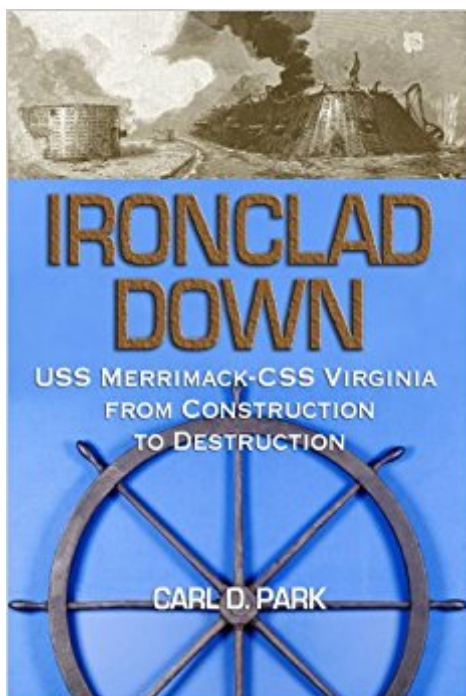


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Ironclad Down: USS Merrimack - CSS Virginia From Design To Destruction



Synopsis

The result of more than fifteen years of research, *Ironclad Down* is a treasure trove of detailed information about one of history's most famous vessels. Describing the fascinating people— Stephen Russell Mallory, John Mercer Brooke, John Luke Porter, et al.— who conceived, designed, and built one of the world's first ironclads as well as describing the ship itself, Carl Park offers both the most thoroughly detailed, in-depth analysis to date of the actual architecture of the *Virginia* and a fascinating, colorful chapter of Civil War history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Park's original intent was to build an accurate model of the ship. He quickly found that examining and reconciling the conflicting and incomplete information about *Virginia* overwhelmed his plans. The model, he reports, was never built. Instead he produced *Ironclad Down*, a very valuable contribution to naval history. Anyone interested in the Confederate Navy and the Battle of Hampton Roads will enjoy this book. --Reviewed by Joe Judge for *The Daybook*, a publication of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum

Carl D. Park studied design at the Layton School of Art after serving in the Army. Park has written and illustrated numerous articles for *Fine Scale Modeler* magazine.

Glad to see some thing was written about the ship that fought the Monitor. Too much has been written about the Union vessel, and not enough about the Confederate ironclads.

The story of the Monitor and the Merrimack is one that has seen about 100 books and 400 articles on the Monitor and the Merrimack action. *IRONCLAD DOWN* is the story of the CSS Virginia, better known as the Merrimack. Carl D. Park is a modeler who has gone a step further and produced a solid book on the construction details of the Confederate ironclad. This is a well-illustrated book on the building, life and death of the Confederate ironclad. The main emphasis of Park's work is on the details of the CSS Virginia. He is quite successful in going through the myriad of details surrounding the construction of the ironclad. This includes detailed discussion, based on contemporary evidence when possible, of everything from the guns, to the ladders, to the armor plate, and even the possible wooden joints used in the building of the warship. The biggest problem is one he shares with many American authors on the topic. It is myopic. The European influence, even after the publication in 1860 of the Delafield Report by the GPO on the then current state of the art of war in Europe (including the Crimean ironclads that fought at Kinburn) and James P. Baxter's classic and insightful, *The Introduction of the Ironclad Warship* (1933) is simply not seen. Park's uses Baxter, but only selectively. Park assigns the idea of the design to either Captain John Mercer Brooke or naval constructor John Luke Porter. While both were key in the construction of it, the work of the Italian artillerist Giovanni Cavalli is ignored, though his pre-American Civil War ironclad design is discussed in Raimondo Luraghi's *A History of the Confederate Navy*, also published by the Naval Institute Press and included in Park's biography. The parentage is also discussed in my co-authored *Ironclads at War* (absent from the bibliography) and Park re-affirms Brooke's claim to have really added only a protruding bow and a stern (page 57) as being original in his concept. That is the key difference between the Cavalli concept from 1856 and the final look of virtually all Confederate ironclad designs in the American Civil War - the extended bow and stern primarily for sea keeping purposes. This is a great book for the modeler or the individual who is interested in the detail on what and how the CSS Virginia was built. It is well written and entertaining. It is not definitive on the story of the famous ironclad.

