

# BATTLE WITH THE MONITOR

(Copyright, 1902, by G. L. Kilmer.)

**ACCIDENT,** chance or what not was the instigator and arbiter first and last in the wonderful battle between the little Monitor and the huge Merrimac in Hampton Roads, March 9, 1862. The encounter and its results turned the naval world upside down and decided who would rule the wave on the American coast, with many things besides.

Stories of the marvelous powers of the Confederate ironclad ram had razzed the north and built up the hopes of the south. She entered Hampton Roads on March 8, sank the thirty gun wooden sloop of war Cumberland, burned the fifty gun frigate Congress to the water's edge and then lay by for favorable tides to enable her to visit similar destruction upon three more wooden frigates, the Roanoke, St. Lawrence and Minnesota, anchored at hand and already smarting under the fire of her chance shots during the first day's battle.

While the flames ignited by the incendiary shells from the Merrimac were devouring the noble frigate Congress the evening of March 8 the Monitor steamed up to Fortress Monroe, six miles from the scene of battle. Her presence there was due to an accident, and but for another accident she would not have been in existence. Her projector, Ericsson, had shaped the Federal naval board into ordering the construction of an ironclad upon the plan he had submitted. Ericsson had gone from New York to Washington in the fall of 1861 under the belief that his plan for an ironclad ship had been approved by the naval board. It was false, but the deception and disappointment caused the earnest hearted Swede to burst forth in angry eloquence. "Gentlemen," said he, "after what I have said I consider it your duty to the country to give me an order to build the vessel before I leave this room." The upshot of the little deception, which passed for diplomacy, was an order to build the Monitor within 100 days.

Ericsson's working models were completed, and the machinists toiled night and day from December to March. Finally all was ready for a trial trip, and, with volunteer officers and crew—for it was a life and death venture from the start to sail in her—the Monitor left New York at midday March 1. Her commander, Lieutenant John L. Worden of the navy, was told to proceed to Fortress Monroe for the protection of the Chesapeake bay and the Potomac river from the raids of the dreaded ironclad ram Merrimac.

After the Monitor had left New York a dispatch reached there from Washington ordering Worden to sail up the Potomac to Washington, not touching at Fortress Monroe. A tug gave chase to deliver the message, but failed to overtake the Monitor, and she passed the mouth of the Potomac, bringing up at Fortress Monroe the evening of March 8, the last few miles of the sail enlivened by the sound of the guns in the fight between the Merrimac and the wooden fleet near Newport News.

Meanwhile the undelivered New York dispatch had been forwarded to the naval commandant of Fortress Monroe. With that dispatch before him, he also heard reports from the front, where the sunken sloop Cumberland lay, swaying in the tide, the flames of the burning Congress lit the sky for miles, and the Roanoke, Minnesota and St. Lawrence were patching the rents made in their wooden hulls by the shells of the Merrimac, which was only waiting for daylight to sail forth from her mooring and finish the fleet at one blow.

The orders were imperative to send the Monitor to Washington to defend the capital, and from the way the Merrimac had smashed things on her first attempt it looked like a hopeless case for the little black thing which resembled in comparison with the warships of the day a "tin can on a board" to go out against the monster ram. In the trip down from New York the Monitor people had discovered the weak points of their novel craft. The waves had flooded her hold, deluged her furnace room and coal bunkers, checked the fires and almost suffocated her crew with gas. She carried but two guns. Her ports could only be closed by cessation of firing. One shell in the gun chamber, the turret, would disable her fighting power, and her shots must be delivered at random or "on the fly" when the revolving turret brought the enemy opposite the gun port for an instant. Besides, the cannon were a new invention, and the powder charge was limited to fifteen pounds for a one hundred and eighty pound shot. On the other hand, the Merrimac had made a record and proved invulnerable.

But in spite of all the naval chief, who held the deciding card, concluded to cut red tape and send the floating experiment to the relief of the wooden ships down the channel. Already the Merrimac was closing in upon the Minnesota, which was helplessly aground. The pilot of the ram had promised to lay her within half a mile of the Minnesota, and the commander and crew were discounting their victory, which seemed a foregone result, when the little newcomer from the workshops of the Hudson bobbed into the arena and began pegging shots at the giant from a six hundred yard range.

The Roads were filled with spectators, for out of the thousands of soldiers and sailors marshaled there under the stars and stripes only the little handful in the turret of the Monitor could mix in the strange fight. The Confederate sailors looked for an easy victory over what seemed to be a new kind of tug with a gun or two aboard. But their heavy shots rattled off the solid plate of Ericsson's wonder without leaving a dent. Then, too, that revolving turret, which belched forth smoke and iron, baffled the gunners in gray who attempted to make port shots at the range of a ship's length. And the little ship was as nimble as a tug in dodging the Merrimac's guns. She could go anywhere and get back again while the Merrimac was training a gun on her. Even with her ridiculously weak charges the Monitor's shots started the bolts on the ram, and if she had used double charges the Merrimac would have met the fate she had visited so savagely upon the Cumberland and Congress the day before.

