New York's Civil War Ironclads

Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
MONITOR NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

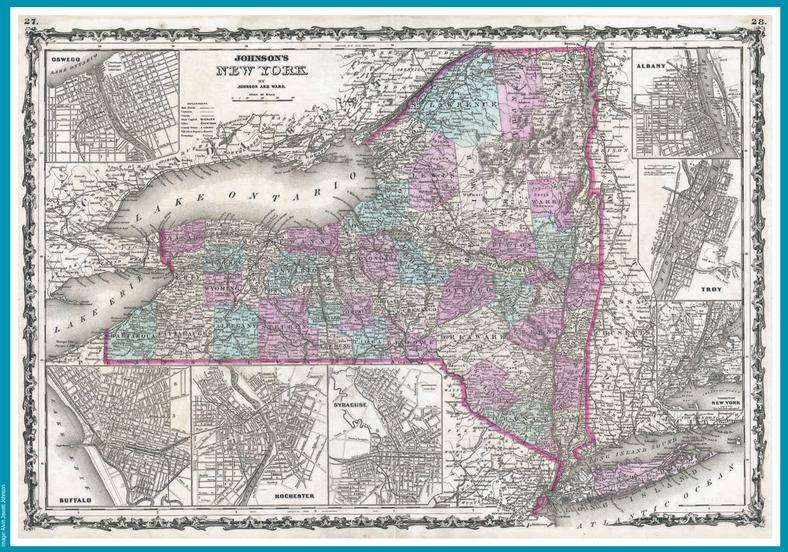


Image: John Jewett Johnson

USS *Monitor* and USS *Onondaga*

Designed, fabricated, and built in New York, USS *Monitor* and its descendant USS *Onondaga* played pivotal roles in the Union's victory during the U.S. Civil War. *Monitor* made history as the Union Navy's first ironclad warship, and 113 years after its launch, *Monitor* made history again by becoming the nation's first national marine sanctuary. Today, Monitor National Marine Sanctuary protects the shipwreck of the *Monitor* as an archaeological site.

Monitor's legacy continued when its name was given to an entirely new type of ironclad warship. Most likely named for the Onondaga Nation, the double turreted USS *Onondaga* was one of the largest monitor-type ironclads built during the Civil War. *Onondaga* served its entire war career in Virginia's James River, supporting Union troops and protecting supply lines. After the war's end, *Onondaga* was sold to France and had a long career with the French Navy.

