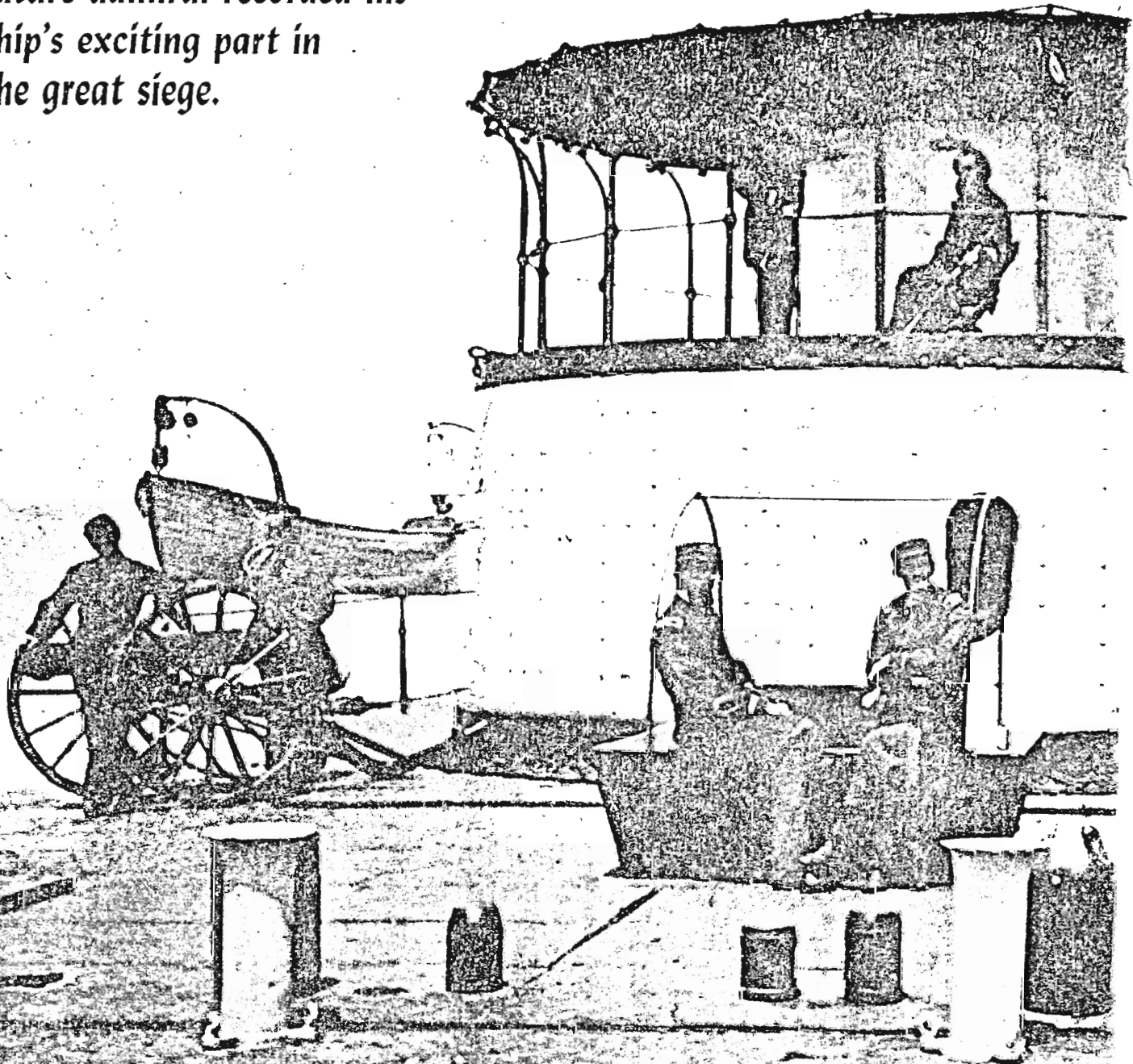


CIVIL WAR TIMES ILLUSTRATED  
JULY 1971

Aboard the monitor Catskill  
at Charleston harbor in 1863,  
an observant and articulate  
future admiral recorded his  
ship's exciting part in  
the great siege.



"Such A Fine 9 Member

## By Wallace Shugg

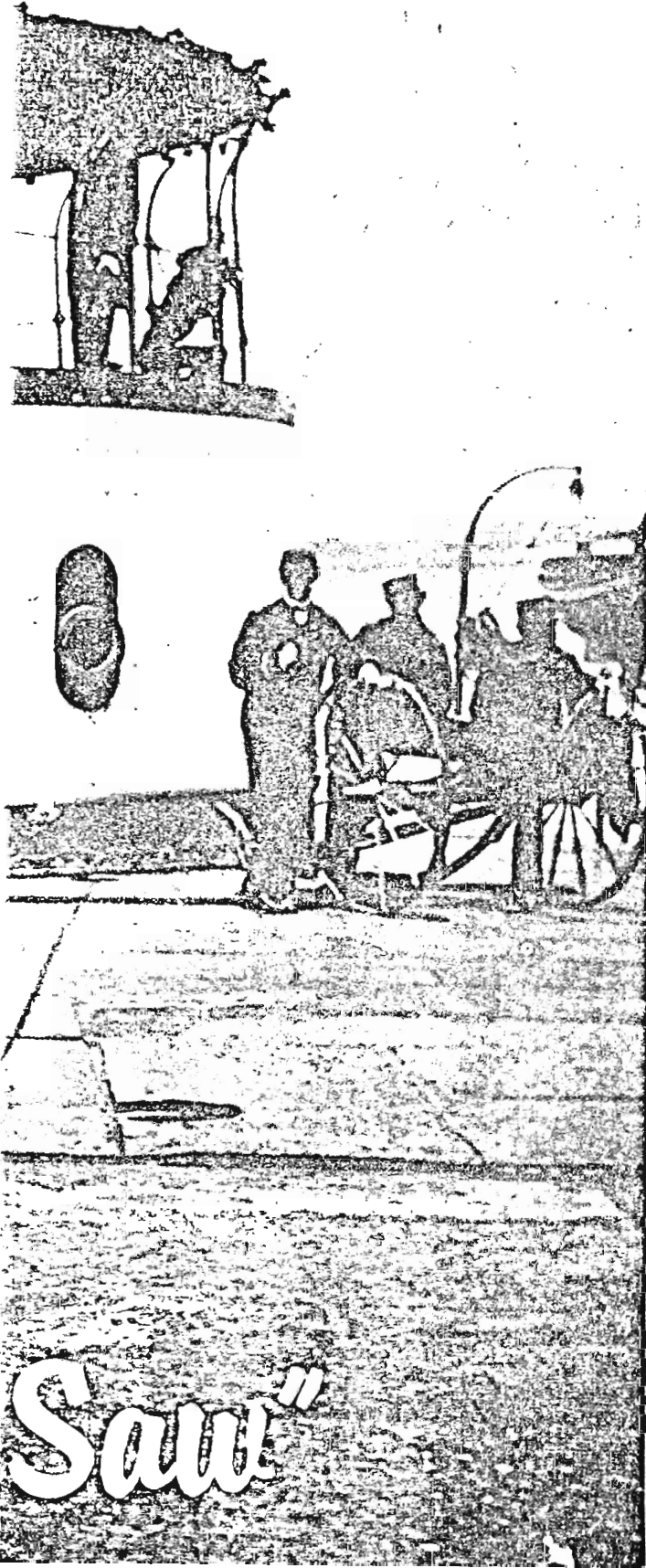
**A**pril 2, 1863 . . . The iron-clads are all here now. . . . It is certainly a formidable force, but how they will stand against those numerous & powerful batteries with the heaviest guns known in modern warfare remains to be proved." Thus wrote Lieutenant Commander Charles Carroll Carpenter, executive officer of the *Catskill*, to his "own dear Annie" just before the first naval attack on Charleston. The 29-year-old officer was one of an elite group chosen to man the new class of monitors.

