Guide to "The First Battle Between 'Iron' Ships of War" Print
MSS.3411

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard
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Summary Information

Repository W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama

Title "The First Battle Between 'Iron' Ships of War" Print

Date after 1862

Extent 1.0 Linear feet (1 print)

Language English

Abstract Print of "The First Battle Between 'Iron' Ships of War" engraving, entered according to act of Congress in the year 1862 by Henry Bill in the Clerks Office of the District Court of the U.S. for the District of Connecticut."

Preferred Citation note

"The First Battle Between 'Iron' Ships of War" Print, W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama
Biographical/Historical note

The USS Monitor was the first ironclad warship commissioned by the United States Navy during the American Civil War. She is most famous for her participation in the Battle of Hampton Roads on March 9, 1862, the first-ever battle fought between two ironclads.

While the battle is usually referred to as being between the USS Monitor and the CSS Merrimac, the Confederate Navy captured the USS Merrimac earlier in 1862 and renamed it the CSS Virginia.

On March 8, 1862, CSS Virginia (the renamed Merrimac) attacked the Union blockading squadron in Hampton Roads, Virginia, destroying the USS Cumberland and Congress. Early in the battle, the Minnesota ran aground while attempting to engage the Virginia, and she remained stranded throughout the battle. The Virginia, however, was unable to reengage the Minnesota before daylight faded.

That night, the Monitor arrived from Brooklyn. When the Virginia returned the next day to finish off the Minnesota and the rest of the blockaders, the Monitor moved out to stop her. The ironclads fought at close range for about four hours, neither one sinking or seriously damaging the other. At one point, the Virginia attempted to ram the Monitor, but she only managed a glancing blow that did no damage. It did, however, aggravate the damage done to the Virginia's bow when she had rammed the Cumberland. The Monitor was also unable to do significant damage to the Virginia, possibly due to the fact that her guns were firing with reduced charges.

Towards the end of the engagement, the Virginia was able to hit the Monitor's pilothouse. The Monitor's commander, Lt. Worden, blinded by shell fragments and gunpowder residue from the explosion, ordered the Monitor to sheer off into shallow water. The command passed to the executive officer, Samuel Greene, who assessed the damage and ordered the Monitor to turn around back into the battle.

The Virginia, seeing the Monitor turn away, turned her attention back to the Minnesota. The falling tide, however, prevented her from getting close to the stranded warship. After an informal war council with his officers, the Virginia's captain decided to return to Norfolk to repairs. The Monitor arrived back on the scene as the Virginia was leaving. Greene, under orders to protect the Minnesota, did not pursue.

Tactically, the battle between these two ships was a draw, though it could be argued that the Virginia did slightly more damage to the Monitor than the other way around. The Monitor did successfully defend the Minnesota and the rest of the U.S. fleet while the Virginia was unable to complete the destruction she started the previous day. Strategically, nothing had immediately changed: the Federals still controlled Hampton Roads and the Confederates still held several rivers and Norfolk.

Neither ironclad was ever to fight again. The Merrimac was scuttled off Craney Island, Virginia on 11 May 1862 to prevent her from being captured. On the last day of that same year, 31 December 1862, the Monitor was swamped in heavy seas during a violent storm while being towed off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. Most of her crew was saved, but several went down with the ironclad.
Scope and Contents note

The collection contains a print of *The First Battle Between 'Iron' Ships of War* "engraving, entered according to act of Congress in the year 1862 by Henry Bill in the Clerks Office of the District Court of the U.S. for the District of Connecticut." The caption below the print also lists the other ships pictured. These include the USS *Cumberland* (Newport News registry), the USS *Congress*, the USS *Minnesota* (Sewell's Point registry), the USS *Monitor* (ironclad), the CSS *Merrimac* (ironclad), the CSS *Jamestown*, and the CSS *Yorktown*. The caption also states that the Monitor, 2 guns, crippled the Merrimac (10 guns) and that the whole of the Rebel fleet was driven off.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama June 2011

Conditions Governing Access note

None

Provenance

unknown

Processed by

Martha Bace, 2011
## Collection Inventory

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