

A 3-D Look at History

Stereoscopic Photographs of the USS *Monitor*

On July 9, 1862, the famous Civil War ironclad USS *Monitor* was on blockade duty in Virginia up the James River at Harrison's Landing. That day, James Gibson, a photographer, recorded a series of stereographic images of the ship and some of her crewmembers. No one knows how many photos Gibson took that day, but eight of his stereographic photographs survive and are the only known images of the celebrated warship.

Stereoscopic or 3-D imaging refers to a method for creating the illusion of depth in an image. Early stereoscopic photos were taken by a camera with two lenses. This method provided two offset pictures 2.5 inches apart, about the distance between the eyes. The pictures were printed on thick paper and called a stereograph or stereo card. Although the pictures appear the same, they are slightly different. When viewed through a stereoscope, the two images are perceived by the brain as a single, three-dimensional scene.

Stereoscopic Camera

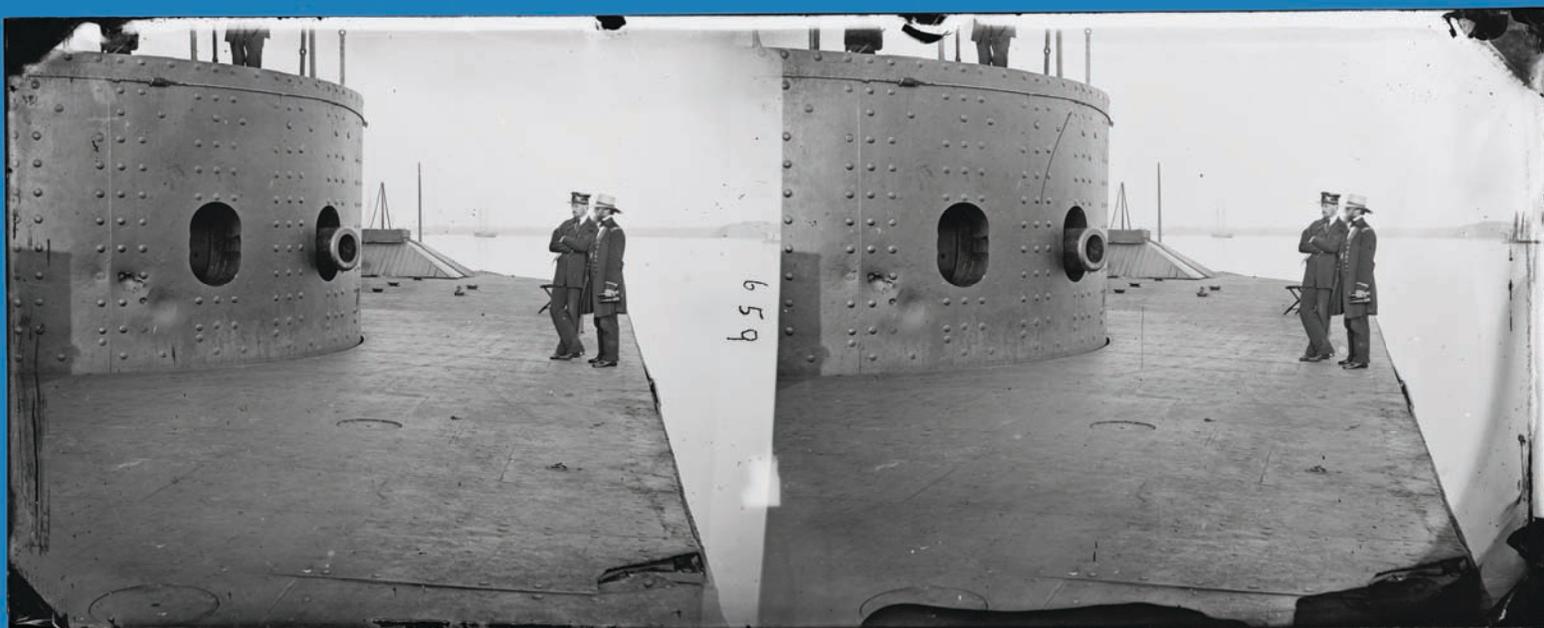


Photo by James Gibson, Courtesy of Library of Congress

Sir Charles Wheatstone is credited with creating the first stereoscopic viewer in 1833. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. developed the first handheld stereoscopic viewer in the 1850s and handheld viewers were soon being sold across the country. Combined with significant advances in photography, a new form of entertainment was invented!



Holmes' Stereoscope

<http://monitor.noaa.gov>

Monitor National Marine Sanctuary