USS Monitor: America's First Ironclad

Launched on Jan. 30, 1862, at the Continental Iron Works in Greenpoint, N.Y., the USS Monitor made history as the Union Navy's first ironclad warship. It fought the Confederate ironclad CSS Virginia in the first-ever clash between two ironclads at the Battle of Hampton Roads on March 9—an encounter that signaled the start of a new era of naval warfare. The Monitor's short but historic career came to an end on Dec. 31, 1862, when it sank in a storm off Cape Hatteras, N.C., with the loss of 16 sailors.

In 1975, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) designated the USS Monitor's wreck site as the nation's first national marine sanctuary. Over the years, NOAA and partners have undertaken several recovery operations and retrieved artifacts for conservation. When U.S. Navy divers recovered the ship's iconic gun tunnel in 2002, archaeologists discovered the remains of two sailors inside.

Continental Works

In 1859, Thomas Fitch Rowland established the Continental Works at this site in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, N.Y. When the Civil War began, the company was engaged by John Ericsson to build a "shot-proof steam battery." On October 25, 1861, the keel for the ironclad was laid and construction began on the ship that Ericsson named Monitor. Just 98 days later, the Monitor launched on January 30, 1862. During the course of the Civil War, Continental Works built seven more ironclad ships for the U.S. Navy including the Passaic and Montauk. In 1887, the business incorporated as the Continental Iron Works.