Archaeology of the Battle of St. Leonard Creek

Archaeology

In 1979, during an archaeological project to find submerged sites in the Patuxent River, a number of boat framing timber were discovered jutting out of the river bottom. Underwater archaeologists removed the sand and silt from the timbers with an airlift revealing many remarkable artifacts. Among the objects recovered were the contents of a surgeon's kit, carpentry tools, a tin-plated half=pint drinking cup bearing the initials "CW", and a lantern with part of its wick still intact. These artifacts, currently on display at the Calvert Marine Museum, suggest that vessel was one of the Chesapeake Flotilla gunboats.

In 1996, the Maryland Historical Trust asked Donald Shomette to develop the "Chesapeake Flotilla Project" to locate the remaining gunboats of the flotilla. Following a side scan sonar survey of St Leonard Creek, researchers from the Maryland Historical Trust, the U.S. Naval Historical Center, and East Carolina University discovered two more vessels and, in 1998 and 1999, they were partially excavated. In 1814, Captain Joshua Barney, The Flotilla commander, had scuttled two gunboats in the shallow water of St. Leonard Creek before the rest of the flotilla's final escape up the Patuxent because he considered them slow and difficult to sail. The British later finished their destruction by setting the vessels on fire. The two boats found by underwater archaeologists exhibited telling burn marks.

Artifacts recovered from the site included .69 caliber musket shot (generally the caliber of American guns in the War of 1812) and .75 caliber musket shot (British caliber) and a brass button manufactured by a company that made military buttons during the war. The burn damage, vessel size, and location of the discovery, along with the types of artifacts that were recovered, all confirm that they are the American gunboats Barney scuttled.

Conservation

In 1999, artifacts recovered from the Chesapeake Flotilla Project underwater archaeology excavations were brought to the MAC Lab for conservation treatment. The objects were made of a range of materials including wood, iron, lead, and copper alloy. There were a total of 293 artifacts recovered, including a gun flint, grape shot, buttons, a buckle, sheathing nails, and boat timbers exhibiting burn marks. A variety of treatments were applied to these objects, ensuring that they would be preserved for future generations to study and observe.