

THE CHARGER

February, 2003

403 Meeting

Vol. 24 #6

Tonight's Topic:

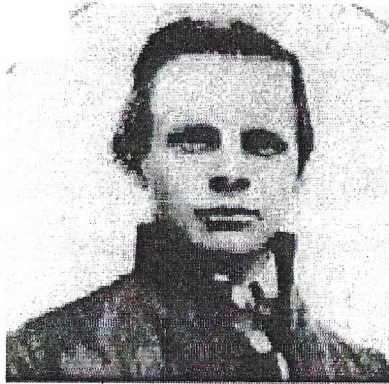
John Pelham

Although "The Gallant Pelham" served the entire war with the artillery, he was destined to fall while moonlighting in a cavalry charge.

A native Alabamian, he withdrew from West Point upon the outbreak of hostilities and joined the Confederate army. After fighting at 1st Bull Run, he became the captain of the first horse artillery battery that served with JEB Stuart, becoming close friends with the general. Commanding his unit, he saw action at Yorktown and during the Seven Days. Promoted, he commanded all of Stuart's horse batteries at 2nd Bull Run and Antietam. At Fredericksburg he held up the advance of a Union division against the Confederate right with only two guns. With only one gun left, he continued to shift positions despite the fact that 24 enemy guns were now concentrating their fire on him. Disobeying repeated orders to withdraw, he only did so upon running out of ammunition. General Lee observed and said, "It is glorious to see such courage in one so young!"

Known as the "Boy Major," he heard of an impending action at Kelly's Ford on March 17, 1863. Away from his battalion at the time, he joined the fray with the cavalry. He was hit by a shell fragment and died within hours.

He was 25 years old.



Tonight's speaker:

Peggy Vogtsberger

Margaret "Peggy" Vogtsberger was born in West Point, New York. She has lived in Hampton, Virginia, for the last 27 years. She attended the College of William and Mary (Williamsburg, Va.). Founder of the John Pelham Historical Association; former editor of JPHA newsletter, "The Cannoneer." A Founder of the Peninsula Civil War Round Table and past president, Williamsburg Civil War Round Table.

Recognized in 1996 by the Civil War Education Association for "fostering the study and appreciation of American Civil War history."

**Date: Wednesday,
February 12, 2003**

**Place: The Cleveland
Playhouse Club
8501 Carnegie Ave.**

**Time: Drinks 6 PM
Dinner 7 PM**

**Reservations: Please Call
JAC Communications
(216) 861-5588**

**Meal choice: Leg of Lamb
Monk Fish**

CLEVELAND CIVIL WAR ROUNDTABLE

FOUNDED 1957

President: **Maynard Bauer** - (440) 835-3081

Vice President: **Warren McClelland** - (216) 751-8564

Secretary: **Mel Maurer** - (440) 808-1249

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Kirk Hinman

Jean Solyan

William F.B. Vodrey

Bill McGrath

Website: **clevelandcivilwarroundtable.com**

email: **a-bell@msn.com**

CHARGER editor—Dick Crews (800) 800-8310

The Cleveland Civil War Roundtable is open to anyone with an interest in the American Civil War. The 120 members of the Roundtable, who's membership varies from 12 to 90 years old, share a belief that the American Civil War was the **defining** event in United States history.

The Roundtable normally meets on the second Wednesday of each month, September through May, at a private club of the Cleveland Playhouse, 8501 Carnegie, next to the Cleveland Clinic.

Yearly Dues: \$40.00

Dinner: \$20.00

Dues: Maureen Goodyear

5906 Hodgman Drive

Parma Hts., OH 44130

(440)888-3814

Check to: Cleveland CWRT

February 12, 2003

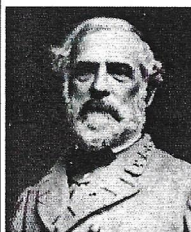


Major John Pelham

Pelham was famous for his "flying artillery". Robert E. Lee called him, "gallant and courageous," at the Battle of Fredericksburg. He was killed five months later.

Peggy Vogtsberger

March 12, 2003

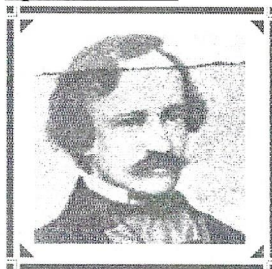


Ed Bearss
"Mister Civil War"

Robert E. Lee
At
Chancellorsville



April 9, 2003



General Pettigrew's Journal

The story of North Carolina General Johnston Pettigrew. He led the confederate left in Pickett's Charge and died in the retreat from Gettysburg.

