

## Arnold earns Silver Award for community service with Girl Scouts

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**Rabid skunk reported**  
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FRIDAY

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St. Mary's County, Maryland



## Tales from the deep

John Oldfield, volunteer diver with the Institute of Maritime History, checks out a sonar anomaly in the Potomac River near St. George Island as work continues to locate remnants of a fleet scuttled in the Revolutionary War.

PHOTO BY FRED ENGLE

Centuries worth of shipwrecks lie hidden in Southern Maryland waters

By JASON BABCOCK  
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"You never know what's below that surface," waterman John "Willy" Dean said in 2013 when he caught two bull sharks in his commercial nets in the Potomac River.

Among other things concealed by the murky tidal waters around Southern Maryland are dozens of shipwrecks, and that's just counting the ones that are known.

There are vessels sunk during the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, World War I and World War II, plus ships lost to storms or accidents during peacetime.

Mallows Bay off the Potomac River in Charles County has the highest visible assortment of wrecked ships. Their rotting hulls still line the bay, and the federal government is now considering making the area into a protected national marine sanctuary.

Farther down the Potomac, off the shores of St. Mary's County, the wreckage of the USS Tulip rests, accidentally blown up in November 1864 during the Civil War.

A German U-boat, U-1105 or the

"Black Panther," also rests on the bottom of the Potomac, off Piney Point. Intentionally sunk in 1946 after the U.S. Navy was done testing its rubbery coating, the sub is now a state historic shipwreck preserve.

Farther south a potential array of wreckage remains, scuttled during the Revolutionary War off St. George Island. Divers and researchers continue to study that site.

More than 30,000 vehicles travel between St. Mary's and Calvert counties every day on the Gov. Thomas Johnson Memorial Bridge. But few of their drivers know that an American submarine lies nearby at the bottom of the Patuxent River in the deepest part of the channel.

There are 266 known shipwrecks in Maryland's waters, though the suspected total right now is 320, said Susan Langley, state underwater archaeologist with the Maryland Historical Trust. There are 116 known wrecks in the waters around Charles County, including those at Mallows Bay; 32 around St. Mary's County and 12 off Calvert County, she said.

Fortunately, the days of pillaging

sport divers "are literally dying out," Langley said, and research can be done on the remains of shipwrecks. "Most folks get it now. It's not finders, keepers," she said.

Diving down to the U-1105 U boat in the Potomac River is challenging. It rests in 91 feet of dark and cloudy water. The surface if the water is 65 feet above its conning tower.

An even more challenging dive is in the Patuxent River — the resting place of the S-49 American sub.

The submarine is still the property of the U.S. Navy. "It's very deep. It's an awfully deep and dangerous dive, 113 feet [down] to the top of it," Langley said. In pitch-black darkness without a light and powerful currents, "this is not your crystal Caribbean resort dive," she said, and it is not recommended for most divers.

Southern Maryland author and diver Don Shomette had heard from local watermen of a sunken sub in the Patuxent. Tales said it was German and had treasure aboard.

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## Asst. sheriff tears into O'Connor

Commissioner files formal complaint

By JASON BABCOCK  
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St. Mary's County's assistant sheriff, Maj. John Horne, approached the microphone Tuesday at the St. Mary's County commissioners' budget meeting and let them have it — calling out Commissioner John O'Connor (R) specifically.

O'Connor filed an official complaint about Horne with the sheriff's office later this week.

The commissioners were reviewing the sheriff's of

fice revised budget request, which included \$1.7 million to go toward pay raises, and things were going along normally.

O'Connor, who worked as a Prince George's County police officer and retired as a lieutenant from the town of Brentwood's police department, scrutinized the vehicle replacement plan for the sheriff's office. Commissioner Todd Morgan (R)

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## For deputies, extra duties all part of the job

Commanders track their task load

By JOHN WHARTON  
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St. Mary's sheriff's Cpl. Brandon Foor had to go through a series of steps to become a sworn lawman, including starting out as a correctional officer. He still has his share of extra duties that go far beyond patrolling the county.

Collateral duties and

overtime pay for sheriff's deputies in St. Mary's have been drawn into the ongoing discussion of the agency's budget, the roughly two dozen staff vacancies and how extra tasks and salary issues compare with law-enforcement agencies in other

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### Making waves

SMCM sailing hosts regatta this weekend, off to great 2016 start

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## Commissioners trim school spending plan

County aims to fund \$96 million

By JASON BABCOCK  
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The St. Mary's County Board of Education has requested a budget of \$206.9 million for fiscal 2017, with \$103.1 million of that coming from the county commissioners.

On Tuesday, most of the commissioners agreed to

fund \$96 million next year, the minimum amount required by a state funding formula called maintenance of effort. However, the budget will not be finalized until May.

A separate request of \$2.9 million to buy new textbooks

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## Possible tax hikes part of budget discussions

Emergency services, solid waste fees eyed

By JASON BABCOCK  
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Some of the St. Mary's County commissioners continue to talk about reducing taxes. Even while Commissioner Mike Hewitt (R) says he still wants to reduce or eliminate the county's energy tax, there are now two tax increases up for consideration during the county government's budget de-

liberations.