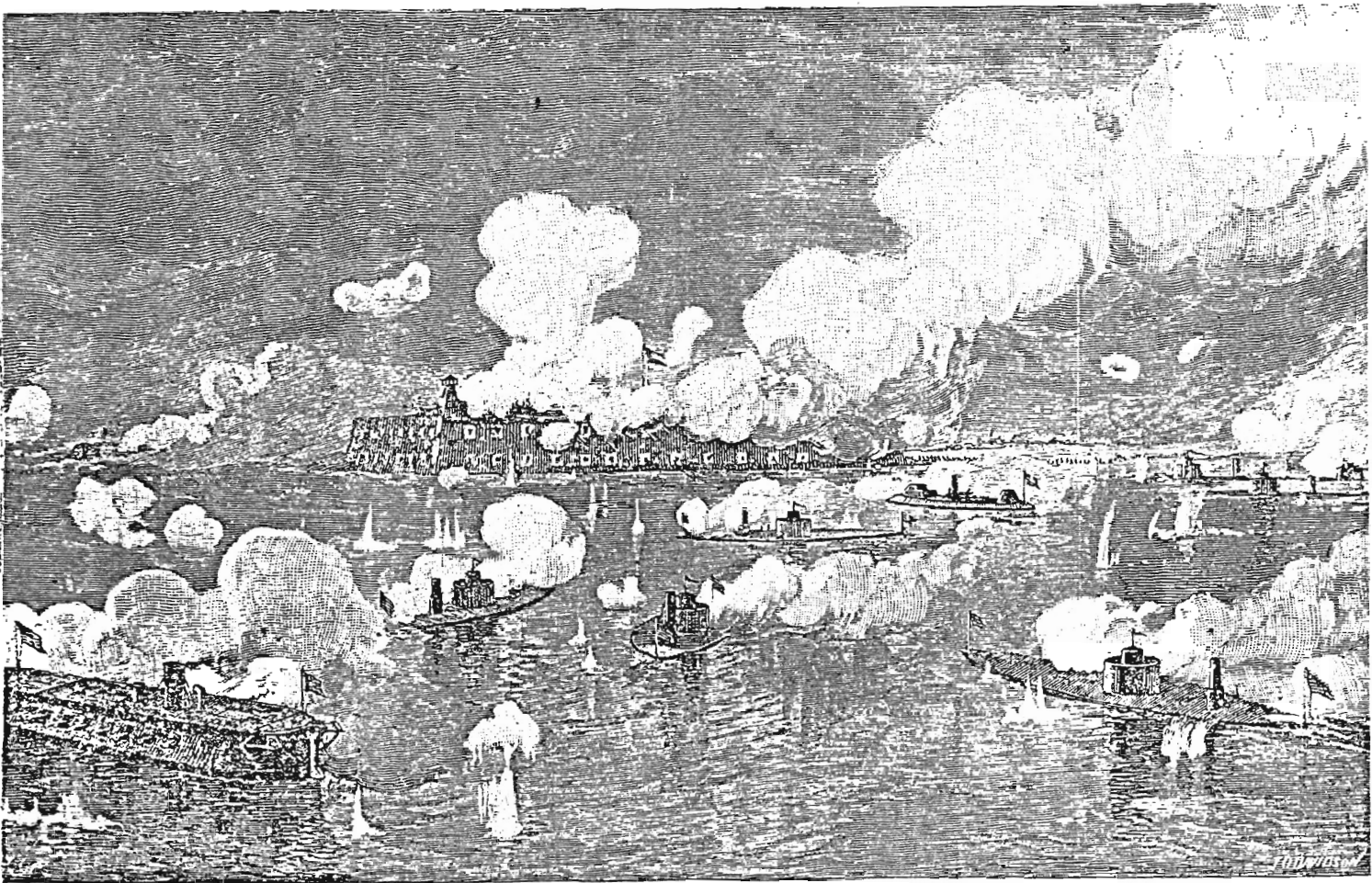
The *Catskill* and her sister ships were part of a bold plan. After the dramatic success of the *Monitor* against the *Merrimack* (or *Virginia*) the previous year at Hampton Roads, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and Assistant Secretary Gustavus Fox pushed through the construction of additional ironclads and placed them under the command of Rear Admiral Samuel F. Du Pont. The plan was for Du Pont to run the gantlet of guns in Charleston Harbor and bombard the city into surrender. By thus smashing or capturing the "cradle of the rebellion" and depriving blockade runners of an important haven, they hoped to hasten the end of the war.

The new monitors had the same "cheesebox-on-a-raft" appearance as their original, but with enlarged dimensions and heavier armor and guns. They were 200 feet long and 46 feet wide. The turret was nine feet high and armored with eleven 1-inch plates of iron. It was surmounted by a pilot house of smaller diameter, seven feet high, with eight 1-inch plates. Inside her turret, the *Catskill* (and most of the others of her class) carried one 11-inch and one 15-inch Dahlgren smoothbore mounted side by side.

Anchored at North Edisto Inlet, some seventeen miles below Charleston Bar, Carpenter described for his wife the extensive preparations for the coming battle (all spelling is as in the original): "We have been taking in more iron plates . . . from the Steamer 'Mary Sandford.' . . . These plates are going over the engine & boilers & will be a great protection. . . . Vessels have been arriving all day, & now there is nothing but a forrest of masts. . . . I suppose they all have ammunition & supplies. . . . We have been greasing our deck, turret & all outside with tallow, a thick coat, this afternoon. Now we tread in grease when we go on deck. The object is to glance the shot. Everything is taken away & stowed below. . . ."

*The U. S. Monitor "Catskill" off Charleston, early in 1865. The commanding officer, Lt. Comdr. Edward Barrett, is seated in front of the armoured pilothouse on top of the turret. The 15-inch and 11-inch Dahlgren smoothbores which formed the armament may be seen through the gunport in the turret.*  
(Official U.S. Navy Photo)





"NEW IRONSIDES."

"KEOKUK."

Bombardment of Fort Sumter and adjacent forts, April 7, 1863. Foreground (left) "New Ironsides" and (right) "Keokuk." (B&L)

On Sunday, April 5, the ironclads reached their destination for the attack the next day. "When we came in sight this afternoon of Charleston," Carpenter wrote, "they fired a few times from all their batteries, to let us know they were ready, . . . & this evening I have been watching them throwing up rockets: first from Sumpter, then from all the rest. . . . We are so near one battery that I could hear the rocket explode which they sent up. We have a colored man for a pilot who used to be in the pilot boats & seems to be very intelligent." But on Monday the attack was postponed: "It was very hazy, so that we could scarcely see the shore, & the pilots would not take us up."

