



Black John - the Bogus Pirate



The First Submarine Attack

By John Joyce

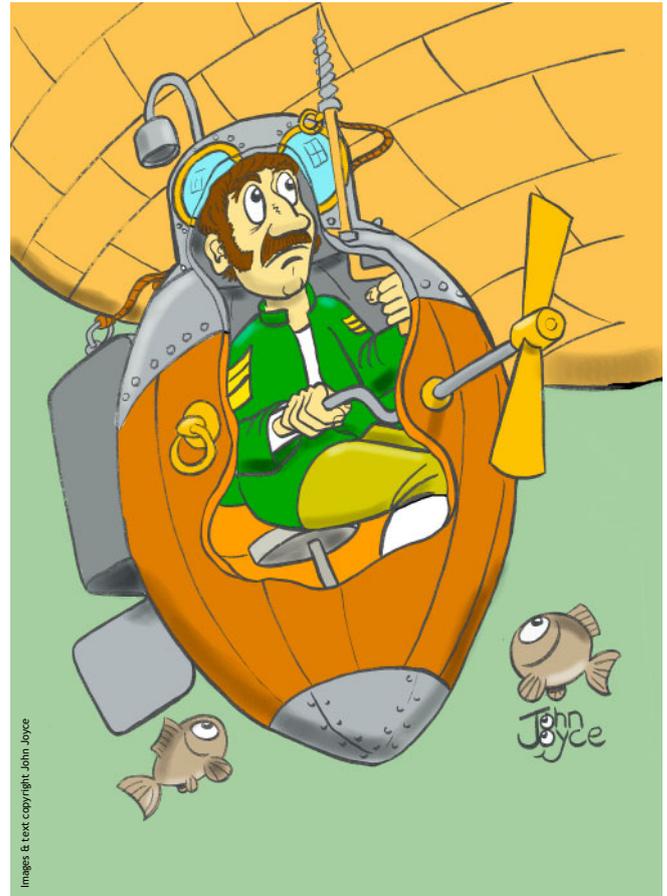
**Avast there, Mateys!
Believe it or not, a submarine was deployed against war ships
in the American War of Independence...**

The first submarine to ever be deployed against surface warships was not a modern vessel equipped with explosive torpedoes, but a wooden shell little bigger than a coffin and powered by the strength of its one operator. During the American War of Independence (1775-83) the British Navy had blockaded Charleston Harbour, South Carolina, causing food shortages and paralysing commerce. David Bushnell, who lacked a formal education until he was considered bright enough to enter Yale College at the age of 31, was interested in demonstrating how a gunpowder charge exploded under a warship would have a far more devastating effect than one exploded on the deck. Sponsored by the local Freemasons, who were losing fortunes thanks to the blockade, Bushnell developed the one-man submarine *Turtle*, designed to deliver an explosive 'time bomb' against the side of a warship and then escape.

The attack took place at Long Island Sound on the night of 6th September 1776 when, using his own muscle power and endurance, Sergeant Ezra Lee manoeuvred the *Turtle* beneath the British warship *HMS Eagle* and began turning the screw that would bore an anchor pin into the hull of the ship above from which the explosive mine would hang.

Unfortunately for Lee however, the hull of the British ship had been clad with thick copper sheeting to protect it from boring shipworm. Even after several attempts, Lee was unable to secure the explosive and had to withdraw abandoning the *Turtle*, which then sank.

Bushnell himself went on to develop other marine weapons, including floating mines—designed to drift down river, snag in the anchor cables of blockading warships and then explode. In practice, these tended to be released too far upstream from the target and were then spotted, upon which they could be destroyed with musket fire. Dispirited by his failures with the *Turtle* and the floating mines, Bushnell changed his name to Bush. He went on to study medicine and moved to Warrenton, Georgia, where he practiced as a doctor until his death in 1826. Though he would not live to see it, other ideas of Bushnell's, including a screw propeller and the use of water as ballast to provide stability in ships, are still in use today. Full-sized models of the *Turtle* are on display at the US Submarine Museum in Groton, Connecticut, the Oceanographic Museum of Monaco and in the Royal Navy Submarine Museum in Portsmouth in the UK.



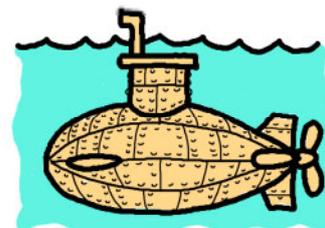
HOW TO DRAW A SUBMARINE



**DRAW
THE HULL**



**PUT ON THE
CONNING TOWER**



**ADD THE PLATING
AND PROPELLER**

Follow Black John the Bogus Pirate and his crew on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/BlackJohntheBogusPirate/>

© 2021 Sherkin Island Marine Station & its licensors. All rights reserved.