

Suggester of the Month



Congratulations to **Paul R. Cardinal**, the Shipyard's most recent Suggester of the Month.

Clean environmental conditions are essential to keep work processes on schedule and keep costs down (thus helping to insure our future). Dirt and industrial debris can lead to safety problems and cause damage as well as create a non-professional atmosphere.

Paul's suggestion to change the current practice of bringing welding leads into buildings through doorways and cutting holes into walls (which allow entry of dirt, cold air, rain, and snow) helped improve the area's environmental conditions. He proposed installation of an electrical panel to provide a cleanliness boundary for welding leads. The captivated welding leads can be stored inside, thereby reducing the accumulation of dirt and the necessity for repeated cleanliness inspections.

History note

USS AGAMENTICUS

by Arnold Putnam, Code 280.41

In January of 1862, prior to the launching of the original USS MONITOR, John Lenthall, Chief Constructor of the Navy, sent specifications to the Kittery Navy Yard, to be laid out in the mold loft, for construction of a Monitor, as this type of ship came to be known. The specifications were preliminary and construction was not to commence until the original single-turreted vessel had been tested completely under combat conditions. This occurred on March 9 at Hampton Roads, Virginia when the ironclads MONITOR and CSS VIRGINIA (formerly USS MERRIMACK) fought their now-famous battle to a draw. Both the Union and Confederate Navies began construction of ships similar to each of the two combatants, the Union Navy eventually constructing over 50 Monitors.

However, it was not until September that the keel of the double-turreted USS AGAMENTICUS was laid and work on the wooden hull began in earnest. AGAMENTICUS was constructed on the ships' railway between the floating dry dock, now Dry Dock Number 1, and the Head House, now Building 14. In addition, work was contracted out to various vendors: steam engines and machinery to Morris, Towne & Company of Philadelphia; pilot houses and revolving turrets to Atlantic Works in South Boston; and ventilation equipment to Novelty Iron Works in New York.

Work on the 258 ft. 6 in. long by 52 ft. 9 in. beam ship proceeded slowly, plagued by mishap and shortages, late delivery, and lack of skilled labor due to wartime demand. In December carpenters were diverted from the AGAMENTICUS to concentrate upon completion of the USS SASSACUS (see *Periscope*, April 1989). Near disaster occurred when, on March-11, 1863, the shed which temporarily housed the craft collapsed from

the weight of snow on the roof, according to the Daily Morning Chronical, "...with a crash, — the noise being heard across the river in New Castle." It was not until September of 1863 that the iron plating, late in arriving, began to be installed on the ship.

Meanwhile, one of the contractors was having problems of his own. A fire at the Atlantic Works, on August 31, 1863, in the building where the turrets were being assembled severely damaged the construction equipment. Later in August and September of 1864, Atlantic Works, in a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, stated that alterations to the turrets and pilot houses, ordered by the Navy's Chief Engineer William W. Wood, would require "three months to complete if we work the usual hours. This work is now in progress and no want of exertion in our part shall prevent its being done at the earliest moment possible."

The four Martin boilers for the AGAMENTICUS, each weighing 45 tons, arrived in mid-December of 1863 and by mid-January of 1864 were installed aboard the ship. Now began the arduous task of moving the heavy ship into the floating dry dock from which it was launched, or rather floated, on May 28, 1864.

As work progressed at dockside the usual problems incurred in shipbuilding cropped up, as witnessed by Acting Chief Engineer Auchinleck's December 1, 1864 report to Chief Engineer Wood:

"The ventilating pipes are progressing finely, and all the ventilating piping abaft the engine room will be finished this week. I find that there are wrought iron flanges attached to the copper ventilating pipes leading under the magazines.

"Auxiliary piping is progressing slowly. I find the steam pipe on auxiliary engine for working aft turret