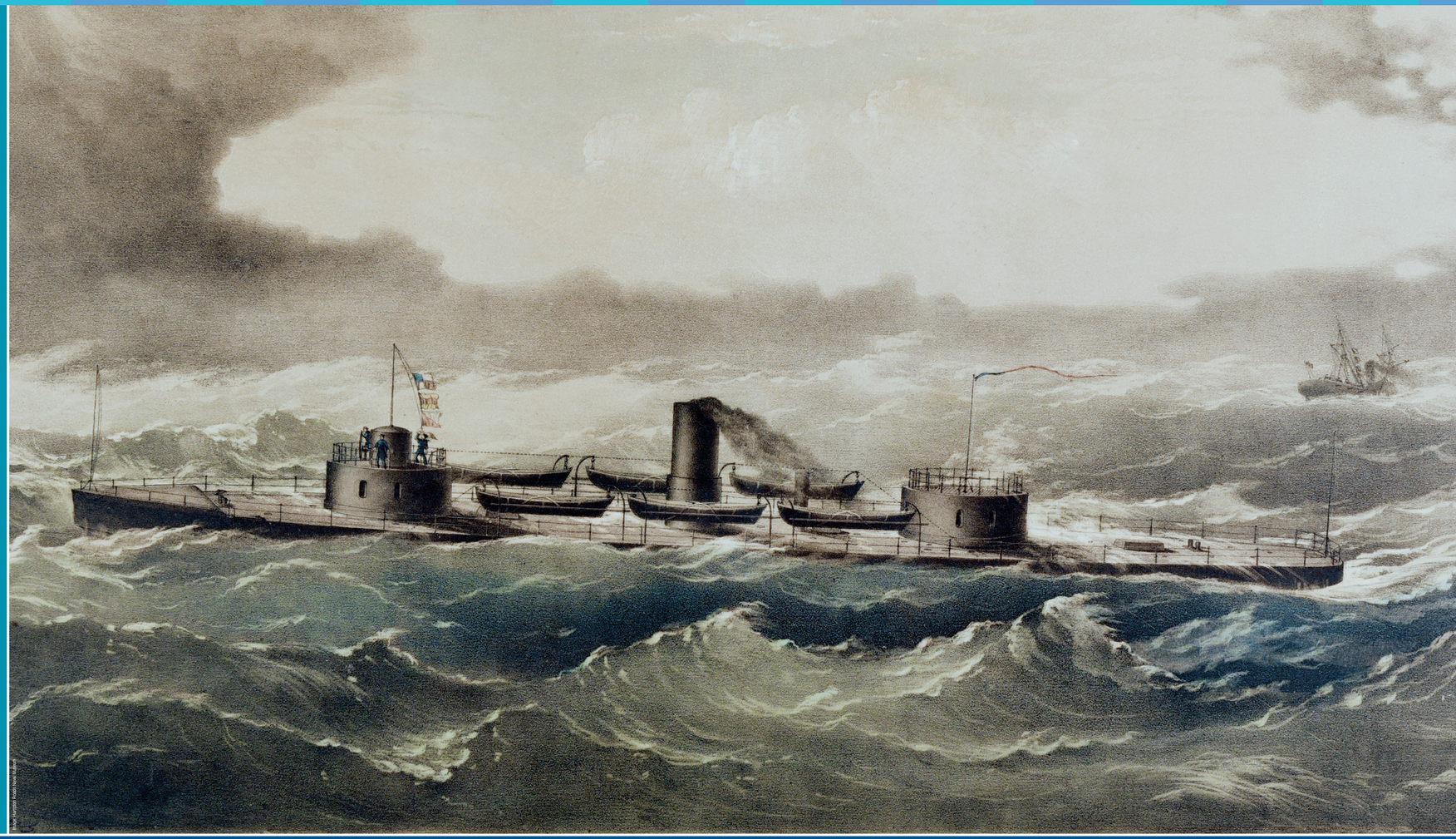


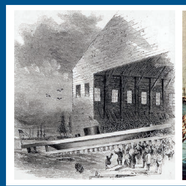
Photo: Courtesy Mariners' Museum

TIMELINE

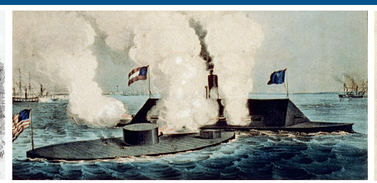
- Oct. 25 – USS *Monitor* construction begins
- March 8-9 – Battle of Hampton Roads
- 1864-1865 – *Onondaga*'s U.S. Navy career
- *Onondaga* dismantled and sold
- August 27 – *Monitor* shipwreck discovered

1861 | 1862 | 1863 | 1864 | 1865 | 1867 | 1904 | 1973 | 1975

- January 30 – *Monitor* launched
- December 31 – Loss of the *Monitor*
- July 29 – *Onondaga* launched
- March 7 – *Onondaga* sold to French Navy
- July 15 – USS *Onondaga* construction begins
- June 8 – *Onondaga* decomissioned
- January 30 – Sanctuary designation

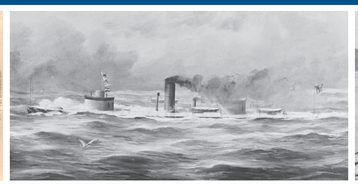


Construction on the USS *Monitor* began October 25, 1861, at the Continental Iron Works in Greenpoint Brooklyn, New York. The ironclad was launched in 98 days, on January 30, 1862.



On March 8, 1862, the USS *Monitor* steamed into Hampton Roads, Virginia, to find a scene of carnage. Earlier that day, the CSS *Virginia* had attacked the Union fleet and destroyed four wooden ships with ease. The next morning, the two ironclads met for the first time, fighting for hours at close range. The Battle of Hampton Roads ended in a draw, but the age of iron warships had just begun.

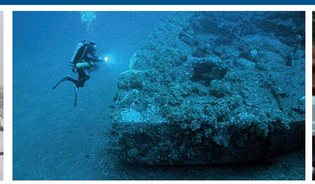
On New Year's Eve 1862, less than a year after launch, the USS *Monitor* was under tow by the USS *Rhode Island* when it sank in a storm off the North Carolina coast. Sixteen *Monitor* sailors died that night.



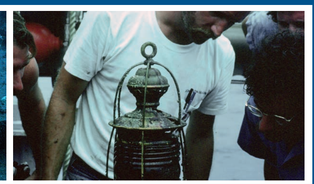
The double turreted USS *Onondaga* was one of the largest monitor-type ironclads built during the Civil War. It was launched on July 29, 1863, by the Continental Iron Works in New York.

Onondaga spent most of its career during the Civil War in Hampton Roads, Virginia, as part of the Union's James River Flotilla engaging Confederate shore batteries and naval forces.

The USS *Onondaga* was sold to France on March 7, 1867. Serving under the same name, *Onondaga* had a long career with the French Navy. France dismantled and sold *Onondaga* in 1904.



In August 1973, a team of scientists led by John G. Newton of the Duke University Marine Laboratory located what appeared to be an ironclad vessel lying upside down in 230 feet of water, 16 miles off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. The wreck's identity was positively confirmed as the USS *Monitor* by Newton's team and the U.S. Navy in 1974.



Designated by Congress, the wreck site of the USS *Monitor* became the nation's first national marine sanctuary on January 30, 1975. Today, Monitor National Marine Sanctuary protects the wreck for future generations and works to share the vessel's historical and cultural legacy with the public.

All images courtesy of The Mariners' Museum, NOAA, and Library of Congress