

# The Last Surviving Officer of the Monitor

Nearly forty years ago a voyage was made which, considering its brief duration, was probably fraught with consequences of greater moment to this nation than any other that has been performed in American waters. On the 6th of March, 1862, the little ironclad Monitor left the harbor of New York and sailed for Newport News, reaching her destination about midnight of the 8th, just in time to meet and defeat the Confederate ironclad Merrimac, which that very day had nearly destroyed two Federal ships of war and was about to go forth on what promised to be an unopposed career of destruction against her wooden walled adversaries. This is the historical fact, known to all, but it will come almost as a shock to many—who can hardly realize that the civil war was fought and over more than a generation ago—to learn that of the nearly sixty men who were on the Monitor at that time barely half a dozen survive.

Of the officers of that historic craft, in fact, there is at present only one survivor, Captain Louis N. Stodder, at present supervisor of anchorages of the port of New York

Swede, John Ericsson, not only supplied the energy and the vim, the plans and the material, but he is said to have practically owned the Monitor at the time she won the fight. This was not greatly to the credit of our government, but that, again, is quite another story. Suffice it that the queer craft was built, was launched and engaged and then, manned with such a crew as could be hastily collected, started on her famous voyage. Commenced in October, 1861, and launched in January, 1862, the Monitor went into commission Feb. 25, and before the 10th of March had achieved her momentous victory.

No wonder that the genial Captain Stodder's eyes sparkle at remembrance of the memorable voyage and that, looking back over the forty intervening years, he feels quite young again as he fights his battles o'er. And he is not so old, after all, for, as Dr. Holmes might say, he is only sixty-three years young. He has a fine, hearty way with him, his head is well shaped, his complexion like a boy's and his mental poise is perfect.

Of the two occurrences, the voyage and the fight that followed, I

in the midst of the Federal fleet, had sunk the Cumberland, forced the Congress to surrender and run several other ships aground, so that she, to all appearances, had the whole United States navy at her mercy.

That might have seemed alarming news to some, but to these sailors who had just risked their lives at sea in Ericsson's "iron pot" almost anything would seem better than taking the voyage over again. In fact, there was no thought but of attacking, and almost before they had washed the sea salt out of their eyes and with the Monitor all rusty and battered from her buffeting by the waves, they sailed in and gave battle. If the Monitor's steering gear had not broken down and delayed her for a time, she might have carried out the original programme, which was to enter the Potomac and make her way to Washington. If she could pass the Potomac batteries without being sunk by their concentrated fire, Uncle Sam had promised to accept her. This was "looking a gift horse in the mouth" with a vengeance, as subsequent events have proved, but Ericsson had taken the chances, for he was ready to build the vessel on any terms, so confident

in the guns and put in bigger charges the Monitor's projectiles might have pierced the Merrimac's armor and ended the fight sooner. But in they went, these fighters, of forty years ago, taking up a position near the spoken warship, awaited the coming of the foe. When the Merrimac appeared, the Monitor steamed out to meet her and to her rapid broadside fire replied slowly, at about seven minute intervals. Every shot, however, took effect, or would have taken effect if the charges of powder had been thirty pounds instead of fifteen, for all, or nearly all, went where they were aimed.

There are many at this day so distant from that great fight who may have no distinct picture before them of the occurrences, and for this reason: Captain Stodder's description will be quoted: "The Merrimac was a frigate which the Confederates found burned and sunk when they took possession of Norfolk and which they raised and converted into an ironclad. She appeared to be impregnable and was commanded by a brave officer of the old navy, Franklin Buchanan. When she made her advent at Hampton Roads about mid-day of March 8, 1862, she carried swift consternation to all the United States vessels there assembled. As history tells us, she sank the Cumberland, forced the Congress to give up and after a brief fight withdrew, leaving the frigates Minnesota, Roanoke and St. Lawrence grounded and practically helpless. Two guns and twenty men were her losses on that day when she carried terror to the heart of our navy, and she retired at night with the determination to return in the morning and complete the work of destruction.

"The appearance of the Monitor was as great a surprise to the men of the Merrimac as that of the latter vessel had been to those of the former. As soon as the news was received the Monitor had begun practice with her big guns, stripped of her sea rig and put in fighting trim, so when she arrived at anchorage near the stranded Minnesota at midnight her men were somewhat prepared for what they expected to happen on the morrow. There was not much to encourage them, however, and if ever men were justified in regarding themselves as victims for a sacrifice they were those on board the Monitor. Near them lay the Cumberland, only her peaks above water, with her flag still flying, and soon after their arrival the Congress blew up amid a blaze of sparks, disclosing also the unfortunate positions of her ill fated companions.

