Turtle

The Turtle was the first American submarine. It was designed and built by David Bushnell in 1776, which makes American submarines as old as the country itself. The one-man vessel was powered by a pedal operated propeller and submerged by admitting water into the hull and surfaced by hand pumping the water out. The submarine was armed with one torpedo consisting of a keg of gun powder. To attack, the turtle would submerge under an enemy ship and screw the explosives to the underside of its adversary. The new secret weapon gave America high hopes to destroy the British war ships anchored in New York Harbor.

On the night of September 7, 1776, Army volunteer Ezra Lee piloted the Turtle on its maiden voyage to attack on the British ship HMS Eagle. Unfortunately for the Americans, the drilling device that was operated from inside the Turtle, failed to penetrate the Eagle’s hull. There are three main theories of why the Turtle did not succeed in its mission. One of the most accepted theories is that the pilot, Ezra Lee, was too exhausted to screw the bomb in place after propelling the Turtle to the British ship. Another reason is that the wooden bottom of the Eagle was simply too thick to drill through. The third theory is that instead of drilling into the wooden underside of the British ship, the Turtle hit an iron brace or bolt. Whatever the reason, when Sergeant Lee attempted to shift the Turtle to another position beneath the hull, the torpedo lost contact with the target vessel and had to abandon his mission. Even though the torpedo never was attached to its target, the clockwork timer was still set off and it detonated about an hour after it was released. The result was a spectacular explosion that forced the British to move their ships anchorage further out into the harbor. Royal Navy logs never had any mention of the incident so it is possible that Turtle itself existed, but its attack on the HMS Eagle could be no more than submarine legend.

Bayonets

A bayonet is a blade adapted to fit the muzzle end of a rifle and used as weapon in close combat. The bayonet was an important part of the musket system. Some muskets had longer bayonets designed to be used to defend against cavlary. Soldiers would form a rectangular square facing outward so that horsemen could not among them. The bayonet replaced the pike as the means of defending against cavalry. Bayonets were also used as an effective weapon in close combat. In fact some military tactics were used to break up the enemy’s organized lines so that your side could march forward and make a cohesive charge with the bayonet. A disorganized unit could not stand up against a calculated bayonet charge.