

Dawn of the Iron Age:
How the USS *Monitor* Revolutionized Naval Warfare at the
Battle of Hampton Roads

Clarity Kapur and Jana Liu

Senior Group Website Division

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Process Paper

When we first heard about the theme, Revolution, Reaction and Reform in History, we decided to focus on technological innovations because we knew that most inventions changed history in interesting and relevant ways. We started making a list, and came across ironclads. Something about the idea of an invincible ship, impervious to artillery, seemed exciting and compelling. We both knew very little about ironclads, and had assumed that they were merely an interesting anecdote of the Civil War. However, when we researched further, we discovered the Battle of Hampton Roads was a pivotal transition point in naval design. We hadn't thought about how wooden warships of the colonial period became the armored and turreted battleships used today, but suddenly we realized how important and revolutionary ironclads were, as they supplied the missing piece in the timeline of naval design. We decided to focus especially on the *Monitor* because many parts of its design were adopted and used on subsequent warships.

To conduct our research, we began with secondary sources such as academic articles and books that comprehensively described the battle and its effects. We then searched for primary sources. To find specific newspaper articles, we combed through databases like Newspaper Archives and Chronicling America. By looking in the footnotes of our secondary sources, we found accounts of the battle written by actual sailors and officers on the ironclads in reports, magazines, and letters that were in the public domain. We found another account of a *Virginia* sailor when we visited the Historical Society of Pennsylvania archives. In December, Clarity visited the USS *Monitor* Center at the Mariner's Museum in Newport News, Virginia, which displayed extensive artifacts and explanations about the battle. In April, we interviewed Mr. Tāne Casserley, the Research, Resource Protection, and Permit Coordinator of the Monitor National Marine Sanctuary, who provided further information about the *Monitor*.

We quickly decided a website was ideal for displaying the large amount of visual media and quotes we found about the battle. We planned each page of the website out on a separate document to organize the quotes and images, connecting them in a chronological order. We made the color scheme blue and gray because blue represented the waters of Hampton Roads and the Union while gray represented technology, ironclads, and the Confederacy.

Our argument is that the USS *Monitor*, created by the Union in reaction to the construction of the CSS *Virginia* by the Confederacy, revolutionized naval warfare when it fought the latter at the Battle of Hampton Roads, because it demonstrated ironclad ships were superior to wooden ones. The *Monitor*'s performance impacted navies around the world, as countries quickly began building ironclads to reform their navies. Shipbuilders also adopted the design of the *Monitor*'s turret, transforming naval strategy by allowing ships to fire in any direction. The technology introduced by the *Monitor* eventually led to the development of battleships and aircraft carriers as warships evolved, and modern vessels still carry on the legacy of the *Monitor* through their rotating guns.