Dan Bauer

May 14, 2003 "Guest Night"



During the Civil War, Canada was a British Colony

Canada
and the
**American
Civil War**

Mark Vinet

President's Message - February, 2003

The debate last month was a great success. I am tremendously impressed by the quality of our speakers as well as Dick Crews ability to identify participants and convince them to put the effort into preparing for the debate. Congratulations to David Carrino, our winner, for winning over some tough competition.

I have had two friends, one in North Carolina and one in Mississippi both send me news clippings about Gordon Rhea's latest book on Grant's Overland Campaign. It is nice to see the Civil War history getting this much ink. Rhea's contention is that Grant was a better general than history has accredited him. It would seem there is considerable differences of opinion as to the number casualties in the battle of Cold Harbor. Rhea cites a number of 3500 which is far lower than most other sources such as McPherson and Foote who both cited 7000 in casualties. Rhea thinks that Grant got a bad reputation because many of the earlier historians were Southerners bent on enhancing Robert E. Lee's reputation. Looks like there might be the makings of a future debate on the topic of Grant's reputation.

Please remember to get your meal reservations in before 10:00 a.m. of the Monday before our meetings.

Maynard

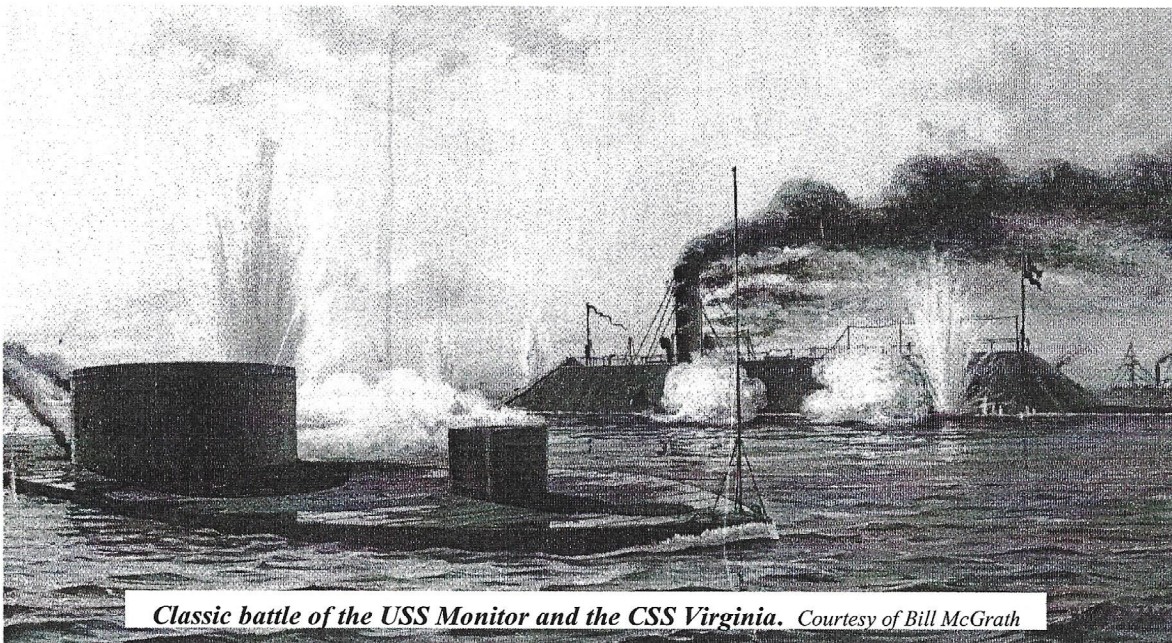
“Sailing Aboard the Monitor”

Civil War Bookshelf
By William F.B. Vodrey
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The March 9, 1862 clash of the ironclads USS Monitor and CSS Virginia (formerly the USS Merrimack) has always had a tenacious grip on the American imagination. It is easily the best-known naval engagement of the war. Many historians call the first-ever battle between two armored warships a draw; after all, neither was sunk or seriously damaged. However, when the battle was over, it was the larger, more heavily-armed Virginia which withdrew, and the smaller, more maneuverable Monitor which remained in place, having successfully guarded the vulnerable wooden warships of the U.S. Navy blockading fleet in Hampton Roads, Va.

