



In 1861 the U.S. Navy was in a demoralized condition with its 1457 officers and 7600 men scattered all over the globe and less than half of its 90 ships ready for active service. Of its meager officer personnel many defected to the South: 16 captains, 34 commanders, 76 lieutenants, and 111 regular and acting midshipmen. Yet as one naval expert stated: *“If the North’s command problem was irritating, that of the South was intolerable.”* Still, the energetic Confederacy held full control of the Mississippi River. Along the 1000-miles of winding river the Confederates constructed fortified positions to deny use by the Union navy, creating an economic crisis for many Northern states bordering the Mississippi. To regain control of this crucial waterway the Union desperately needed an inland navy.

Selected to build a major part of this navy was James Buchanan Eads, a retired St. Louis millionaire. Eads had made his fortune raising vessels from the bottom of the Mississippi using a fleet of salvage ships known as *“snag boats.”* Inspired by Louis Napoleon’s use of floating gun batteries during the Crimean War, Eads went to Washington D.C. with a proposal to convert one of his *“snag boats”* into an ironclad ship—fully five months before construction began on the **USS Monitor**. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles was impressed with the idea, but the Naval Department had no authority in the matter since the western waters were under the jurisdiction of the Army.

The Army wasn’t interested in Eads’ converted boat, but it did want him to build seven new ironclads. Eads was not a naval architect, so the plans were drawn up by Samuel M. Pook with assistance from designer Thomas Merritt. Seven new ironclads—**Cairo, Carondelet, Cincinnati, Louisville, Mound City, Pittsburg, and St. Louis** (later renamed the **Baron De Kalb**)—were soon under construction. Eads had guaranteed the Army that the ships could be finished in 65 days, but the **USS St. Louis** was launched 45 days after construction began. The six other sister ships, collectively called *“Pook Turtles,”* followed shortly. Round-nosed and flat-bottomed, each Turtle weighed 512 tons, was 175-feet long, and had a draft of 6 feet. Their slanted casements were protected by 2.5 inches of iron-plated armor. Armed with smoothbore and rifled cannon, the Turtles were manned by Regular Navy men, volunteers, detailed army personnel, and contract civilians. Despite serious defects in their design, the Pook Turtles contributed greatly to Federal successes in the River War on Western waters allowing the Union to regain control of the *“Father of Waters.”*

This month—**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29**—Larry Hathcock will present *“Naval War on the Mississippi.”* Larry will concentrate on the building of the river ironclads and the campaigns on the Mississippi including the capture of Island No. 10, Fort Jackson, and Port Hudson. An MRRT member since 1981, Larry is a retired teacher from Holly Public Schools. He has given two other talks to our group—*“The Battle of Hampton Roads: USS Monitor and CSS Virginia”* and *“The CSS Alabama and USS Kearsarge.”* It should be a fun evening....

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Our thanks to September speaker, **Steve Hawks**, for his exceptional program, *“Embattled Baltimore & Ohio: Front Line Railroading in the Civil War.”*

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Our Chattanooga/Chickamauga foragers have returned to tell you of their travels. Hopefully photographs will be displayed for you to see what you missed.

**YEARLY DUES:** Once again it’s time to pay your dues to the Michigan Regimental, and the good news is they haven’t changed (\$15 for regular membership/\$10 for seniors and students). Simply place your checks (made out to Carroll Tietz) in the envelopes provided and mail them in. You can’t beat that with a musket butt.



**QUIZ:** All questions pertain to the navies....

1. Who designed and created the Confederacy’s submarine that sank an enemy ship? And, what weapon did it carry? [Extra Credit: What was this inventor’s final outcome?]
2. One of the Confederacy’s famous cruisers built in England was the *Tallahassee*. By what other two names was it later known?
3. Where did 3 Confederate politicians, all vociferous opponents of Jefferson Davis, meet with Abraham Lincoln on February 3, 1865, to discuss possible terms of peace? And, name these three men.
4. Which ship attempted to carry supplies to Robert Anderson’s forces at Fort Sumter on January 9, 1861, and from which locations did Confederates fire on this ship?
5. Which former U.S. Navy lieutenant and veteran of the Mexican War commanded the *CSS Sumter* and made 18 captures of Union ships in 6 months? And, which more famous vessel did he later command? [Extra Credit: Which 3 professions did he dabble in following the war?]
6. What was the first cruiser constructed abroad for the Confederacy? And, which ship built in Scotland was the last Confederate commerce destroyer to operate on the seas?
7. Who commanded the *USS Monitor* in the famous battle with the *CSS Merrimack* on March 9, 1862? And, who succeeded him in command when he was blinded during the battle?
8. Who commanded the *CSS Merrimack* in this first battle of the ironclads? And, who took command when he was wounded?
9. Following the killing of John Wilkes Booth, where was his body kept until its burial? And, what other vessel was used for temporary incarceration of the Lincoln conspirators?
10. Who commanded the *USS New Ironsides*? And, which Confederate submarine exploded a torpedo against it on October 5, 1863, without great damage?