IRONCLAD DOWN: USS MERRIMACK-CSS VIRGINIA FROM DESIGN TO DESTRUCTION
CARL D. PARK
NAVAL INSTITUTE PRESS, 2007
HARDCOVER, \$45.00, 272 PAGES, PHOTOGRAPHS, ILLUSTRATIONS, DIAGRAMS, CHARTS, MAPS
The USS Merrimack was a 3,200 ton, forty-gun screw frigate of the U.S. Navy, but best known as the hull upon which the CSS Virginia was built

during the War Between the States and then took part in the Battle of Hampton Roads (sometimes called the Battle of the Monitor and Merrimack). The USS Merrimack was launched by the Boston Navy Yard on 15 June 1855; sponsored by Miss Mary E. Simmons; commissioned 20 February 1856, Captain Garrett J. Pendergrast in command. She was the second ship of the U.S. Navy to be named for the Merrimack River, which flowed from New Hampshire to Massachusetts before emptying into the Atlantic. Even though she never exceeded more than seven knots; the USS Merrimack was the pride of the U.S. Navy. She was sent to the Caribbean and to Western Europe. She visited Southampton, Brest, Lisbon, and Toulon before returning to Boston and decommissioning on 22 April 1857 for repairs. Re-commissioned on 1 September 1857, the USS Merrimack got underway from Boston Harbor on 17 October 1857 as the flagship for the U.S. Pacific Squadron. She rounded Cape Horn and cruised the Pacific coast of South and Central America until heading for home on 14 November 1859. Upon her return to Norfolk, she was decommissioned on 16 February 1860 for an extensive equipment overhaul. The USS Merrimack fell into Confederate hands when the Norfolk Gosport Navy Yard was captured in April, 1861. Engineer-in-Chief B.F. Isherwood managed to get her engines lit off (the plan was to have her sail to Philadelphia) but the previous night saw Confederates sink lifeboats in the channel between Craney Island and Sewell's Point preventing her and other ships from leaving. Unable to save the Yard's guns and scuttle the ships, the Union soldiers spiked the guns and fired the seven ships in the Yard which included the USS Merrimack before retreating. In May, 1861, a salvage company raised the USS Merrimack and towed it into dry dock. Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory convinced the Confederate Congress to appropriate the \$172,523 needed to convert the 275-foot burned-out hull into an ironclad. Lt. John M. Brooke prepared the drawings and calculations necessary for the transformation. By mid-July, 1861, carpenters had stripped the charred remains from the hull and eliminated all timbers above the berth deck (three feet above the ship's waterline). Workers laid a new gun deck from bow to stern and by the end of July, carpenters prepared to attach the casemated, or bombproof, iron exterior. Procuring iron for the Merrimack soon became the greatest obstacle. The Tredegar Iron Works at Richmond was the only plant in the South capable of supplying the necessary metal for the project, yet the company wasn't initially prepared to roll iron for plating. It took weeks to transform its operations, train its workers, and create tools to produce the required material. Additionally, the iron itself had to be found to create the two-inch-thick, eight-inch-wide plating. Ultimately, more than 300 tons of scrap iron was gathered from the ruins of the Gosport Navy Yard, scavenged from captured Union railroad lines, and purchased from Confederate railroad companies whose tracks were too close to the front to

operate. The ship was completely armored by 27 January 1862 and on 17 February 1862, she was re-christened the CSS Virginia. With a hull measuring almost 263 feet from bow to stern, it had a 178-foot, 3-inch iron casemated base atop its hull sloping upward at a 36-degree angle. The casemated sides, 24 feet from waterline to top, consisted of an outer shell of two 2-inch layers of iron plate fastened horizontally by metal bolts to a 2-foot-thick solid pine and 4-inch-thick oak backing. The ship had four gun ports on each side of the casemate and three 7-inch rifle ports at each end. The main deck, also covered with iron plating, stretched 29 feet 6 inches in front of the casemate and 55 feet to the rear. Just below the waterline on the bow, the ship had a 1,500 pound cast-iron ram. Merrimack's engines, now part of the CSS Virginia, hadn't been in good working order, and the salty Elizabeth River water and addition of tons of iron didn't improve the situation. On 8 March 1862, the CSS Virginia confronted the Union blockading force in Chesapeake Bay. She sank two Union frigates, drove three steam frigates aground, and exchanged fire with several small armed steamers and shore batteries. The following day, 9 March 1862, saw the CSS Virginia fight its famous duel against the Union ironclad, the USS Monitor. Starting at 8:45 AM, the two ships began circling one another while trying to gain an advantageous position. Both battled furiously at close range for the next four hours, but they failed to sustain any damage. Neither vessel could claim a victory. During the next several months, the CSS Virginia made several sorties to Hampton Roads hoping to draw the USS Monitor into battle but the Union vessel was under orders not to engage. The CSS Virginia was later destroyed by the Confederates to prevent it from falling into Union hands.

IRONCLAD DOWN: USS MERRIMACK-CSS VIRGINIA FROM CONSTRUCTION TO DESTRUCTION is the riveting story, from start to finish, of the world's first ironclad—the CSS Virginia. Packed with never before information and lavishly illustrated, author Carl D. Park has written a superb tribute to both the ship and the men that made the CSS Virginia a reality and ushered in a new age of naval warfare. With the 150th Anniversary of the War Between the States now being celebrated, this book would make an excellent addition to any serious student's personal library.

Lt. Colonel Robert A. Lynn, Florida Guard
Orlando, Florida

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