With the raising of the Monitor's turret last summer, interest in the stalwart Union ironclad has perhaps never been stronger. Two recent books reexamine the Monitor's origins, history and mythology in very different ways. Both *The Monitor Chronicles*, edited by William Marvel (Simon & Schuster, 2000), and *War, Technology and Experience aboard the USS Monitor* by David A. Mindell (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), are interesting and informative, and they're complimentary in the different approaches they take to the subject.

The Monitor Chronicles was published in conjunction with the Mariners' Museum of Newport News, Va., the official repository of artifacts raised from the Monitor's wreck. In the book, William Marvel selects and edits dozens of letters written by George S. Geer, a 25-year-old sailor. Born in Troy, N.Y., Geer joined the Navy on Feb. 15, 1862, “less to help save the Union than to earn some money and learn a reliable trade,” as Marvel writes. Geer served aboard the Monitor throughout her short career and, with erratic spelling, wrote to his wife Martha about virtually everything that happened aboard — particularly his tireless angling for promotion, his denunciation of liquor and its effect upon his shipmates, and his keen entrepreneurial spirit. His wife bought and sent him newspapers, small locks and keys (useful against shipboard thieves), silk and sewing notions, all of which Geer sold aboard at great profit.



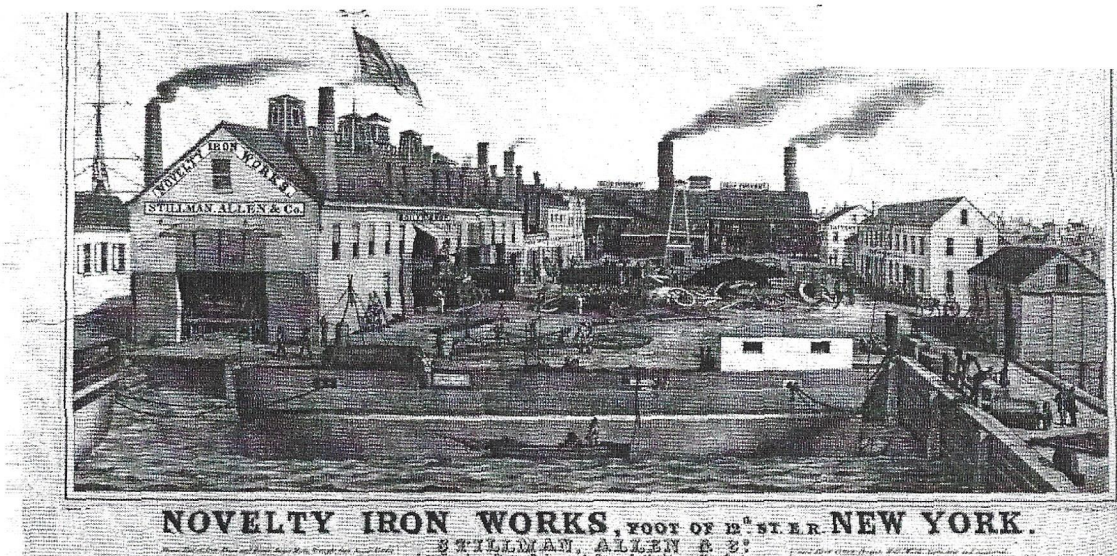
Classic battle of the USS Monitor and the CSS Virginia. Courtesy of Bill McGrath

William Vodrey is a Cleveland Magistrate and past president of Cleveland CWRT

As a first-class fireman, Geer's duties included working on the ship's engines, heaving coal, and storing ammunition and supplies. He had every sailor's concern for his own creature comforts. The pursuit of food, sleep and light duty was a major motivation for Geer, who in those days of more relaxed hygiene wasn't too embarrassed to admit he'd worn the same underwear for almost three weeks. Still, his thoughts were never far from home. Martha Geer raised their tight-knit family in a small Manhattan tenement, and depended on money her husband sent home to make ends meet. Geer worried about his family, and expressions of love and concern often appear in his letters. On March 2, 1862, just a week before the battle with the Virginia, Geer wrote: "Kiss both the Babys about 24 times apiece for me and don't let them get sick and as for you I have got no love for you, you have it all."