"Sunday, March 9, dawned clear and cloudless, showing the Merrimac at anchor near Sewall's point. Shortly after 7 o'clock she was reported under way, and instantly all was life aboard the Monitor. The iron hatches were closed, deadlight covers put on and all obstructions removed from the main deck so as to present a smooth surface only twenty-four inches above the water, unbroken save for the pilothouse and turret. These preparations concluded, officers and men took their stations for the coming battle. Lieutenant Worden directed operations from the pilothouse, a wrought iron structure situated well forward near the bow and projecting four feet above the deck, whence a speaking tube ran to the turret amidships. By Lieutenant Worden's side were Howard, the pilot, and Quartermaster Williams, who steered the Monitor during the engagement. Lieutenant Greene commanded in the turret, where also I was stationed, with Chief Engineer Stimers as assistant in charge of the machinery that controlled the revolving of the turret.

"Each of the two guns in the turret was manned by a crew of eight men, captained by Boatswain's Mate John Stocking and Seaman Thomas Lochrane. The fight began with a broadside from the Merrimac directed at the Minnesota, but the Monitor did not return the fire until within range and almost alongside. Then Lieutenant Worden stopped the engine and gave the order to begin firing. Lieutenant Greene instantly triced up the port, ran out the gun, took careful aim and pulled the locking string. The Merrimac answered by a broadside from her ten guns, and the duel was on in earnest.

Shortly after noon Lieutenant Worden, the Monitor's commander, was rendered blind and helpless by a shell that struck the pilothouse and was for a time incapacitated by the painful accident. He was then forty-four years old, "but looked all of sixty," Captain Stodder says, "with his long beard and cadaverous countenance." He had been in the United States naval service many years and had reached the grade he then held, of Lieutenant, in 1840, but after this great action he was rapidly

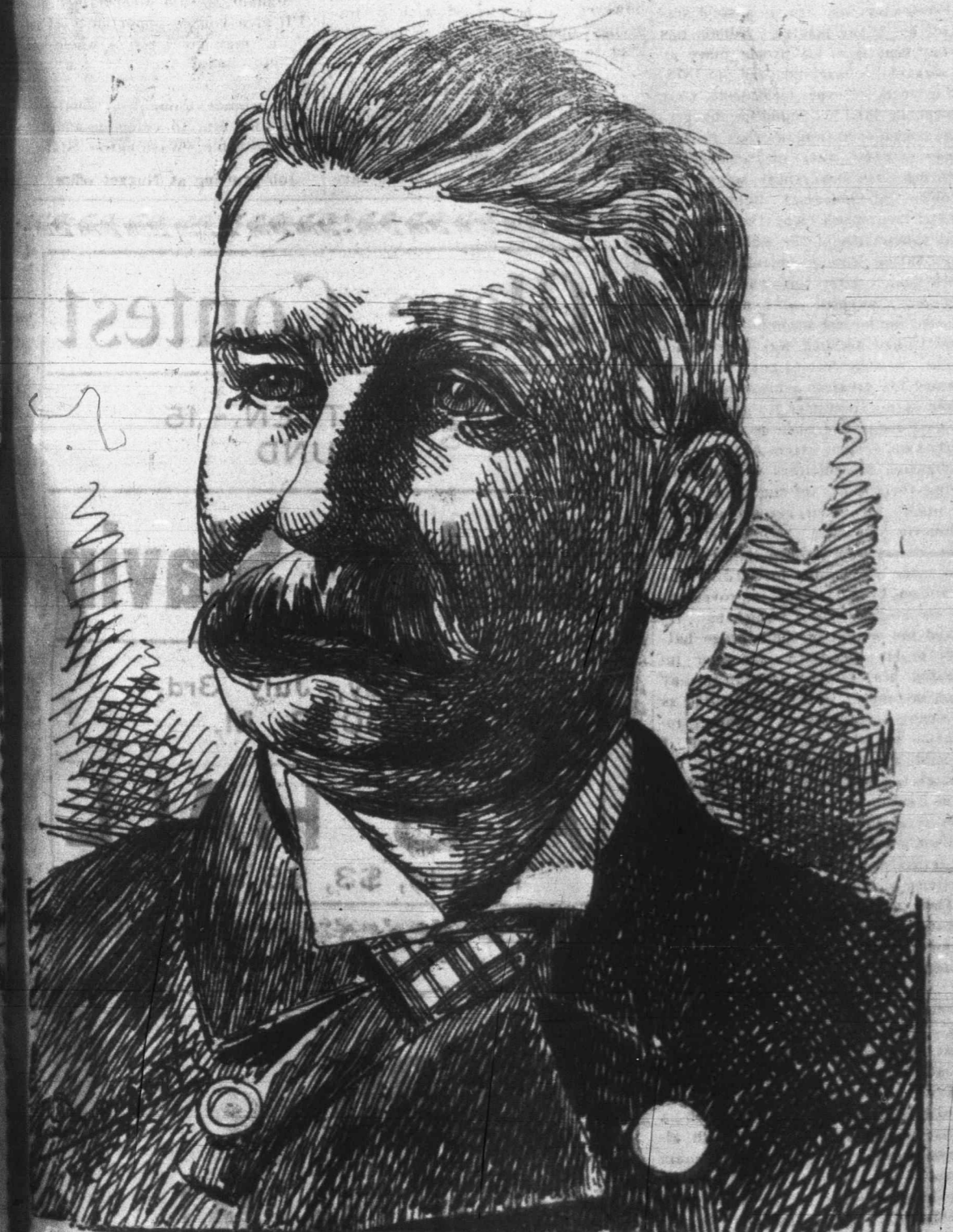
promoted to the rank of Captain. He was still suffering from this imprisonment when he took command, but had sufficient energy to carry out the plans of his superiors in the navy department and forge the Monitor on to victory. He suffered from the effects of the explosion that blinded him even to the day of his death, which occurred in Washington in October, 1897.

