

The Union's Last Ironclad Sailor

Submitted by Steve Glazer, Lt. Col., US Army (Ret)

On April 19, 1945 -- less than three weeks before the end of World War II in Europe -- *The New York Times* carried an article headlined, "Veteran of Monitor, 101, Dies." The U.P. news report, datelined the previous day from Vineland, New Jersey, began, "Andrew Fenton, who served on the iron-clad Monitor during the Civil War, died today in the Soldiers Home here." Thus was born a tortuous tale that continues to this day.

The Times' report drew the attention of numerous historians over the years. Professor Jay Hoar of the University of Maine wove an elaborate tale describing how Fenton suffered the partial loss of sight and hearing in action against Fort Sumter when one of the *Monitor's* guns unexpectedly discharged, and how he later dramatically survived the iconic ironclad's sinking. (*The North's Last Boys in Blue*, Higginson Book Co., 2006, pp. 352-57.) Hoar largely relied on an interview of the old sailor published in 1938.

On the other hand, John Quarstein, Director of the USS *Monitor* Center in Newport News, Virginia, concluded that there is no proof for Fenton's purported service on the *Monitor*. Indeed, Quarstein goes much further. He categorically and repeatedly asserted in his book on the ship's crew that "there is no indication of *any* naval service" by Fenton. (*The Monitor Boys*, The History Press, 2011, pp. 299-301.) The *Monitor* Center's website similarly now asserts that "no records of naval service have been found" for Fenton.

Both Hoar and Quarstein, as well as *The Times*, were mistaken. Moreover, there are abundant official records documenting Andrew Fenton's distinguished military service, making him New Jersey's last known survivor of the Union Navy, and the nation's last known veteran of the Civil War's ironclad monitors, albeit not the USS *Monitor*.

Andrew Fenton was born in St. Augustine, Florida, on Christmas 1843, but his family moved to Philadelphia when he was still an infant. According to unearthed naval records, Fenton enlisted for three years as a 1st Class Boy at the U.S. Naval Rendezvous in Philadelphia on September 2, 1862, on the receiving ship *Princeton*. Soon thereafter, he was sent to the USS *Patapsco*, a *Passaic*-class ironclad monitor first launched later that month from Wilmington, Delaware, by shipbuilder Harlan & Hollingsworth. *Patapsco* was commissioned on January 2, 1863, when Fenton was formally assigned to her according to his service records. Fenton and his ship would be engaged in combat operations for the next two years,

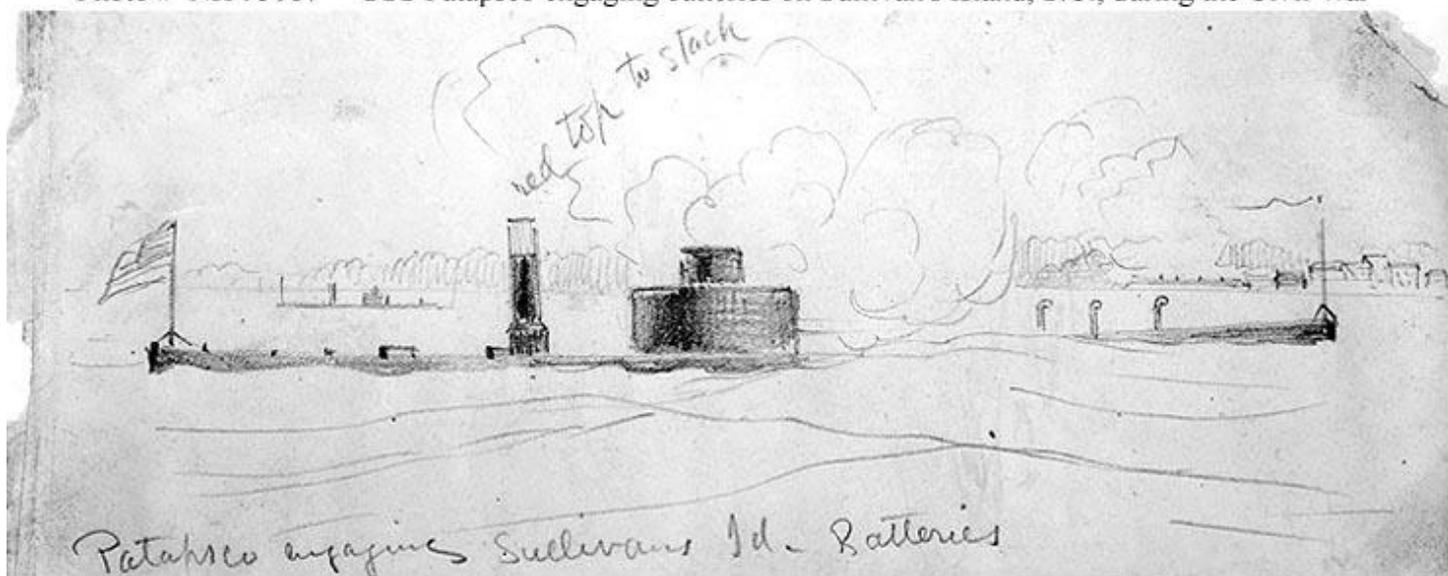
According to naval records, on the afternoon of November 2, 1863, while firing at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, a premature explosion of one of *Patapsco's* guns instantly killed a crew member and injured several others, including then-landsman Andrew Fenton. (*Official Records*, Ser. I, Vol. XV, p. 88.) And on the night of January 15, 1865, the *Patapsco*, on station for picket duty some 700 yards from Fort Sumter, struck a large torpedo and sank in the harbor's channel within 15 seconds, taking the ship's complement with her. Most perished, but Ordinary Seaman Andrew Fenton survived. (*Official Records*, Ser. I, Vol. XVI, pp. 178-79.) Two weeks later, Fenton reported for duty on the USS *Pawnee*, which saw action the following month in South Carolina against numerous Confederate artillery batteries.

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On July 26, 1865, *Pawnee* was decommissioned at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where Fenton was honorably discharged the same day, according to the ship's final muster roll. However, Fenton was not done serving his country. One year later he re-enlisted in the U.S. Navy, and after that term expired, he enlisted yet again.

After his years at sea, Fenton made his home in Fairfield and Mount Holly, New Jersey, as well as in Philadelphia, where he was a member of Anna M. Ross G.A.R. Post No. 94. In 1881, he married Susan Cecelia Bamford of Bridgeton, New Jersey, one year later having a son, Andrew Percy Fenton. On April 18, 1945, the ancient mariner passed away in Vineland, being buried in Overlook Cemetery in Bridgeton, marking the end of a direct link to the Civil War and its transformation of naval warfare.

Photo # NH 95087 USS Patapsco engaging batteries on Sullivan's Island, S.C., during the Civil War



Veteran of Monitor, 101, Dies

VINELAND, N. J., April 18 (U.P.) —Andrew Fenton, who served on the iron-clad Monitor during the Civil War, died today in the Soldiers Home here at the age of 101. Mr. Fenton was flag-bearer when the United States took possession of Alaska. He leaves a widow, a son, five grandchildren, ten great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren.

The New York Times

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Navy Invalid Pensioner Document

NAME:	<i>Fenton Andrew</i>	ACT OF MAY 1, 1920 3-a (3-P. A. 5.)	601
Certificate No.	5.404.	NAVY INVALID.	Law: ACT OF FEB 6, 1907
Service:	<i>Ord. Seaman, U.S.S. "Catapasco, Pawnee, & Princeton"</i>		
Disability:			

Andrew Fenton