After the Battle of Hampton Roads, the Navy Department decided it could not take undue risks with the unique Monitor, and the ship stayed at anchor throughout the steamy summer of 1862 as a deterrent against further Confederate naval attack. Geer and his crewmates grew bored and weary in the heat. He wrote to Martha on August 13, "I do not wonder you are world at what you read in the Papers. . . about the doings of the Monitor, but they are all bosh. We have not had our Anchor up, Fired a Gun, or been of the least use or service except to act as a scare crow, for most [of] one month."

By the end of the year the Navy decided to send the Monitor south and, while being towed to Beaufort, N.C. in late December, she sank in a severe storm off Cape Hatteras, N.C. Geer barely escaped with his life, and wrote to Martha at the first opportunity, "I am sorry to have to write you that we have lost the Monitor, and what is worse we had 16 poor fellows drowned. I can tell you I thank God my life is spared... do not worry. I am safe and well" He later wrote her (in a turn of phrase I'd thought was from a century later), "You need not worry for me, as I am always looking out for No. 1 and am not going to get killed or drowned in this war." He wasn't, as it happened, but the book's biggest shortcoming is that we don't learn much more about Geer's later life other than that he served almost another three years in the Navy, including service as an engineer aboard the USS Galena. Still, this is a worthwhile look at life aboard the Monitor through the eyes of one of her crew. The book concludes with an interesting account of current efforts to preserve what remains of the Monitor's wreck.



Factories like the Novelty Iron Works (above) gave the North a marked advantage in the race to produce state-of-the-art warships. Employing a thousand workers at its facility in Manhattan. Novelty produced machinery that powered the turret of the soon-to-be-famous USS Monitor.

By contrast, *War, Technology and Experience aboard the USS Monitor* is more academic in tone, exploring the broader significance of the Union's most notable and technologically-advanced ironclad. In author David A. Mindell's conception, the ship's story "provides a lens through which to see issues of . . . society, military technology, and the human implications of new machinery."

This is an ambitious goal, and Mindell achieves it. He provides good background on the naval arms race in Europe in the mid-1800s, noting that U.S. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles had his eye on France and Britain at least as much as on the Confederacy when he set up an Ironclad Board to consider construction proposals. John Ericsson, the brilliant but mercurial designer of the Monitor, wrote in suggesting her name, "The impregnable and aggressive character of this vessel will admonish the leaders of the Southern Rebellion that the batteries on the banks of their rivers will no longer present barriers to the entrance of Union forces... but there are other leaders who will also be startled and admonished. . . . To the Lords of the [British] Admiralty the new craft will be a monitor, suggesting doubts. . . . On these and many similar grounds I propose to name the new battery Monitor."

Ericsson, Mindell writes, was not above altering his own public persona to fit the image of a hero of the Industrial Revolution, clashing with hidebound traditionalists in the Navy (some of whom insisted his ship would sink like a stone as soon as she was launched), insisting on his own grand vision and inventing — or re-inventing — himself along the way. Ericsson was distrusted by many for both his genius and his imperious manner, but what is now forgotten is that his private life was, by the standards of his day, rather scandalous. Mindell notes that Ericsson had a failed romance that resulted in the birth of an illegitimate child in his native Sweden. He was a poor businessman, declaring bankruptcy while working in England and spending some time in debtor's prison. He later married, but left his wife Amelia behind in England when he came to America in 1839; he supported her financially but never saw her again. His work in designing the USS Princeton, and the blame wrongly heaped upon him when a cannon not of his design disastrously exploded aboard her in 1844 (killing several observers, including the Secretary of State and the Secretary of the Navy), made Ericsson and the Navy mutually leery. However, the inventor learned his lessons well. Mindell writes pun-gently of the obstacles Ericsson overcame in getting the Monitor built, with all of the political wire-pulling and maneuvering that entailed: "Appearances count; demonstrations convince; nationality inspires; politics gets things done."