The weather cleared on Tuesday, April 7:

shortly after 12 o'clock, the Admiral made signal to get underway. In a very short time, we were all moving in order of battle towards Ft. Sumpter. Went to quarters. We were No. 6 in the line, following immediately after the Ironsides. The Weehawkin taking the lead. Everything was perfectly quiet, & a beautiful afternoon. Capt. Rogers & myself remained on top of the turret, watching the first guns from the Forts. When the . . . [Weehawkin] got within about 1000 yards of the forts & equal distance

nearly, they opened fire from Ft. Moultrie, then Ft. Sumpter, Ft. Johnson & all the Sullivan's Island batteries shot, striking all about her & the next vessel, but they did not seem to notice it & they stood on without firing a gun. until . . . [the Weehawkin] got within about 600 yds, when she opened fire on Ft. Sumpter. I was on the turret & could plainly see the shot strike & the bricks & dust fly. Ft. Sumpter would fire all her parapet guns at once, a perfect shower of shot. It soon began to get so hot that the Capt. & myself concluded to go down & close the top of the turret, he taking his station in the pilot house & myself directing the fire of the guns in the turret. In a few minutes, the shot began to fly about us, & such a noise as they made, whistling by us. Then one would strike & seem to jar the whole vessel. Soon the order was given to open fire & we opened on Ft. Sumpter, firing & loading as rapidly as we could, gradually approaching until we got within 600 yards. . . . The Admiral's vessel [the *New Ironsides*], not being manageable in the narrow channel, did not get up so near as the rest of us.

A line of obstructions across the channel between Ft. Sumpter and Ft. Moultrie caused the leading monitors to veer off. The *New Ironsides*, a flat-bottomed vessel

Lieutenant Commander Charles C. Carpenter, photographed ca. 1864-66. (Naval Photographic Center)



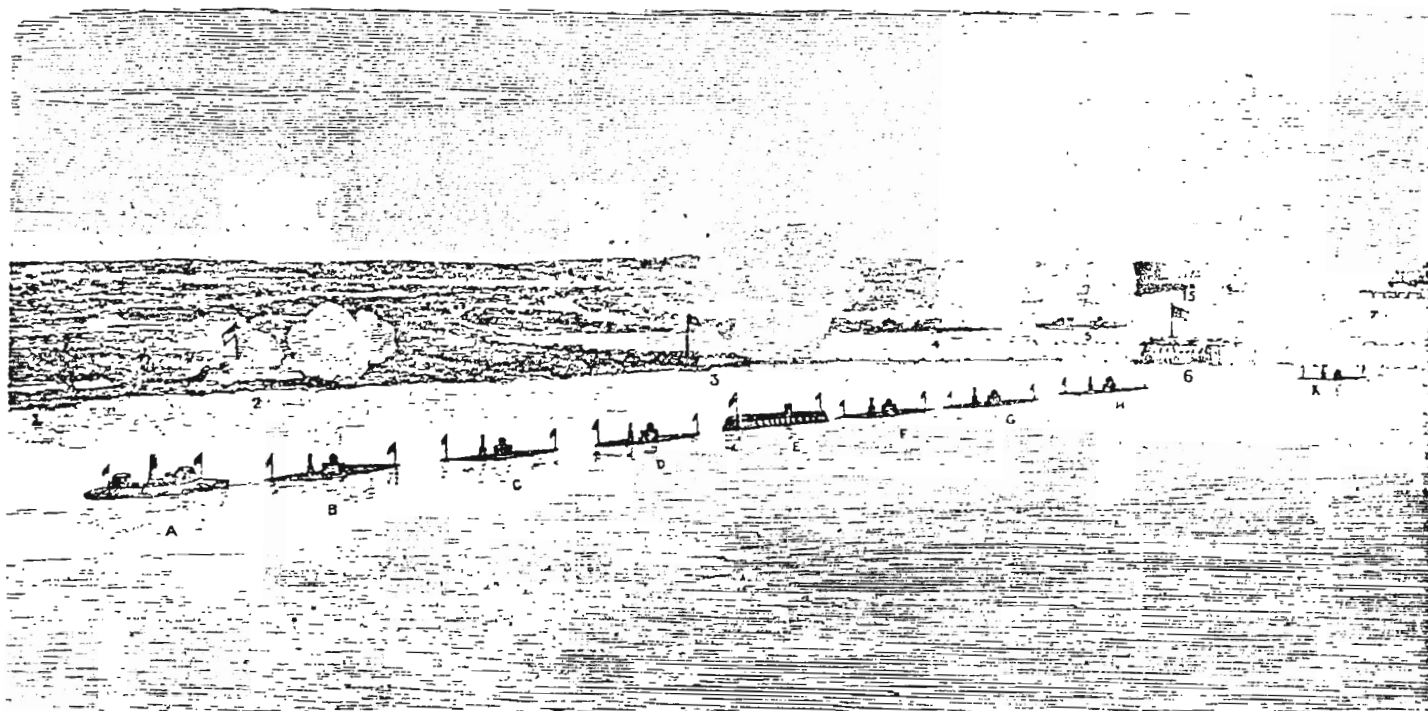
with a deeper draught than the monitors, was forced to anchor in order to point her bow in the right direction. In so doing, she broke up the line of battle and swung directly over a huge mine connected to Ft. Wagner by an electric wire. The Confederates tried frantically for ten minutes to ignite the charge, but without success.

... Such a fire I never saw. Nothing to be heard but the whistling of shot. The poor Keokuk was catching it. The shot made very little impression on us. They would strike the turret & then break into a thousand pieces. The only danger was in one coming through the port holes wch [which] would have injured every body inside, but I took good care to have the port closers shut at once, & the guns fired as soon as they were run out & I could get sight. Then I would turn the turret away from the batteries [while reloading]. . . . Towards the last, they had left the upper tier of guns & scarcely a shot replied from Ft. Sumpter. I believe an hour more would have silenced it. One of our shot was distinctly seen to dismount one of their guns, besides several striking & knocking out any quantity of brick & mortar. We then went down & joined the other vessels, gradually dropping out of fire. It was so singular that we were not struck more. Most of the others were hit 40 or 50 times, while we could not count more than 20 shots. All the others' smoke stacks were riddled, while none went through ours, but two struck it. The worst place is in our deck, which is cut in about 8 or 10 inches deep. One struck right under our port holes. I thought it was coming in. So ended this . . . [brief] fight, we dropping down & anchoring just out of range.

"Panoramic view of Charleston Harbor—Advance of ironclads to the attack, April 7th, 1863." (Naval Historical Foundation)

One shot went half through the Nahant's turret. Our deck was covered with pieces of shot. You could see through & through the Keokuk. She was a perfect sieve, & it was all the pumps could do to keep her afloat. This morning it began to blow fresh & the sea to rise. She made signal for assistance. Sent two tugs to her & just as they could get every body out, she went down & now you can just see the top of her smoke pipe. Her crew & officers, with wounded, were taken to the Flag ship, who gave them three hearty cheers. [The Confederates later salvaged some useful items from the Keokuk. "At low tide today," Carpenter noted on July 14, "the old Keokuk was half out of water. Some of our men (we have some of her old crew) visited her yesterday. They say the guns are gone, so the rebels did get them." And according to a Confederate report, "from her wreck floated ashore a book, a spy-glass, and pieces of furniture, bespattered with blood, and small fragments of iron sticking in them. . . ." The book may have been the signal book recovered by the rebels that enabled them to intercept messages between Admiral Dahlgren and General Gillmore and repulse the surprise storming of Ft. Sumter on September 8.]