A 1.2 cent hike is proposed in the emergency services support fund, and a \$12 increase is on the table for the solid waste and recycling fee. Both charges are added to St. Mary's property tax bills.

The commissioners are

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More than 100 shipwrecks are in Mallows Bay in the Potomac River off the west coast of Charles County. The area is now undergoing federal review to become a national marine sanctuary.

## SHIPWRECKS

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Shomette asked Pepper Langley, one of the founding fathers of the Calvert Marine Museum, about the story. Langley had worked at the Naval Mine Warfare Test Center in Solomons during World War II.

In Shomette's book, "History Beneath the Patuxent," Langley said of the sub, "She wasn't no Nazi, though. Navy boat she was. They had no use for it so they took it in this deep hole above Point Patience, and they sunk it in a hundred and twenty-six feet of water, mainly to give their divers something to train on and probably try to cut a hole in, rescue work, such as that. That's a very hazardous place where the water is squeezed down the most narrow of any place in the river, and creates an awful whirling tide."

The S-49 was one of dozens of its class of submarines produced between 1918 and 1922, Shomette wrote. The S-49 was commissioned on June 5, 1921, and was sent to Connecticut for service. It was decommissioned in 1927 after a fatal gas explosion the year before.

The S-49 was sold to the Boston Iron and Metal Co. in Baltimore in 1931 and was reduced to a hulk by that company in 1936, but not scrapped, according to the Naval History and Heritage Command, and "the hulk was reacquired seven years later, 'as equipment,' for use in experimental work" at Solomons.

"Soon after the onset of World War II she was accidentally sunk during testing off Point Patience and was finally abandoned," Shomette wrote, in late 1942 or early 1943.

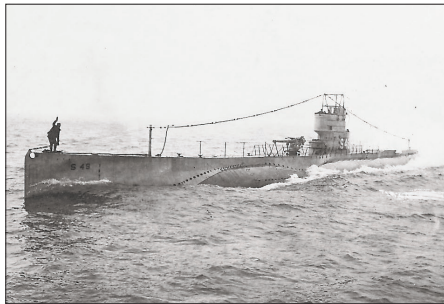
"Diving S-49 is for the advanced wreck diver only," wrote Henry C. Keatts and George C. Farr in their book, "Dive Into History, Vol. 2: U.S. Submarines."

"Due to bad visibility and black water, divers must use a powerful light, with a backup in case the primary light fails. Using a light provides visibility of about five feet on a good day. It is a night dive regardless of the hour," they wrote.

Describing a 1986 dive by Mike Moore, a Baltimore wreck diver, to find the sub, Keatts and Farr wrote, "Submarines, in general, are hard to hook. Their smooth sides, designed to slide past nets and mine cables, provide little for a grapple to catch."

Diving conditions are much better in the Potomac River off St. George Island, where the Institute of Maritime History is working to find any remnants of Lord Dunmore's fleet scuttled in the Revolutionary War.

In 1776 Virginia Royal Governor Lord Dunmore fled from Williamsburg to Norfolk. "Dunmore's float-



The S-49 was an American submarine in service in the 1920s, which now rests in the middle of the Patuxent River near Point Patience in 125 feet of water, sunk during World War II.

ing city" was chased by American forces from Norfolk to nearby Milford Haven at the mouth of the Potomac River in Virginia.

"The entire fleet was without water, and smallpox was running rampant," Shomette wrote in "Shipwrecks on the Chesapeake."

"It was thus deemed absolutely necessary that they retire to some isolated place where water could be procured in safety, and each vessel could be carefully examined. The nearest such place likely to answer these needs, Dunmore believed, was St. George Island, in the Potomac River," Shomette wrote.

"On July 16, protected by harassing gunfire from a hastily contrived but effective row galley, Dunmore's troops were landed on the island. They proceeded to throw up a breastwork, and began in earnest the search for fresh water. Much to Dunmore's distress, none was found," Shomette wrote.

There is a Maryland Historical Trust roadside marker on Route 249 at St. George Island titled "British Landing Prevented."

Dunmore decided in late July to head for Florida, and some ships were intentionally burned on Aug. 2, 1776. "Within hours, the remnants of Dunmore's floating town — once ninety ships strong, but now reduced to nine vessels — hoisted anchors and set sail down the bay," Shomette wrote.

"We do not know how many vessels were burned," said David Howe of the Institute of Maritime History, a nonprofit organization based in Tall Timbers. "The archives disagree, with estimates ranging from eight to 23-plus."

There is a list of vessels that arrived at St. George Island, "but we do not know which ones were burned, where they were burned side by side or were scattered all around the island in the Potomac, the St. Mary's and/or St. George Creek," he said.

"None of the vessels has been mapped or even located," he said. Doing the work for free and when they can find time, volunteers with the institute have seen anomalies

using side-scan sonar and magnetometers. The sites will have to be manually investigated by divers and "that work will take several years," Howe said. "After 240 years, the most we can hope to find are ballast stones and burned wood, and perhaps some artifacts."

