

Remains of 1779 naval disaster in Maine

October 7 2007

Relics of one of the great naval disasters of U.S. history, the 1779 Penobscot Expedition, are emerging from the mud in Maine.

The expedition was an effort by the Massachusetts government -- Maine was not yet an independent state -- to retake Castine, Maine, from the British. But the biggest naval force assembled on the revolutionary side ended up being destroyed by its own crews to keep the vessels out of the hands of the enemy.

Some items surfaced two months ago that may have been from the lost ships, The Bangor Daily News reports.

But the newspaper warns that souvenir hunters could face prosecution. That's because the wrecks still belong to the U.S. Navy.

Efforts at salvage began almost immediately with the British pulling 50 or 60 cannons out of the river and the revolutionary forces retrieving eight. The most recent was a partnership between the Naval Historical Center, the University of Maine and the Maine Historical Preservation Commission.

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