Not all the ironclads came through so well as the *Catskill*. Besides the loss of the thinly armored *Keokuk*—an experimental ship of "turtleback" design—the other vessels suffered varying degrees of damage: turrets jammed, guns rendered inoperable, armor plating broken or knocked loose. After hearing the damage report from his commanders, Admiral Du Pont decided against risking his ships in another attack. The reduction of Fort Sumter, he believed, would require land-based artillery, and even if his ironclads penetrated the inner defenses of the harbor



A. Keokuk. B. Nahant. C. Nahant. D. Catskill. E. Ironsides. F. Patapsco. G. Monitor. H. Passaic. K. Wheelock. — Coast  
 I. Fort Johnson. 5. Fort Ripley. 6. Fort Sumter. 7. Charleston City. 8. Castle Pinckney. 9. Fort Redoubt. 10. Fort Moultrie. 11. Moultrie Barracks

and took Charleston, he did not think that they could hold the city without the support of troops.

In Washington, Secretary Welles and his assistant were keenly disappointed at the news of the repulse and sent Admiral John A. Dahlgren to relieve Du Pont. Arriving in Port Royal on July 4, Dahlgren conferred the next day with Major General Quincy A. Gillmore. The latter told him of his plan to land troops on the southern end of Morris Island and requested supporting naval gunfire. Once the island was taken, he could bring his heavy artillery up to the northern end within range of Sumter. On July 10, the *Catskill*—with Admiral Dahlgren aboard—led three other monitors parallel to the beach of Morris Island and cleared the way for Gillmore's advancing troops. Carpenter's account (July 12) of the two-day battle shows that the honor of flying the admiral's flag had its attendant dangers:

Our attack on Sumter before is nothing in comparison to this. Thank God we have all come out safely, except two or three wounded on this vessel & several used up from exertion & the heat. The poor *Catskill*, having the Admiral's flag for'd & being always much closer in than the others, suffered badly & is now almost crippled. The first day we were struck sixty times, many shots very bad, piercing our deck, & the water pouring in below. Our sides are badly opened in places, & the turret & pilot house [have] shot marks on them wch [which] none of the other monitors have had yet. Mr. Simmons, our master, was badly injured, knocked insensible by standing close to the side when one shot struck. The Admiral had his flag flying all the time & we were selected as the target. The other vessels were hit only a few times, & some none. Our flag staff was shot away. Admiral's pennant a large hole through, as well as the flag. We



Rear Admiral Charles Carroll Carpenter, Commander in Chief of Asiatic Squadron, 1895, and aides Lt. J. H. Shipley and W. F. Halsey, father of Admiral "Bull" Halsey, (Mrs. S. Carpenter)

got underway at four o'clock, Friday morn'g, took the Admiral & started in, the others following. We soon crossed the bar & flanked [the rebels]. Then our troops crossed over, & the rebels left—such a skeddadle I have never seen—running up the beach & on the hills, hiding under the sand bank when the shells w'd burst, horses & wagons all in confusion. Whenever we saw the largest number, there we w'd fire, & such havoc as our shells must have made. We could see them burst right amongst them. Our troops followed up the beach, taking the batteries wch we had drove the rebels from. We just followed ahead of our troops with shell all the way up the beach, so that they met with very little resistance nearly up to Ft. Wagoner [Wagner]. There they had a powerful fort & made a stand, opening on us. . . . One little messenger boy in the turret—I was standing right behind the port closer, & he right alongside—was struck in the foot by a piece of shell wch came in the port. We have got a trophy in the shape of a ten inch solid shot weighing 130 lbs. wch lodged on our deck, besides any quantity of broken fragments of shot. . . . if you had seen me. . . , you w'd not recognize me. In my shirt sleeves, face all black as well as clothes.

Although safer in battle than wooden ships, the ironclads were far less comfortable for the men cooped up in them, especially in summertime. Carpenter's



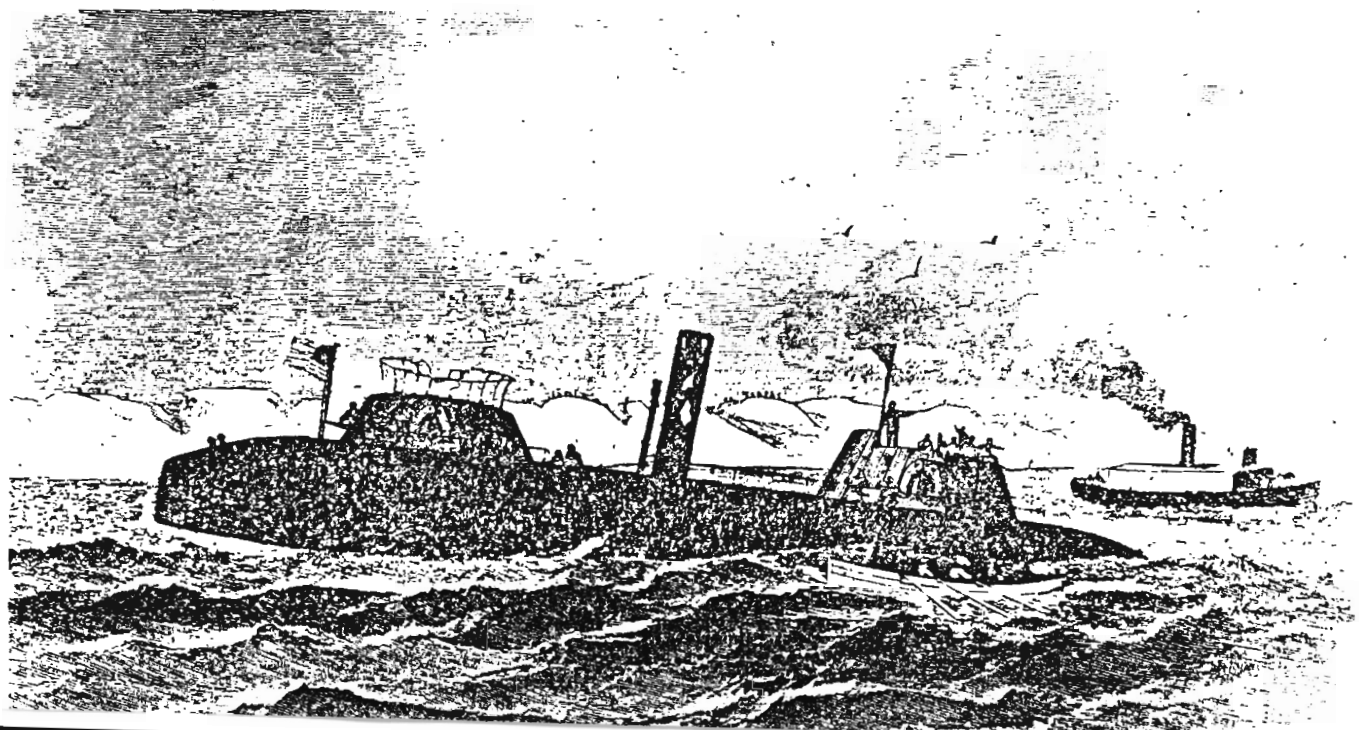
1. Monitor No. 1. 2. Port Wagoner. 3. Battery De la Motte. 4. Battery De la Motte. 5. Battery De la Motte. 6. Battery De la Motte. 7. Battery De la Motte. 8. Battery De la Motte. 9. Battery De la Motte. 10. Battery De la Motte. 11. Cooper River. 12. Ashley River.