If the institute can find evidence of ballast stones and burned wood, "it will be the first documented underwater war site in Maryland from the Revolution," Howe said.

The institute has been working on the east side of the island, but Howe doesn't want to get too specific in order to avoid any looting by divers. "Much of the area has been dredged and tonged for oysters, so surviving wreckage may be scattered," he said.

Diving in the Potomac is muddy with some current depending on the tide, he said. "Occasionally we get a good day with visibility of 6 to 8 feet, but more often it is 2 to 4 feet, until you touch something and stir up the sediment, when it drops to zero," he said.

The location of the shipwrecks of Mallows Bay, farther north along the Potomac River, is no secret.

It is the site of the largest and most varied assemblage of historic shipwrecks in the United States, covering three centuries of history, according to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is now considering making the area into a national marine sanctuary and full designation is expected in the spring of 2017, said Kelly Collins of the Chesapeake and Coastal Service with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

There are known vessels in Mallows Bay spanning from the Revolutionary War to the present, including the remains of the largest "ghost fleet" of wooden steamships from World War I, according to NOAA.

During that war, President Woodrow Wilson in 1917 called for 1,000 American boats to be built in 18 months. The war with Germany ended before any of those ships

crossed the ocean, but the slow work continued at 58 shipyards in 16 states.

Some of the surplus ships were then put into storage on the Virginia side of the Potomac River.

"The flotilla of ghost vessels first gained national prominence shortly after the first World War when two of the hulks ... were swept from their moorings by storm and driven onto the airport at the Quantico Marine Base," The Baltimore Sun reported on July 11, 1943.

"The Navy was outraged and demanded that something be done about the stray ships. When no one claimed the vessels, the Navy ordered their anchor chains cut and had them towed to the Maryland shore and secured there for good — at a safe distance from the Quantico airfield."

"The destruction of the ships subsequently was undertaken, under government contract by a large salvage firm, but the project shortly was abandoned. The Navy promptly had the vessels burned to water level and forgot about them," The Sun reported.

In 1943, the federal government attempted salvaging 11,000 tons of scrap metal out of Mallows Bay.

"A spectacular engineering job, involving the use of an array of costly machinery, the salvaging has proceeded almost unnoticed for nine months," The Sun reported.

After three months of work, 750 tons of scrap metal had been recovered by October 1943, but work didn't last much longer as it was too costly.

By the 1960s, the ships were seen as blight and a hazard to navigation. Taking a helicopter tour of Mallows Bay in 1964, Rep. Carlton R. Sickles (D-Md.) said, "The abandoned ships are not only a hazard to navigation, they also constitute a severe eyesore in the surrounding area."

In 1968, Congress authorized \$175,000 to remove the ship remains, but required "local interests" to match that money.

A "dummy" corporation for Pepco owned nearby land, secretly intended for a power plant which never came about. "When it was disclosed last April that Pepco owned the adjacent land, Maryland announced it would not pay the matching funds," The Washington Post reported on Dec. 18, 1970.

That year, the federal government recognized that the old ships at Mallows Bay had become beneficial to local fish and wildlife. A federal government operations subcommittee on conservation and natural resources recommended Mallows Bay should be left as it was.

"Seen from the river," the committee's report said, the ship hulks "look like small islands. Seen from the air, some of the hulks look like huge flower pots."

## Death notices

**Michael Eric Adams**, 44, of Lexington Park, MD passed away on March 11, 2016. Mattingley-Gardiner Funeral Home, P.A. Leonardtown, MD.

**Troy Alexander English** (T-roy or "Big Guy"), 20, of Patuxent River, MD, was called home to be with the Lord Jesus Christ on March 10, 2016. Arrangements by Briscoe-Tonic Funeral Home.

**Steven Keith Benfield**, 49, of Mechanicsville, MD passed away on March 13, 2016. Mattingley-Gardiner Funeral Home, P.A., Leonardtown, MD.

**Aurora Suarez**, 76, of Lexington Park, MD, passed away on March 13, 2016 at MedStar Washington Hospital Center. Arrangements: Brinsfield Funeral Home, P.A., Leonardtown, MD.

**Linda Jean Manson**, 68, of Mechanicsville, MD, passed away on March 13, 2016. Mattingley-Gardiner Funeral Home, P.A.

**Mary Catherine Ellis "Bitsy"**, 78, of Bushwood, MD, passed away on March 15, 2016. Mattingley-Gardiner Funeral Home, P.A. Leonardtown, MD.

## Obituaries

To place an obituary in The Enterprise, call a sales representative at 443-218-8633. Customers may also email [obits@chespub.com](mailto:obits@chespub.com) to place an obituary.

# Toby

# "DeSales"

# Clyburn

March 20, 1976

## Gone but not forgotten

Happy 40<sup>th</sup> Birthday ~ 1<sup>st</sup> Heavenly Birthday

Love,  
**Lashonda, Demetrius & Deasia**