

H-Net Reviews

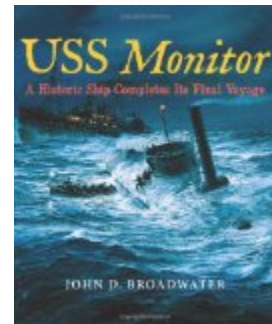
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John D. Broadwater. *USS Monitor: A Historic Ship Completes Its Final Voyage*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012. xiv + 239 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-60344-473-6.

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Published on H-CivWar (September, 2012)

Commissioned by Hugh F. Dubrulle



Raising the USS *Monitor*

If the U.S. Navy is mentioned in histories of the American Civil War, it is almost always with reference to the famous ironclad USS *Monitor* and its epic battle with the Confederate ironclad CSS *Virginia*. From the moment it arrived in Hampton Roads on the evening of March 8, 1862, to magnificent exhibits about the warship and its artifacts currently on display at the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, Virginia, no other U.S. Navy warship has caught the public attention like the *Monitor*. Add the public fascination with shipwrecks of any kind and one has the making of a story as riveting and interesting as the Egyptian mummies.

Many books have been written about the *Monitor* over the years, and with the 150th anniversary of the battle many more have been published recently. The vast majority, unfortunately, have offered no new insights into the warship. Thus it is wonderful to see John D. Broadwater's *USS Monitor: A Historic Ships Completes Its Final Voyage*, which presents new information into the discovery, recovery, and preservation of the ship as only a primary source can. Broadwater served as the chief archeologist for the National Oceanographic Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Monitor National Marine Sanctuary for many years. He was personally involved with numerous dives on the shipwreck and with the development of the wreck's management plan.

This work is not a formal archaeological report or history with many technical words and numbers that only a

trained archeologist or historian could understand. There is no college-level thesis that the reader has to break down and analyze from different points of view. The author explains in simple and accessible language the diverse technologies used in surveying and recovering the wreck, allowing any person with a basic understanding of the sea to comprehend his study. The result is a narrative that is both educational and entertaining.

For the uninitiated, the work provides a history of the *Monitor*'s design and operations. It includes a discussion of how and why the *Monitor* sank off the coast of Cape Hatteras, and what has been done since. The bulk of the work is focused on the planning and challenges of working on a wreck like the *Monitor*. Broadwater discusses the new maritime technologies and approaches used to both survey and ultimately raise parts of the wreck. This book also answers numerous questions, including why NOAA, a federal agency nominally in charge of such projects as managing the country's ocean fishing stocks and monitoring the weather, is in charge of a U.S. warship (answer: the navy was not in a position to do so in the 1970s, and fortunately NOAA stepped up to protect the site).

A more complete discussion about the legal status of U.S. Navy and Confederate shipwrecks could have been added to further educate the reader. In other words, why is the wreck of the *Monitor* different from the wreck of the *Titanic*? The *Monitor* is a U.S. government vessel while the *Titanic* and other civilian shipwrecks belong to the

insurance companies that underwrote the voyages. But only a select few are aware of this difference.

It could be argued that such a discussion and other weighty topics fall outside the scope of this work. The

point of this study is to provide the general public with an overview of the *Monitor*, how it was raised from the depths, and what is being done to highlight its legacy. In that respect, Broadwater has succeeded.

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Citation: Gordon B. Calhoun. Review of Broadwater, John D., *USS Monitor: A Historic Ship Completes Its Final Voyage*. H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. September, 2012.

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