

**“MONITOR” By James Tertius deKay**  
**Pimlico Books 1997. ISBN 0-7126-6539-0**  
**Original Paperback Price £9.**  
**Reviewed by Rob Morgan**

No, I didn't pay £9 for this 247 page book. It's illustrated too, but with prints and photos which most will know. 'MONITOR' is currently on sale at branches of 'The Works' for 99p, and has to be the naval wargamer's bargain of the month. There are well over a hundred branches of 'The Works' across the UK and a call to 0121 313 6000 will give you details of the nearest one (I don't think they do mail order).

That incredible vessel the *USS Monitor*, brainchild of one of the three men who revolutionised war at sea in the second half of the nineteenth century is described here with great precision and even greater flair. It's as much the background story of Ericsson as of his Ironclad, and I found it fascinating reading.



The creation of the 'tin can on a raft' was no easy feat, and of course Ericsson had to compete with the other designs of *Galena* and *New Ironsides* also rushed

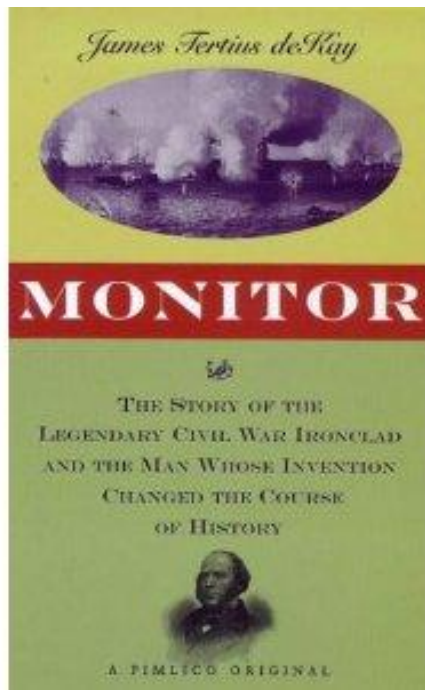
into existence as the War looked set to turn against the Union.

The saga unfolds against the backdrop of these early reverses, and the story begins not with *Monitor* but with the fate of the Frigate *USS Merrimack* and her re-incarnation as the Confederate battery ironclad at Norfolk. It was interesting to learn that the US Department of The Navy originally expected their new ship to

operate under sail as well as steam, which had it happened might have given *Monitor* an even shorter career!

The book goes on to give one of the best accounts I've read of the *CSS Virginia's* elimination of the 18 strong Blockading Squadron including no fewer than 5 major US warships mounting 212 guns , by a single ironclad with a ram and only 12 guns.

While the actual 'Battle of Hampton Roads,' far from being a decisive encounter between '*...a pair of heavily armored knights...upon a watery field of honor*' as the book suggests, was in fact a rather scrappy three-hour affair, since neither side actually possessed any experience in ironclad warfare.



The US ship ironically, had strictly limited powder aboard, a limitation imposed after an 1843 explosion aboard the *USS Princeton*.

Finally the author follows the two ships beyond their fight, with assessments of the effects of shot, the damage to armour, the state of the Confederate's engines which are all well known and have been rehearsed often enough. None of deKay's many listed sources and acknowledgements will surprise any reader with an interest in ironclad warships, though he does tell the story particularly well.

Neither of these incredible warships lasted long of course, only two months for the Rebel ram, and eleven for the Federal, but the ironclad was here to stay.