The next in command, Lieutenant Samuel Dana Greene, executive officer of the Monitor, was only twenty-three at the time of the fight, but was a graduate of the Naval academy and had seen service several years. He died at the Portsmouth (N. H.) navy yard in 1884. Like Captain Stodder, who served in the turret with him, he remained with the Monitor until she foundered off Cape Hatteras the last day of December, 1862. So it will be seen that Captain Stodder, the old surviving officer of the Monitor, stood by her during her entire existence. He saw her launching and he witnessed her sad end when she plunged beneath the waves, carrying down sixteen officers and seamen.

CHANNING A. BARTOW

**The Boers in America**  
Washington, June 3.—Gen. Samuel Pearson, the Boer representative in this country, who made the protest about the British shipments of mules from New Orleans, says that he intends to call at the British embassy and ask for transportation to South Africa. "Under the peace terms," said Gen. Pearson, "Great Britain agrees to send the burghers back home, wherever they may be. I have been ruined by the war, and I have not a sixpence to my name."

Mr. Charles D. Pierce, who for the past few years has been Consul General at New York for the Orange Free State, and who has had charge of the circulation of pro-Boer literature, when asked if the Boer refugees in this country would return to South Africa, replied: "They will all return and take back their property. One of the best knowers of them, W. D. Snyman, is now at the Union Square Hotel." Concerning his own status, Mr. Pierce said he supposed his office was a thing of the past. "At any rate," he added, "I shall not make any claim to the title."




CAPTAIN L. N. STODDER.

a veteran of the United States service. Born in Boston, Mass., in 1838, Captain Stodder entered the navy as a merchant marine at an early age and was in the gunnery school then established at Brooklyn in January, 1862, a call was made for volunteers to work the "cheesebox on a raft," an unfinished state at Green Point. John Ericsson's "newfangled craft," as some then styled it, the laughing stock of all the wits who had seen or heard of the prospective gunners were in their hands when they volunteered. But men were found, and a vessel was constructed at rate and progress probably unprecedented. In 100 days from the laying of the keel the Monitor

rather fancy the former was the more dreaded by the gallant tars. In fact, I know so, for as we can verify by allusion to the annals of the time, the Monitor was built for service in smooth waters only, and at least twice on the trip to Hampton Roads came very near sinking. When she finally arrived there, her officers and crew had been for forty-eight hours without sleep and almost without food, yet they stripped their vessel for action as soon as they reached the Roads and proceeded immediately to business. They had received the first news of the fight of the day preceding from a pilot off Cape Henry. They had never before even heard of the Merrimac, for she had been kept in hiding and, though they had heard the heavy firing when at sea, they

was he of ultimate success. Well, as it turned out, the Monitor's detention was providential, for instead of proceeding up the Potomac to Washington to be inspected by the president she found a fight on her hands at the word "go." She stripped for it and won, as we now know. But we may imagine the feelings of the men aboard of her as she steamed slowly, yet unwaveringly, to meet her formidable antagonist. That moment there was being tested an entirely new kind of armament, and not only that, but new guns and tactics. The gunners had been told that their cartridges would be burst when the big guns in the turret went off and they would be buried to the deck unconscious. But Ericsson has assured them that no such thing would occur, and if they



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