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## THE MONITOR AND THE MERRIMAC.

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WASHINGTON, July 19.



AMONG the bills which will be presented to Congress at the coming session will be one for the increase of the rank of Lieut. Samuel Howard. Lieut.

Howard came within one-tenth of one per cent of passing the technical examination given by the martinet of the Department of the Navy in 1876, and by them he was refused a second examination. Committees of Congress have reported in favor of the bill, and, if passed, it will be only justice to one of the bravest men the United States has ever known. Among the most heroic acts of the late civil war was that of this man Howard when he volunteered to act as the pilot of the Monitor in its terrible fight with the Merrimac at Hampton Roads. He carried the vessel throughout that engagement, and his story of that awful fight is now here given for the first time to the public.

But first let me tell you something about Lieut. Howard. He is an old man now, and his years number seventy-five. Still his eye is bright, his step is firm and he is mentally as sound as he was when, now more than a generation ago, he took the Monitor into action. He is as straight as an arrow, and his bearing is military. He has a broad forehead, bright blue eyes and a long blonde beard, in which there are many gray strands. He lives in a modest little house almost under the shadow of the national Capitol. He is the personification of modesty, and in his talk about the engagement with me last night he kept himself in the background. I had to ask many questions before I got the story of his life. His first voyage was taken at the age of sixteen, when he sailed from Dublin for the Mediterranean. I believe he ran away from home to go to sea, and he had visited nearly every part of the world and had coasted up and down the Atlantic shores of the United States for many years before the war began. He had been several times captain of a vessel, and as a naturalized American citizen, he put himself at the service of Uncle Sam as soon as the war opened. He was appointed acting master of the brig Amanda, whose duty it was to coast up and down the eastern shores of the Atlantic and capture the

ships who tried to run our blockade, and he left this ship to act as pilot for the Monitor. Speaking of his modesty, he evidently thinks that he did no more than any other man would have done under similar circumstances, and when I asked him whether he was not afraid when he was penned up in that little iron box with the shot and shell raining down upon it he replied:

"I had no time to think of being afraid. It was all I could do to keep the boat moving according to the directions of Captain Worden, who stood in the pilot house by my side."

The main facts of the engagement between the Monitor and the Merrimac are well known, but there are many details which have never been given to the public. It is safe to say that had it not been for Samuel Howard there would have been no action that day. The Merrimac would have returned and the Minnesota and millions of dollars' worth of Uncle Sam's property would have been destroyed. When the Monitor came into Fortress Monroe she found herself unable to go into action for the want of a pilot. She had been brought from the north by a Baltimore man who sympathized with the south, and when Fortress Monroe was reached this man refused to take the little iron monster out against the Merrimac. The pilots on the boats at Hampton Roads were also southern sympathizers, and either from this or from cowardice they refused to act. They said they knew nothing about the waters, and Captain Worden was in despair when he was called upon by Samuel Howard and the captain of his brig. These two had brought their ship from Wilmington to Fortress Monroe for provisions, and seeing the Monitor they came to visit her. As they stepped upon the deck Captain Worden greeted them and told them his troubles about a pilot. Lieut. Howard at once offered to take the position. He said he knew something of the Roads, and that he would gladly conduct it into action. He told Captain Worden that the pilots had been lying to him about their ignorance. He said: "They are a set of — rebels, captain, and they know the Roads better than I do, but you can't make them act. You had better take me." To this Captain Worden gladly assented, and Howard was ushered into the pilot house of the Monitor and remained there almost from the time of its arrival Saturday until the close of its fight with the Merrimac on the following day.

Before I give Lieut. Howard's story of the battle proper let me say something of the events of the day preceding. Lieut. Howard had arrived on his brig in time to see the engagement between the Merrimac and our gunboats, and the

most of my information concerning that fight comes from him. Sitting in the rigging of his ship with his glass he saw the queer ironclad sail down the Elizabeth river and take its way across the channel to engage with our gunboats lying along the coast between Newport News and Fortress Monroe, and he watched that terrible fight. The Merrimac, you know, was a frigate of 3,500 tons, which had been burned and sunk during the spring of 1861 at Norfolk.

A few months later it was raised by the confederates and converted into an ironclad. The ship was then cut down to the old berth decks. Her machinery was left within her, but the whole of the ship above the water was covered with iron plates two inches thick and eight inches wide, so riveted together that the vessel had an armor of iron four inches thick. Upon its prow they put a great iron ram, which projected four feet beyond the vessel and which did terrible damage to one of the northern gunboats before the Monitor arrived. In the sides of the vessel there were port holes, and the ten great guns behind these vomited forth shot and shell without ceasing while she was in action. The ship was commanded by some of the ablest officers in the confederacy, and it had a crew of 300 picked men. It was a clumsy vessel. It drew twenty-three feet of water. It could not travel more than five miles an hour and it took from thirty to forty minutes to turn. Still, with the wooden ships of 1862 it was an all-powerful monster. Its iron coat made it practically impregnable, and when it started on its first voyage of destruction there was a panic in the cabinet at Washington, and Secretary Stanton predicted that it would ruin our navy, and the other members almost felt that it was already anchored in the Potomac with its guns trained on the White House. The ship was built at the Norfolk navy yard, its iron plates having been rolled at the Tredegar iron foundry in Richmond. When it started out some of the officers thought that it was merely for a trial trip, but if so, it was the most terrible trial that any vessel ever had.

Only a few miles from Norfolk is Fortress Monroe, with Hampton Roads lying between. About seven miles above Fortress Monroe, at the mouth of the James river, is Newport News. This line of several miles constitutes the northern part of the roads, and, scattered along it, was a line of northern men-of-war. Nearest Fortress Monroe were the three frigates, the St. Lawrence, the Roanoke and the Minnesota. Just off Newport News were anchored two more frigates, the Congress, containing fifty guns, and the Cumberland, having thirty. These boats evidently did not expect an engagement. The