smaller, perhaps lighter-built vessels, and that's maybe an interesting question, too, is how they strengthened the hulls on these vessels to --

Q: So when you talk about a gun barge, you're talking about a platform with just a couple of cannon on it, not what we -- what I would consider a barge, like you see on the Mississippi or someplace, where you could mount literally a dozen or two dozen cannon.

MR. NEYLAND: Yeah. Yeah. This is more like a row galley. This is more like a large -- you'd see a large ship's boat, which could be rowed or sailed. And from the records, these supposedly ranged anywhere from, you know, 40 foot up to 75 feet, the smaller ones being around 40 feet, and then some others around in 50 feet in length, and then the larger ones, such as the one that we're looking at, is 75 feet.

Q: OK. Thank you.

MR. NEYLAND: I might also add that in the scuttled fleet, it wasn't just Barney's flotilla. There was apparently a number of Maryland merchant ships that had gone upriver too and were scuttled as well in there.

Q: But there's no possibility that you're looking at a merchant ship.

MR. NEYLAND: No. Not with a surgeon's kit on board. And, you know, the surgeons' kits -- the Navy had a limited number of those, and I think maybe only one was even assigned to Barney's flotilla. Also, the -- and there has been -- when there was as previous excavation, there have been some military artifacts recovered, some ordnance and stuff.

Q: Thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Somebody may have dropped out. John are you still there?

Q: I'm still here. MR. NEYLAND: Did you have some more questions?

Q: One more question. It's such a fascinating era and a 200-year commemoration, Doctor. I'm wondering how -- how your institution's kind of tying in with the educational -- the elementary and high schools around the country. Is there any way where, if a school wanted to participate, do you envision having a live webcam on your cofferdam activities or things of that nature?

MR. NEYLAND: Yes. Yes, that's being looked at. We've also been trying to incorporate what we're doing with the STEM program, and also using some university interns, as well, from the area and around the nation. But yeah, that certainly is part of it.

And that was part of the justification for doing this as a dry site rather than an underwater site, is that you can make it very visible through webcams and through bringing visitors actually physically out to the site. You have to bring them out by boat, but then can dock and they could look out and see what's going on and ask questions.

One of the projects I did, oh, gosh, 10 years ago now was recovery of the Confederate submarine Hunley.

Q: Oh, yeah.

MR. NEYLAND: And at that time we actually worked with -- South Carolina educational television came out and did live broadcasts, live interviews with the schools. We had several women scientists onboard too, involved too, that, you know, kind of -- they were just role models for some of the young ladies in schools, to talk about -- we had some women, female archeologists, scientists. We also had some forensic anthropologists looking at the human remains as well, too. And so I think that was really, you know, very interesting for all the school kids.

Q: Very good. The STEM program, I'm not familiar with that. What does the acronym stand for?

MR. NEYLAND: Ah, gosh, what is it? Science and Technology Education (sic) program.

Q: OK.

MR. NEYLAND: Yeah, it's --

Q: Right. OK.

MR. NEYLAND: The Navy is -- does a lot with it, other organizations, I believe, too, other federal agencies work with that, trying to encourage within the school systems science education. Q: Very good. Thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And Chuck, did you have any more questions?

Q: Well, yeah, just one more, Doctor. Somewhere in that immediate area, you've got at least a dozen shipwrecks.

MR. NEYLAND: Mmm hmm.

Q: Right?

MR. NEYLAND: That's correct, potentially that, as we would think so.

Q: Have you found any sign of any of the other ships, or is that the only one right now?

MR. NEYLAND: Right now that's the only one. And people have looked for some of the others in the flotilla over the years too and have not successfully found them. There are some other magnetic anomalies in the area.

And I might just point out, one way we would start looking for these wrecks is using remote sensing; you know, either sonar or magnetometry. And sonar works very well when things are above the mud line, at the bottom.

In this case, the wreck is completely buried, and probably others are as well, too. And so you have to use some other form of remote sensing. Using a magnetometer is probably the best -- most straightforward method, but there are things like subbottom profilers, the sonar that penetrates the sediment.

But I've also been talking with Professor Peter Guth at the United States Naval Academy about some of their existent -- different strategies we could -- we could use to try to look in the river, with the concept of trying to locate the other -- the other shipwrecks. And part of this might be twofold: first, trying to determine where the original river channel was in 1814, and then verify if -- you know, if these -- if -- you know, where these wrecks could be either within the channel or without.

There's some possibility that the channel has changed its course since that time, since 1814. And it could very well be that in a shallow river, having 13 ships sunk in one spot there could -- that could, you know, create a sandbar that could, in fact, change the course of the river. Just a thought.

Q: When they scuttled, would they have run the ships aground and set explosives? Would they have set them on fire?

MR. NEYLAND: Yes -- the latter, too. They would -- they set explosive charges, and they set the ships on fire. And in fact, the British Admiral Cockburn reports that he could see -- he could see the fleet burning from where he was located in the Patuxent River and that he could see the -- I guess the pinnet of the flagship, Scorpion, on fire.

Q: OK, so -- but they were -- they were -- because of the size of their ships, they were unable to come further up the river?

MR. NEYLAND: Well, that's true. They did send out longboats -- or they had barges. The British had also constructed barges to operate in the rivers, in the shallows. That's -- that would be their way of landing their troops and their weapons. And also, they could be more maneuverable, both for operations and for defending their ships to -- you know, in these shallow waters.

So the British had built barges. And in fact, the reason Barney first took his flotilla out was because he -- it was rumored that the British were building barges on Tangier Island in the Chesapeake, and he hoped to interrupt that. Q: OK. Thank you so much.

MR. NEYLAND: One thing I might add in this with underwater archaeology is that it is -- it does -- it mixes both science and history together so that you do have -- you know, where you use not -- you know, going to -- (inaudible) -- the science of archaeology, but all the artifacts that would come up. They can be very well-preserved in a marine environment. And you get -- we have, you know, recovered intact whole artifacts, and it -- you know, in glass and ceramics, but it's anticipated we would find, you know, leather shoes, perhaps some textile, wooden objects, of course.

And these things have -- you know, are in a -- you know, they look quite -- in quite remarkable condition. They have to be treated in certain ways to preserve them very quickly. So this involves materials science, conservation. And this project in itself involves the materials science, it involves engineering, it involves archaeology, involves chemistry, a certain amount of physics, and again -- as well as history. And this again gets into the educational process.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you very much, sir.

And John, you're good to go?

Q: Yes, I am. (Audio break) -- but thank you, Petty Officer Selby, and thank you, Doctor. Most interesting.

MR. NEYLAND: Oh, thank you. Thanks for the opportunity.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Chuck, did you have any more questions?

Q: I'm all set. And thank you so much, Doctor. Very interesting topic.

MR. NEYLAND: Well, thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Well, sir, with that, I'd like to wrap up today's call. And did you have any closing comments you'd like to make?

MR. NEYLAND: No, just that as the project progresses, I think it'd be very interesting for people to follow it. And we hope that in 2013 we'll be able to take people out to the site, both physically and virtually.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Sounds very interesting, sir.

Thank you, everybody who participated in the call today, especially Dr. Neyland. As we wrap up today's program, I'd like to let you know that we have source documents such as the audio file and print transcript that will be on dodlive.mil today. Again, thank you to everybody on the call. This concludes today's event. Feel free to disconnect at this time.

MR. NEYLAND: Thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you.

END.