Wallace Shugg, assistant professor of English at University of Maryland, Baltimore County, is a great-grandson of Lieutenant Commander—later Admiral—Carpenter. The letters themselves, as well as the photographs of Carpenter, are in the possession of Mrs. Sybil Carpenter, Short Hills, N. J. Among other sources consulted by Professor Shugg are: Bern Anderson, "By Sea and By River: The Naval History of the Civil War" (New York: 1962); "Battles and Leaders," vol. IV; Richard H. Webber, ed., "Monitors of the U. S. Navy 1861-1937" (Washington, 1969); and "Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies," vols. XIII and XIV.

letters abound with complaints about the heat and lack of air—for example, at the end of the first day of the battle just described: "I was ready to drop down at night, but had no where to sleep. It was so hot I could not stay below. Had to give it up. Went in the turret, but looked in vain for a place long enough for me to lay on. All occupied. I laid down on top in the open air, with my overcoat over me, & slept." Also, the little ships, with their low freeboard, were constantly awash—"the only dry place is in the turret. Even now my pants & drawers up to my waist are wet. It's no use to change them tho', for in a short time . . . they w'd be just as bad again."

But otherwise, the hardships were much the same as on wooden vessels. In the combat zone, the food was apt to be poor, relieved only by an occasional treat: "I had a piece of a splendid watermelon, cold, right off the ice. It was luscious. Capt. R. brought it on board. We of

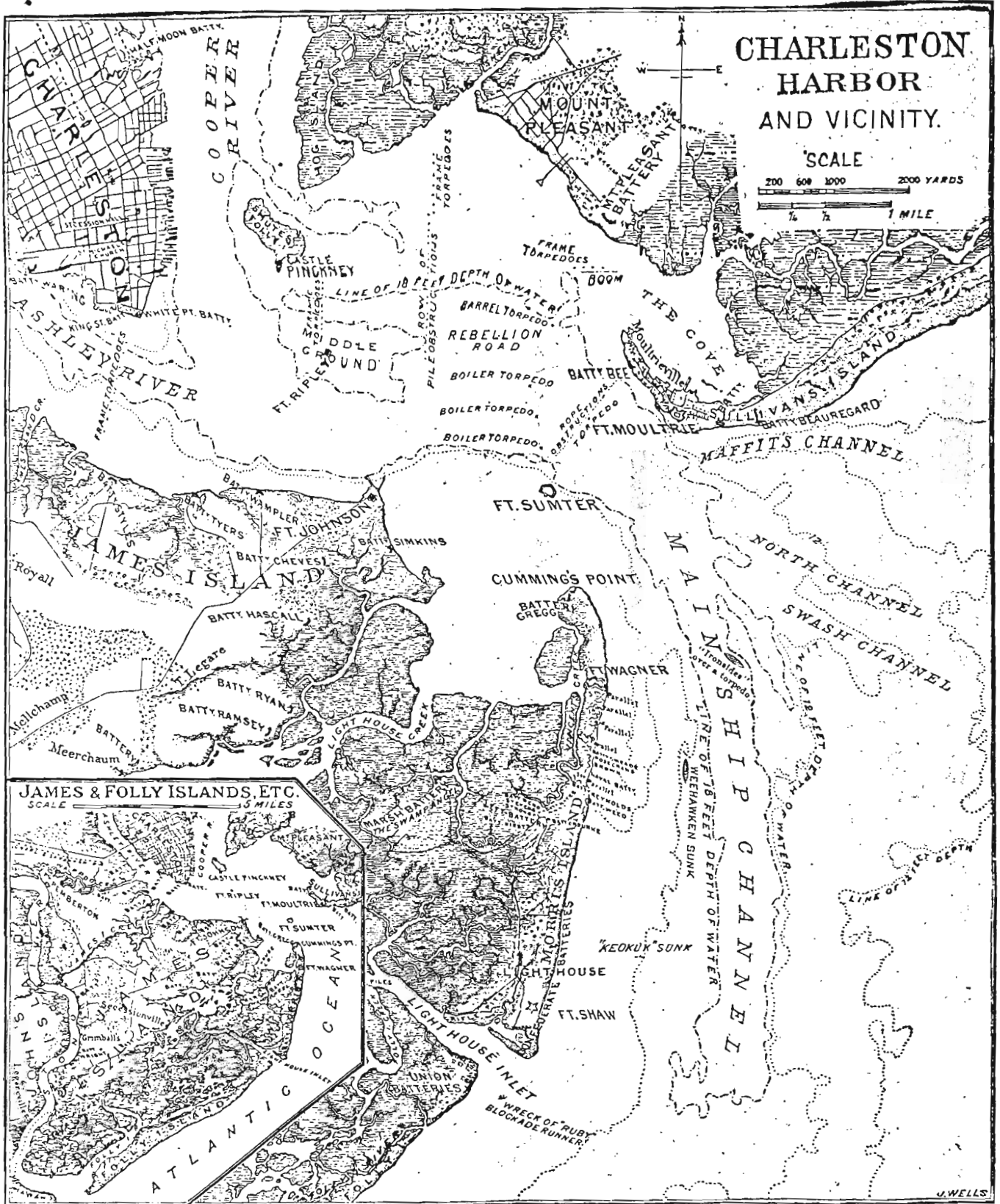
"The iron-clad "Keokuk" sinking on the morning after the battle at Charleston, South Carolina." (Naval Photographic Center)



course can get nothing here & what we do have is generally eaten cold, for the cooking pipe has to be all taken down. Then we got a shot thro the deck over the galley. Consequently, the water comes down so that we can't bake bread in the oven & with great difficulty do anything else." And then there were the rats: "Just as soon as I got to sleep, I was awakened by a severe bite on my finger. . . . Called the steward & told him to look & see if the racoon [a ship's mascot, apparently] was in the cabin. He soon found a large rat hid away. No doubt half-starved, for he gave a tremendous bite. The stew'd made a furious attack, but he made his escape in safety."