During the first fight, which lasted about three hours, Captain Worden and the pilot stayed in the pilothouse, a little structure of iron logs at one end of the low deck. Owing to a break of the speaking tubes communication between Worden and the men in the firing turret was cut early in the action, and messages were passed on the lips of seamen stationed at intervals. Finally the shots in the turret gave out, and the Monitor hauled off to replenish the supply.

Meanwhile the Merrimac turned again to the Minnesota and was struck with a broadside of twenty guns that would have torn a wooden ship to shreds. She answered with a shell that set the Minnesota on fire and, turning, found the Monitor again closing in. The first shot of the Merrimac in this second attack struck the upper

log of the pilothouse, where Worden was looking out, and blinded him with powder. Supposing that the pilothouse was destroyed and the steering gear along with it, Worden ordered his subordinate, Lieutenant Greene, who was in the turret, to "sheer off" and look to the damaged works. Greene decided to go on with the fight alone, for Worden was stunned by the concussion of the shock as well as blinded. But the Merrimac had sailed away without waiting to finish her enemies. Even the Minnesota was saved by putting out the fires. So the net result of the second foray of the ram was that she went back to her moorings with a few extra wounded men in her crew and the reputation of running from the smallest fighting ship afloat.

During the fight both the Merrimac and the Monitor tried ramming. The Monitor lightly dodged her antagonist and in turn just missed striking the Merrimac with her sharp end by a hair. Officers and men of both ships declared that the contest was not fought out. Those aboard the ram said that when the Monitor backed off, which was to replenish her ammunition and change commanders, they believed her out of the fight. Why they didn't go ahead and smash the remaining frigates close at hand, as they had done the Cumberland and Congress the day before, they never clearly explained. Admiral Buchanan, the commander of the Merrimac in the first day's fight, had been put ashore on account of a wound.

Worden and his crew were made the heroes of the hour. In the first fight between ironclads they held the field of battle and saw their foe beat a quiet retreat. Even admitting that it was a drawn battle, the future of naval science was decided in that short fight between experimental craft. The advantages of the pygmy Monitor lay in her revolving gun turret, with its impervious shield, her rapid movements and her low invulnerable deck. Her weaknesses were that the turret was not under complete control and her guns were not fully effective. All her shots were sent at random, never twice in the same place. She sank at sea off Hatteras in December, 1862, and the forlorn fight on March 9, which gave birth to the new American navy, was her first and her last. The Merrimac was repaired for service in James river and on May 11 was blown up to prevent capture.

GEORGE L. KILMER.

His Cross.

Wife—I've done nothing but practice economy ever since we were married!

Husband—And I've had to pay for it!

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## FIRST FIGHT OF IRONCLADS

March 9, 1862

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THE MONITOR'S OPENING SHOT AT THE MERRIMAC.

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His Cross.

Wife—I've done nothing but practice economy ever since we were married!

Husband—And I've had to pay for it!

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### NOTICE.

North Carolina, Pasquotank County, In The Superior Court,

NEVY FERRY,

vs. THOMAS H. ROBBINS, LILLIAN NAYLOR & ADELIA S. ROBBINS.

By virtue of an execution directed to the undersigned from the Superior Court of Pasquotank Co., in the above entitled cause I will, on Tuesday the 27th day of May, 1902, at 12 o'clock M. at the Court House door of said County sell to the highest bidder for cash to satisfy said execution, all the right, title and interest which the said Thomas H. Robbins, defendant, has in the following described real estate, to-wit: All that certain tract of land located in Mount Hennen Township, Pasquotank County, N. C. known as a part of the Great Park Estate of Terry's major, adjoining the lands of Rev. Geo. W. Sanderlin (now owned by Jno. D. Parker) and others Deed Book No. 17, pages 241-242 office of Register of Deeds of Pasquotank county, North Carolina.

N. G. GRANDY, Sheriff.

April 16th, 1902.

### NOTICE.

North Carolina, Perquimans County, In the Superior Court Before the Clerk, ROBT. B. COX, Administrator of ROBT. B. COX decd, ptf.,

against M. H. WHITE and JAMES COX defendants The defendant above named, James Cox, will take notice that an action entitled as above has been commenced in the Superior Court of Perquimans County, state aforesaid, before the Clerk of said county, the purpose of which is to sell the land of said Robert B. Cox decd, in said county to make assets to pay the debts of the said Cox decd, and the said defendant James Cox will further take notice that he is required to appear at the office of the Clerk of the Superior Court for the said County of Perquimans, on the 21st day of June A. D. 1902, at the court house of said county, and answer or demur to the complaint in said action, or the plaintiff will apply to the Court for the relief demanded in said Complaint.

E. V. PERRY C. S. C. of Perquimans County, N. C. F. Picard, ptf., atty.

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