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Prostitutes were such a problem in Nashville, Tennessee, that Union commanders attempted to throw them all out of the city, the first Confederate capital captured by Federal forces, falling in February 1862. The city offered Union soldiers temptations in the form of women and opium, both of which could be obtained along the notorious “*Smoky Row*.” By July 1863, the problem of soldiers infected with venereal disease was so bad that Brigadier General James D. Morgan decided it was within his power to “*seize and transport to Louisville all prostitutes found in this City*.” He called it a “*preemptory remedy*.”

Morgan gave the job of handling the “ladies” to Lt. Col. George Spalding who went looking for a riverboat to accomplish the task. Spalding walked down to the Cumberland River wharves and selected the **Idahoe**, which had been built just three weeks earlier. He didn’t even tell the captain of the vessel, which was contracted by the Federal government to move men and supplies, what his next cargo would entail. The first thing Capt. John Newcomb knew about his part in this bold mission was when Col. Spalding showed up on his gangplank with more than a hundred prostitutes in tow. Spalding handed Newcomb a simple written order that stated he was to take the “passengers” to Louisville, and that he was to allow “*none to leave the boat before reaching*” that city. Newcomb protested to no avail.

The **Idahoe** sailed up the Cumberland River on July 9. Along the way, the ladies of the evening came out in the daytime long enough to smash furniture and vandalize the ship’s wall paneling in protest of their removal. Newcomb tried to land at several points along the river but was turned back by guards who were under orders not to let the women set foot on land. The upset ladies waved at men on shore and in rowboats, sometimes taking their dress tops off to make clear what they were selling. Newcomb wrote that he was unable to stop the prostitutes from plying their trade with the civilians



along the river and even with his own crew. He counted 111 “soiled doves” on board, far too many to monitor. Actually, the women did not sell anything to the crew; everything was on the house.

By July 14, a relieved Newcomb reached Louisville. However, Brig. Gen. Jeremiah T. Boyle, the military governor of Kentucky, refused to allow Newcomb to dock and ordered him to proceed with his cargo to Cincinnati. Two days later, armed policemen met the **Idahoe** at Newport, Kentucky, across the river from Cincinnati. They, too, refused to allow the fallen angels off the riverboat. In frustration Newcomb sent a telegram to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton in Washington. Stanton settled the matter of the **Idahoe** quickly and in a manner that allowed him to get back at political enemies in Tennessee. The Secretary of War ordered the cargo to return to Nashville and reprimanded General Morgan for thinking of the scheme in the first place.

By August 3, the love boat’s three-week voyage was over, and the ladies were back at work in Nashville. Brig. Gen. Robert S. Granger, who had replaced Morgan as military commander of the city, settled on a simple solution to the problems brought on by prostitution. He legalized it. The general had the women inspected, licensed, and treated for the diseases of the profession. It was a full year before Captain Newcomb was paid for feeding the women while they were on board his ship.

The **Idahoe** never escaped her label of being a “floating whorehouse.” She later sank in a river accident in 1869. And Newcomb’s crew? It is unknown how many were treated for disease after their three-week encounter. But as long as they were members of his crew, the captain made them “wipe the smiles off their faces” whenever they reminisced about that strangely satisfying voyage of July 1863. One thing for certain, many of the crewmen found truth in the old adage: “*One night with Venus, and a lifetime with Mercury.*”

### QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. Horace L. Hunley and 90# of gunpowder (a torpedo) on a 20’ spar [Hunley, along with 7 other men, died aboard the submarine on October 15, 1863, on its second voyage.]
2. *Olustee* and the *Chameleon*
3. Hampton Roads and John A. Campbell, Robert M.T. Hunter, Alexander Stephens
4. *Star of the West* and Morris Island and Fort Moultrie
5. Raphael Semmes and *CSS Alabama* [college professor, newspaper editor, and attorney]
6. *CSS Florida* and *CSS Shenandoah*
7. John L. Worden and Samuel Dana Greene
8. Franklin Buchanan and Catesby R. Jones
9. The ironclad *Montauk* and the monitor *Saugus*
10. Rear Admiral Samuel F. Du Pont and *CSS David*

A reminder of our meeting this month: **Larry Hathcock** will present, “*Naval War on the Mississippi,*” at the Farmington Public Library (Grand River and Farmington Road). Circle the date: **MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29**. We will begin at 6:30 P.M. See you there.

Also try our website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/> and have a Happy Holiday Season!