On July 18, a second attempt was made to take Fort Wagner on Morris Island, but the defenders repulsed it through a clever ruse:

we all opened fire, closing in with the fort, so that we got within a few hundred yards & could discern every moving person in it. The batteries on shore opened at the same time. Shot & shell rained down on that fort. They very soon left the guns, with the exception of one heavy gun that we could see them load, dodge & drop at every fire, but they were soon driven away from that & we then thought we had everything our way. . . . We kept up this fire as fast as possible until nearly eight o'clock. At dusk, our troops advanced up the beach at double quick to storm the works. Ten regiments & the 54th Massts Negro regiment leading the charge. They met with sharp resistance, nothing but the flash & report of musketry. Their advance was the signal for us to stop firing. Besides, it was so dark at that time, we could not tell whether we would be firing on friend or foe. Musket balls flew all about us. The negro regiment done badly, broke & run at the first volley. [Carpenter, out in the harbor, could not know that the 54th Mass. actually performed admirably, being the first to reach and take Wagner's parapet; retiring only after sustaining 46% losses.] The other regiments got into the work, but were driven back, leaving about 500 killed and wounded



Map of Charleston Harbor. (B&L)

in front of the work. It was . . . [not] until this morning that we knew whether the fort was ours or not, & a sad disappointment it was to hear that we had met with so severe a repulse. . . . [The defenders of Fort Wagner were busy] removing the killed & wounded, & such a sight. We could see our men lying all about. After daylight we sent a flag of truce in shore to inquire for the wounded. Also Genl. Gilmore sent in to ask to remove his wounded, but that they

refused. Said they would take care of them & give them the same treatment as their own. . . . The rebels said they did not attempt to fight their guns, but had their men all hidden in a bomb proof in the rear, ready to resist the assault.

Two days later, the *Catskill's* captain, George W. Rodgers, left to become Dahlgren's chief of staff ("We gave him three cheers with a will & everybody was sorry to lose him"), and Carpenter assumed command.



That same afternoon he took his ship into action and fired on a particularly troublesome gun in Fort Wagner, "a very heavy one that we have tried to disable but have not succeeded. Shell after shell w'd strike & explode, throwing up clouds of sand right by it, but they w'd dodge down & occasionally manage to fire it. Our batteries on shore were firing & pouring shot in, too, but when we hauled off, one of the men at that gun stood up by it & defiantly pointed towards it." Success came four days later, and then frustration: "I done my best to disable that gun & have the credit of hitting it. Knocked it nearly upright & I think its used up, as it's not been fired since." But then a rebel steamer, flying a flag of truce and hospital flag, came in to remove the wounded—whereupon, "the rebels, when a minute before there was not one to be seen, came out like a swarm of bees on top of the Ft. & took advantage of that time to level that gun from its upright position."

In addition to bombarding Fort Wagner almost every day, the *Catskill* took her turn on the nightly patrol for blockade runners near Fort Sumter. On the night of August 5th,

a large side wheel stmr. came out from Sumter about eleven o'clock & ran down in under Ft. Moultrie. I thought she was going to run the blockade. The upper picket-boat saw her, but instead of giving the alarm, they pulled towards her. . . . she put on all steam. . . . it seemed but an instant before she was at the boat. Seemed to go like a dart. I could just discern a long low dark-looking object. The tug & boats above me did not see her & made no signal. I went to quarters & fired at her twice, w'ch passed, they said, very close, if not hitting her, for she turned back & was lost to view again under Sullivan's island. But . . . [she] had run over . . . [the picket] boat & at the same time, when the men had jumped overboard & were in the water, they poured volleys of musketry

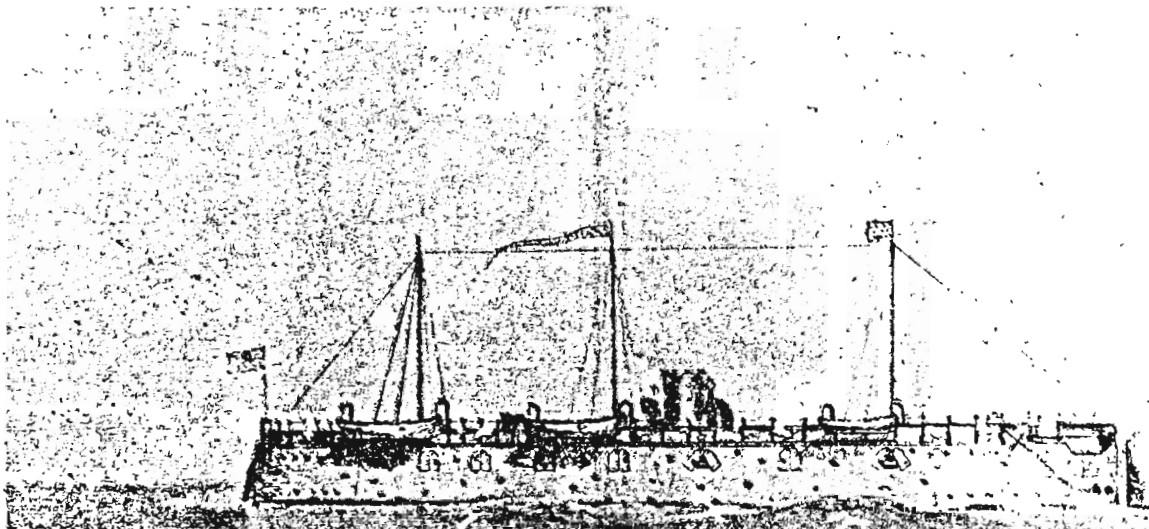
Sketch of USS "New Ironsides." (Naval Photographic Center)

