

The Race to Save the Monitor

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Abstract: During July and August, 2002, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the U.S. Navy fought against time and the elements to recover the gun turret from the sunken Civil War ironclad USS Monitor. The Monitor, which sank off Cape Hatteras, NC, in December 1862, is rapidly disintegrating. Since 1998, NOAA, the U.S. Navy, and The Mariners' Museum have conducted annual joint expeditions to the sanctuary with the goals of site stabilization and component recovery. These expeditions have combined conventional archaeological mapping and excavation with heavy-lift salvage operations. The partnership has been extremely successful, resulting in the safe recovery of major hull components, smaller artifacts, and a wealth of data. During 2001 the Monitor's 40-ton steam engine was recovered. Equally successful has been a multi-agency science team that uses self-contained diving techniques at the Monitor's 240-foot depth. Monitor Expedition 2002, conducted during June and July, resulted in the recovery of the Monitor's famous gun turret and guns. All recovered objects are being conserved and exhibited at The Mariners' Museum, Newport News, VA.