Monitor National Marine Sanctuary

(MNMS) was designated on January 30, 1975, off the coast of North Carolina, as the nation’s first national marine sanctuary. The sanctuary protects the wreck site of the USS Monitor, the prototype for a class of U.S. Civil War ironclad, turreted warships that significantly altered both naval technology and marine architecture in the nineteenth century. The Monitor fought for the Union in the infamous Battle of Hampton Roads. The battle ended in a draw, but it initiated the dawn of iron warships. On December 31, 1862, less than a year after its launch, the Monitor sank in a storm on its way under tow to Beaufort, NC. Today, Monitor National Marine Sanctuary protects the wreck for future generations and works to share this iconic vessel’s historical and cultural legacy with the public.

Research and Monitoring
Since it was first discovered, ship’s historical significance captured the attention of researchers and archaeologists; however, due to its remote location, it is a difficult area to study on a regular basis. Today, researchers and archaeologists continue to study the site, and each expedition has revealed new information that provides us with a deeper understanding of the Monitor’s legacy. The Mariners’ Museum in Newport News, VA, is the leading facility for the conservation of over 200 tons of Monitor artifacts. The museum’s Batten Conservation Laboratory Complex has conserved over 60% of the collection that includes more than 1,500 objects with items from small personal effects to large pieces, such as the rotating gun turret. A NOAA data buoy installed in the sanctuary now makes it possible to view real-time data on water and air temperature, wind direction, wave height and other environmental conditions. The data collected aide mariners in determining sea conditions off the Cape Hatteras coast.

Education and Outreach
Monitor National Marine Sanctuary remains committed to engaging visitors and local communities through education and outreach to learn more about our nation’s maritime heritage. Whether it is participating in events supporting local economies, placing wayside signs to create a Monitor Trail, providing educational programs and materials that teach about our maritime heritage and the USS Monitor, or creating a series of downloadable videos that depict iconic places in North Carolina, the sanctuary strives to inspire new audiences to protect our rich maritime heritage resources and act as wise ocean stewards.

The USS Monitor represented a revolutionary concept in ship design with new inventions and innovations.
The remains of two unidentified sailors were discovered in the USS *Monitor*’s recovered turret.

On July 9, 1862, some of the *Monitor*’s crew relaxed on deck in this photo taken by James Gibson.

After sinking in 1862, the USS *Monitor* wreck now teems with marine life.