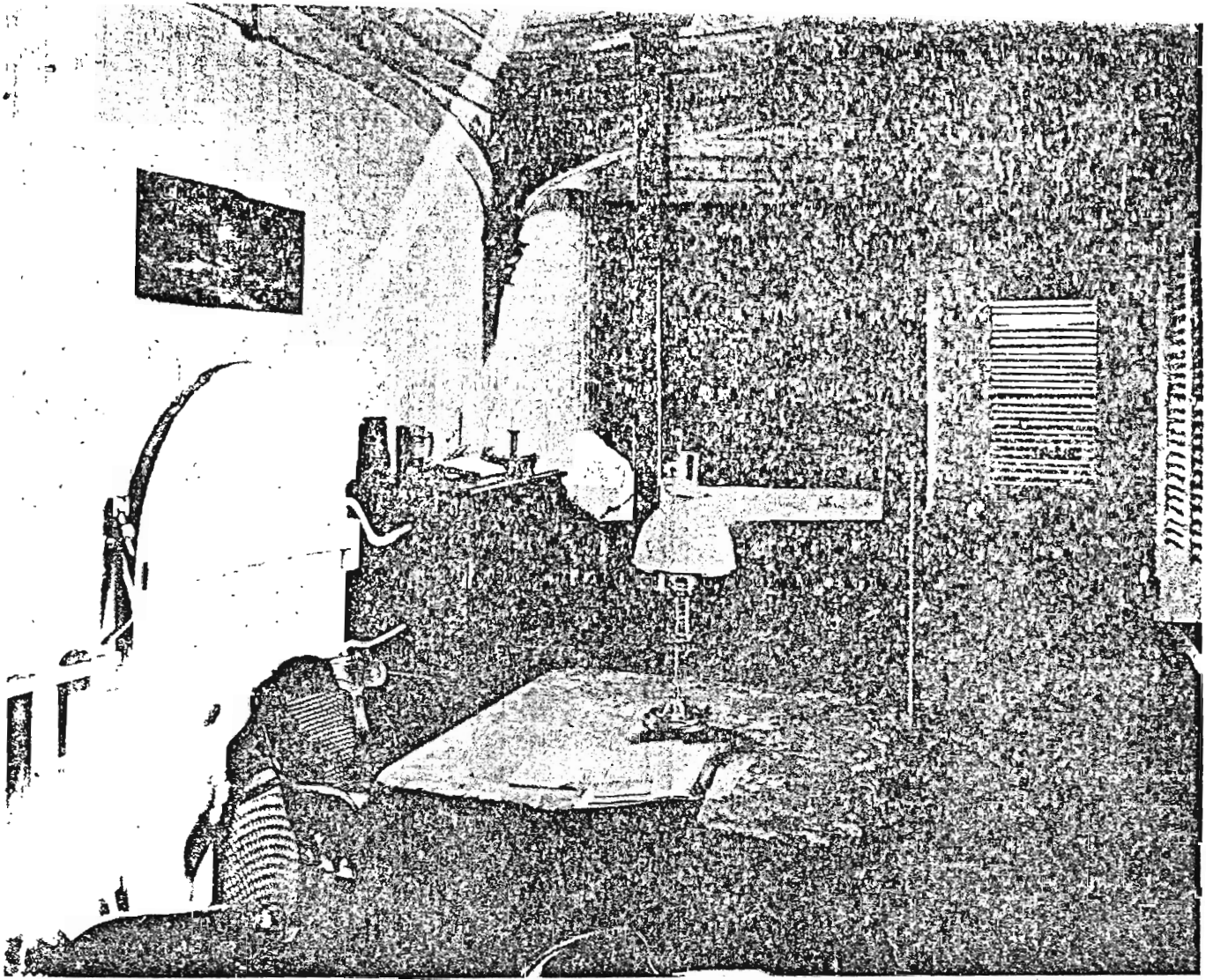
into them, after the Officer had sung out, that he surrendered, several times. It was all over in a few minutes. I sent a boat & picked up eight men in the water out of 23 in the boat. Pulled all about but could find no others. The officer, a master, was missing. The men think the rest were killed & wounded. The [picket] boat carried a twelve pound howitzer & fired it once. The men say they would have pulled away if they had not stopd to fire it. The officer was too bold, & I cautioned him particularly to keep close to the tug, but he thought probably that he might capture a blockade runner. I think she came out on purpose to run our boats down. The men say she had a long spar & a sort of plow on her bows. That's Southern chivalry.

Carpenter was misled. Subsequent reports from both sides state that the crew of the steamer fired on the men from the picket boat when they attempted to board her after a collision. The boarding party was outnumbered and captured. The steamer, the CSS *Juno*, had a 65-pound torpedo attached to the long spar and had been sent down below Fort Sumter on picket duty.

By this time, Carpenter had been aboard nearly six months, and the round-the-clock duty was taking its toll. "I don't believe I can stand iron-clads much longer," he wrote on August 7, "I'm getting well used up. Sleep does not seem to refresh me much, for it's so hot below that I feel tired when I wake. I shall try to get some sleep on the turret tonight." [Admiral Dahlgren had written Secretary Welles on July 20, ". . . the severity of the service is not easily understood except from personal experience. . . . The surgeons now find it indispensable to allow the men whisky when their vessels are in action."]

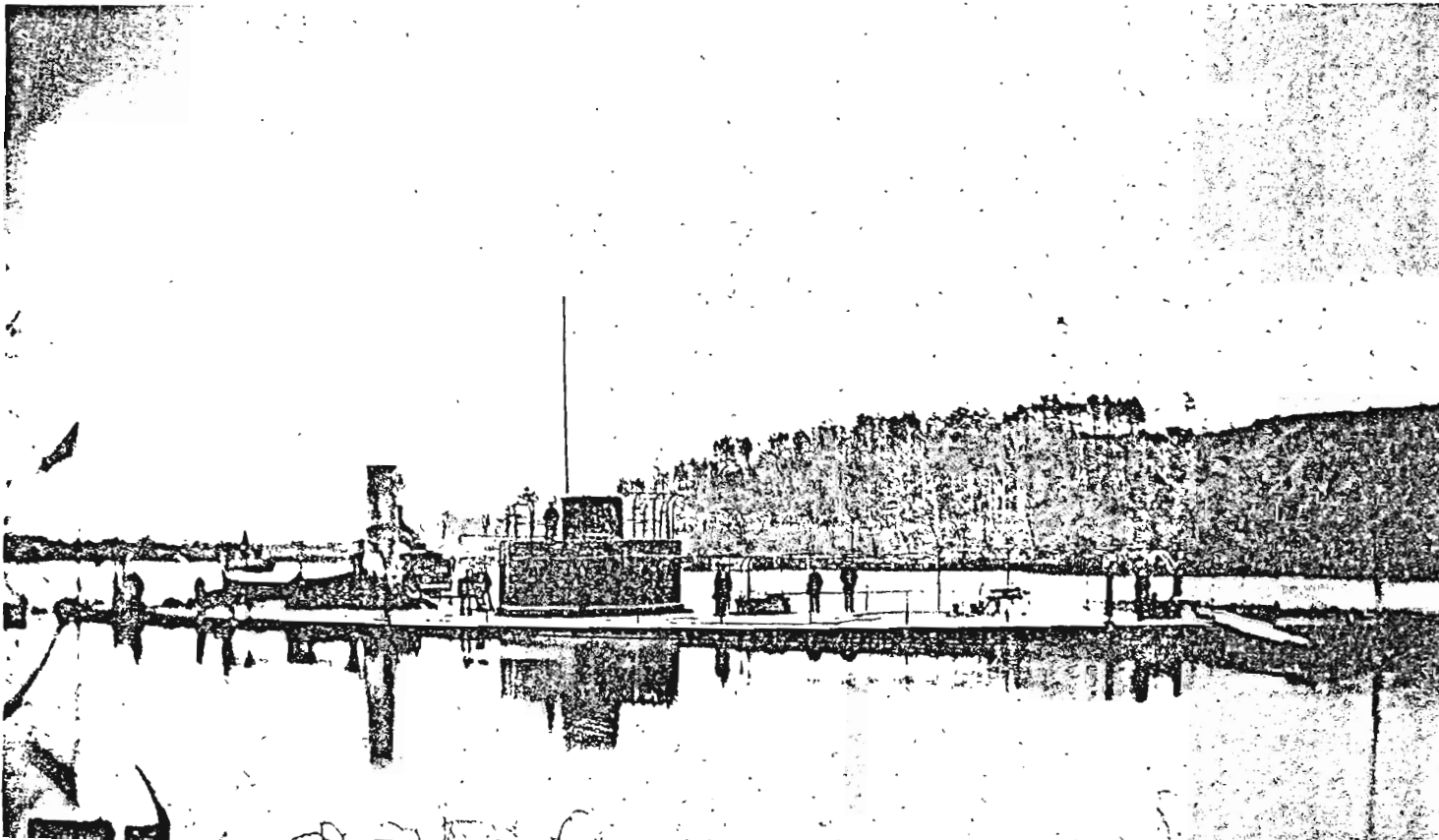
But the hard life of the men aboard the ironclads was not completely in vain. Although Wagner stubbornly resisted all attempts to take it, the daily bombardments of that fort by the monitors allowed General Gillmore to bring his heavy breaching guns within range of

