



shores, the Continental Army would have been caught in a trap from which there could have been no escape and the American Revolution might have died right there. But, the British skippers had had one demonstration of what could be expected from the artillery men on Governors Island and they had no intention of repeating the experience. As a result, Howe's land attack was stymied and under cover of darkness Washington was able to withdraw his forces from their precarious position and make good his escape to Harlem. The Yankee gunners stood to their posts on Governors Island until the Continental rear guard had cleared New York to the north, and then on August 31, they too withdrew. After subjecting the island to an exploratory long-range bombardment and finding it unoccupied, the British at last moved in.

With his Redcoats now commanding New York from their positions on Governors Island and Brooklyn Heights, Howe felt that the American rebels might be in a mood to give up their struggle for freedom and negotiate a peaceful settlement of their grievances. The subsequent two weeks, which he spent devising terms of capitulation, which might prove acceptable to Washington, were completely fruitless as far as any agreement for peace was concerned. But, they did provide an opportunity for Governors Island to participate in the first underwater attack by the first submarine in all the history of warfare.

A Yankee inventor, named David Bushnell,

had evolved a submersible craft, which was built of iron-bound oak planking in the shape of an egg, measuring 6 feet in height and 7 1/2 feet from bow to stern. A small conning tower on top gave access to the interior. The craft was designed to accommodate a one-man crew, who not only controlled the lethal functions of the vessel, but also supplied the power by operating a crank attached to vanes on a horizontal spindle projecting from the bow. This mechanism represented the first successful application of the principle of the modern screw propeller. By working hard, the operator could obtain a forward speed of three miles an hour, provided his breath held out. A similar vertical contrivance made possible the ascent and descent of the craft, aided by emptying or filling tanks of water ballast. Seven hundred pounds of lead on the keel kept the boat right side up and could be used as a detachable anchor in emergencies. A rudder and a phosphorescent compass completed the navigational equipment.

It was Bushnell's idea that his boat, which he had appropriately named Turtle, could destroy the British ships in the harbor by detonating explosive charges under their hulls. He succeeded in obtaining General Putnam's approval to make the attempt. With what seems a strange lack of faith in his own handiwork, Bushnell then secured the services of an Army sergeant named Ezra Lee to work the boat. On the night of Sept. 6, the sergeant set off from the New York shore. Whatever else he may