While Marvel takes us aboard the Monitor in the company of fireman Geer, Mindell reintroduces us to one of the ship's officers, Acting Assistant Paymaster William F. Keeler. Like Geer, Keeler was born in New York. He married the daughter of a prominent Connecticut politician, and became a small businessman with a flair for machinery. He had two years' sea experience and was an ardent abolitionist. He was 41 when he came

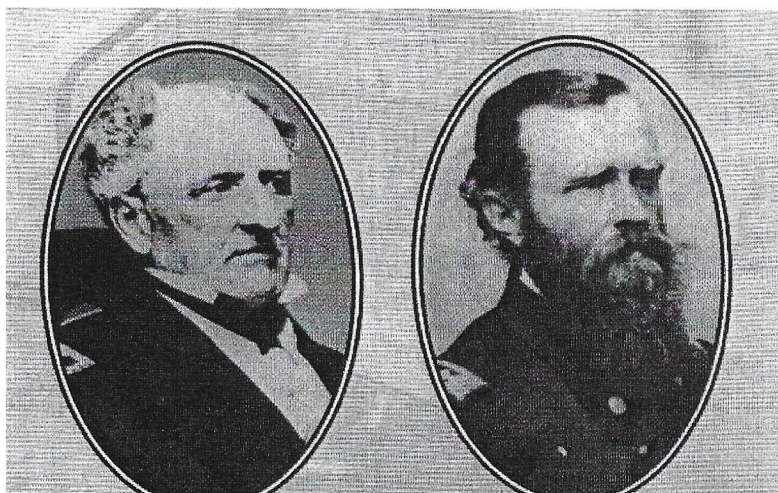


John Ericsson, brilliant but egotistical engineer who designed the Monitor.

(Courtesy of the Naval Photographic Center, Washington, D.C.)

aboard the Monitor for service as a glorified clerk, the oldest man aboard but for the captain. On such a small ship, he and Geer knew one another; Keeler was blamed by the crew when the ship's fund ran out of money or the captain decided to withhold pay; in one letter, Geer denounced Keeler a "devilish scoundrel." Keeler disapproved of the crew's excessive drinking and pranks, and kept his distance. As Mindell writes, "Amid the crew, Keeler had that tinge of social awkwardness that makes a good observer." Keeler wrote 79 letters to his wife Anna while serving aboard the Monitor, and in them he provided a thorough description of ironclad shipboard life.

Mindell makes good use of Keeler's letters and other documents in showing how sharp a break the Monitor made with maritime tradition. The role of engineers and staff officers was in flux; the Navy's traditionalist deck officers considered them almost second-class citizens. Officers and crew also mixed and mingled much more aboard the compact ironclad than they would on a sailing ship, breaking down some social barriers that the officers might rather have maintained. The delicate but complex machinery of the Monitor needed constant watching, and the crew was "living on a technological frontier," Mindell writes, with constant uncertainty as to what lay ahead. The Monitor's crew prized physical courage, as did most Americans of that era, so fighting in an ironclad vessel seemed almost unsporting. After the clash with the Virginia, Keeler wrote, "I think we get more credit for the fight than we deserve — anyone could fight behind an impenetrable armor — many have fought as well behind wooden walls or none at all. The credit, if any is due, is in daring to undertake the trip and go into the fight in an untried experiment and in our unprepared condition." Years later, John Worden, the Monitor's commanding officer during her battle with the Virginia, agreed with Keeler, writing, "Here was an unknown, untried vessel, with all but a small portion of her below the waterline, her crew to live with the ocean beating over their heads — an iron coffin-like ship of which the gloomiest predictions were made, with her crew shut out from sunlight and the air above the sea, depending entirely on artificial means to supply the air they breathe. A failure of the machinery



The CSS Virginia was commanded by Franklin Buchanan, a founder of the Naval Academy. When he was wounded in action with the USS Congress, Lt. Catesby Jones replaced him for the battle against the Monitor.