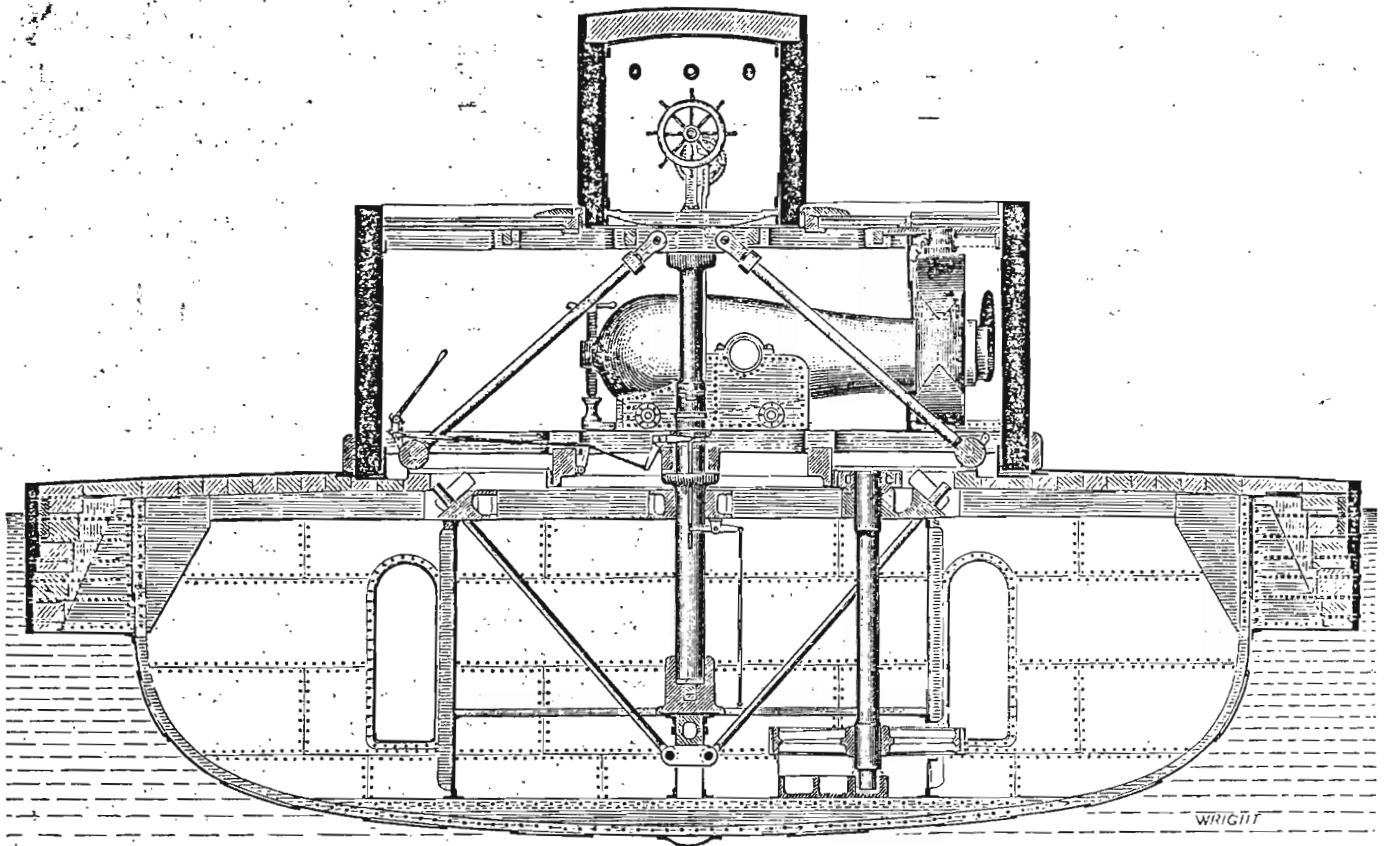




ABOVE: A cabin aboard USS "Catskill". (Razor strap on door)

BELOW: The USS monitor "Lehigh." Note the light gun on deck.





"Section of the Hull of a Sea-Going Monitor." (From B&L)

Sumter. On August 17th began a seven-day bombardment that reduced Sumter to a heap of rubble. On that day too, the *Catskill's* luck finally ran out, as the last surviving letter of Lieutenant Commander Carpenter makes clear:

My darling Annie,

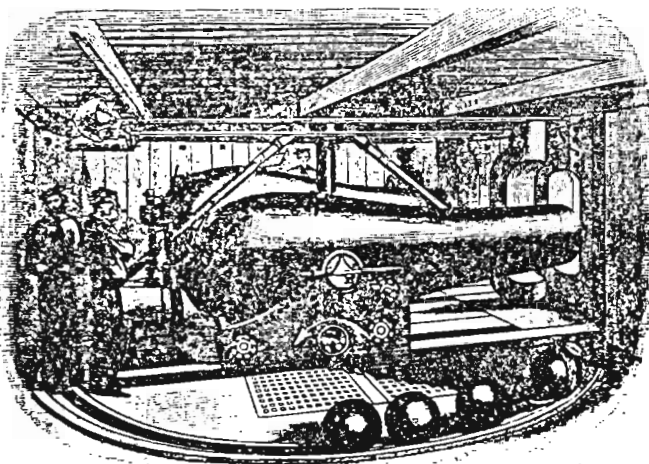
. . . The feelings & horrors of this day will never be erased from my memory. Poor Capt. Rodgers is no more. He came on board early this morning, well & in good spirits, to go into action in this vessel, as he particularly wished it, & we gave him three hearty cheers when he came. I turned the management of the vessel over to him & took charge of the working of

the guns. We went up very close, inside of the Admiral, at Ft. Wagner. They have mounted more heavy guns there. We anchored & they hit us nearly every time. At 8:30, a rifled shot struck the top of the Pilot house, broke through, instantly killed the Capt'n. & Paymaster Woodbury, also wounding two others, all in the pilot house. I will not describe the scene. It is too sickening. . . . I feel so tired & sleepy tonight, Anna, that I cannot write much more. . . . May God bless us & keep us in health, permitting us soon to meet again is the prayer of yr Husband

Charlie

**Sumter lay in ruins**—but the siege of Charleston dragged on because of the harbor's strong inner defenses and the obstructions and mines (real or imagined) in the channel. The city did not fall until February 18, 1865, when Sherman's forces passed to the rear and cut off its communications inland. The Union Navy was more successful, however, in its blockade of the harbor. No wooden ship dared openly to challenge the rugged monitors, and for the rest of the war only an occasional runner managed to slip by. The age of the ironclad had arrived.

Soon after the fatal day, Carpenter was given a much-needed rest; on September 14, 1863, he left the *Catskill* for shore duty at the Naval Academy. He later rose to become rear admiral in command of the Asiatic Squadron during the China-Japan War, 1894-95, and died on April 1, 1899. At the end of the Civil War, the *Catskill* was decommissioned and thereafter saw two brief periods of service in northeastern coastal waters, the second time during the Spanish-American War. She was sold—presumably for scrap—on December 4, 1901.



"Interior View of the Turret of a Sea-Going Monitor." (B&L)