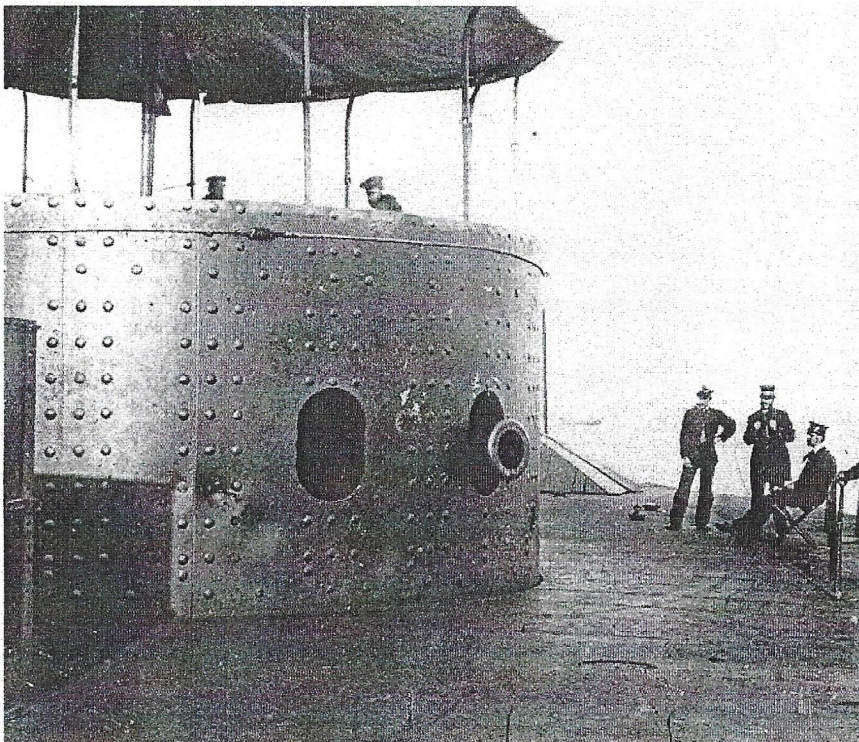
John L. Worden, a 27-year veteran of the Navy, was in command of the Monitor. He fought the Virginia from close range, sometimes only a few yards away.

... would be almost certain death to her men.” Mindell persuasively argues that, for all of the successes of the Monitor and her sister ships, they were oversold by Ericsson, were almost as hazardous to their crews as to the enemy, and sank with disconcerting ease.

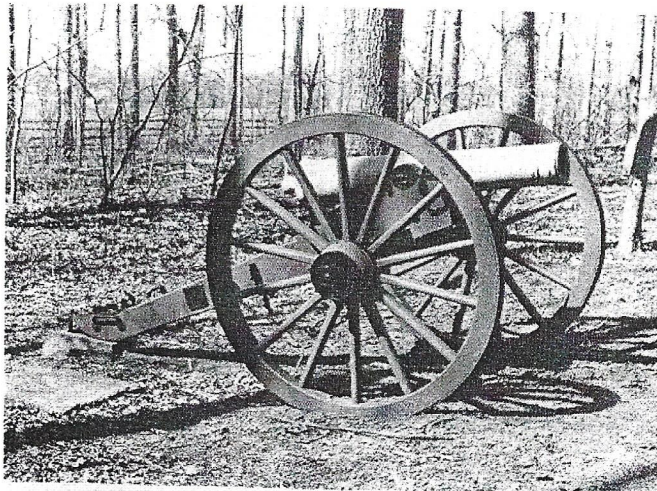
Paymaster Keeler, like Geer and the rest of the crew, chafed under the Navy’s cautious policy after the Virginia steamed away. Keeler wrote his wife in frustration that “the Government is getting to regard the Monitor in pretty much the same light as an over careful housewife regards her ancient china set — too valuable to use, too useful to keep as a relic, yet anxious that all shall know what she owns and that she can use it when the occasion demands, though she fears much its beauty may be marred or its usefulness impaired.” Keeler later wrote, “I believe the department [is] going to build a glass case to put us in for fear of harm coming to us.” However, Mindell acknowledges the tremendous risk Lincoln and Welles would run if the ship were lost or captured after her first battle: “The ironclad gained value as a symbol as well as a weapon, and an emblem of victory could quickly become an emblem of defeat.”

Although ultimately lost not in battle but in a storm at sea, the Monitor was the model for most of the ironclad warships built by the U.S. Navy daring and just after the Civil War. Monitor-type ships remained on the Navy List until 1937. Mindell writes that Ericsson’s little ship and her progeny “sold the ideas that navies could build both ships and machines, that naval officers had to share their glory with designers and constructors, and that mechanical warfare, whatever its indignities, might also leave a place for human skill, and hence for heroism.”

In examining the Monitor phenomena from every angle, and putting it in context with the ever-changing nature of technological warfare up through the 1991 Gulf War, Mindell offers an offbeat and fascinating look at the broader issues surrounding perhaps the most influential warship ever built.



The rotating turret of the Monitor was more than a match for CSS Virginia's shot, which dented but couldn't breach the eight inches of armor. The Monitor's twin 11" guns were just as unsuccessful against the sloping sides and 28 inches of pine, oak, and iron protecting the Virginia.



12-pounder field howitzer, Confederate manufacture

Confederate Cannons & Young Men Dying

**Wednesday,
February 12, 2003**