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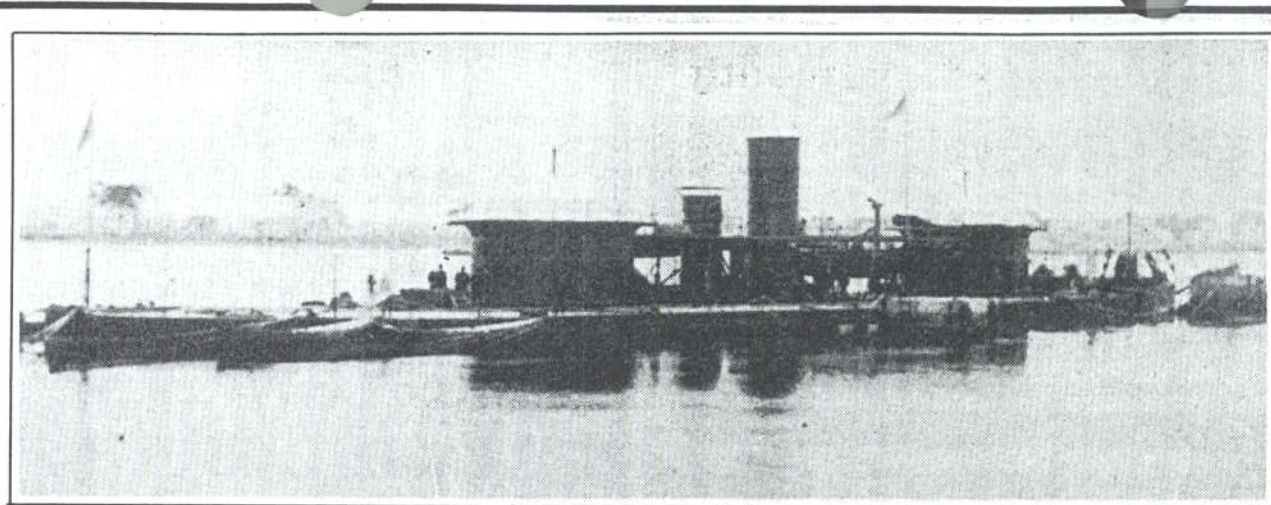
On April 18, 1865, the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, fearing the appearance of the French-built Confederate ironclad ram CSS STONEWALL, urged that the Yard, "Hurry forward the work on the AGAMENTICUS . . ." Unfortunately, on May 2, three days before commissioning, one of the four 15-inch Dahlgren smooth-bore gun's vents was found to have been spiked by someone "actuated by other than patriotic motives and feelings."

Finally, on Friday, May 5, 1865, the USS AGAMENTICUS steamed down the River to the anchorage located inshore of Fort Constitution. The Daily Morning Chronical reported that, "her performance exceeded the utmost expectations," the two Ericsson Vibrating Lever steam engines turning the twin screws, driving the 3,400 ton vessel along at nine knots. After passing the Narrows, Henderson Point, "a trial of speed took place between the Monitor and the little steamer EMERALD...in which the latter, noted for its speed...was soon left far behind."

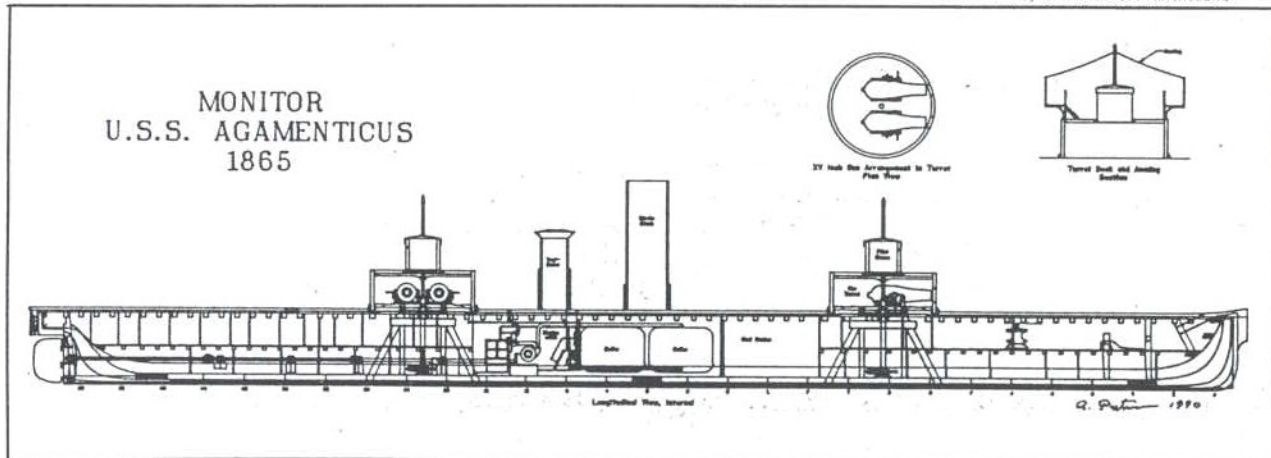
On May 10, 1865 the temporary commander, Lieutenant Commander Charles H. Cushman, still recovering from wounds received at the battle of Fort Fisher (North Carolina) in January, was relieved of command by Lieutenant Commander Alfred Hopkins, who was in turn replaced by permanent Commander E. G. Parrott on May 14.

After the surrender of the STONEWALL to Spanish authorities at Havana on May 19, the AGAMENTICUS remained in the lower harbor while Yard workers put finishing touches on the vessel. This work was finished in June and the new \$1,016,071 Monitor, with a crew of 167, steamed out to join the fleet on July 6, 1865.

The Career of USS AGAMENTICUS was short, however. In September of 1865 it was placed in ordinary in Boston, renamed USS TERROR in 1869, and recommissioned in May of 1870 to operate between Key West and Havana. It was found that the hull had seriously



(Photo courtesy of Portsmouth Atheneum)



USS AGAMENTICUS was built at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in 1865.

deteriorated, due to the necessity of using unseasoned wood in construction, and the TERROR was once again placed in mothballs at League Island, Philadelphia on

June 10, 1872. The condition of the Monitor was found to be such that it was broken up in 1874.

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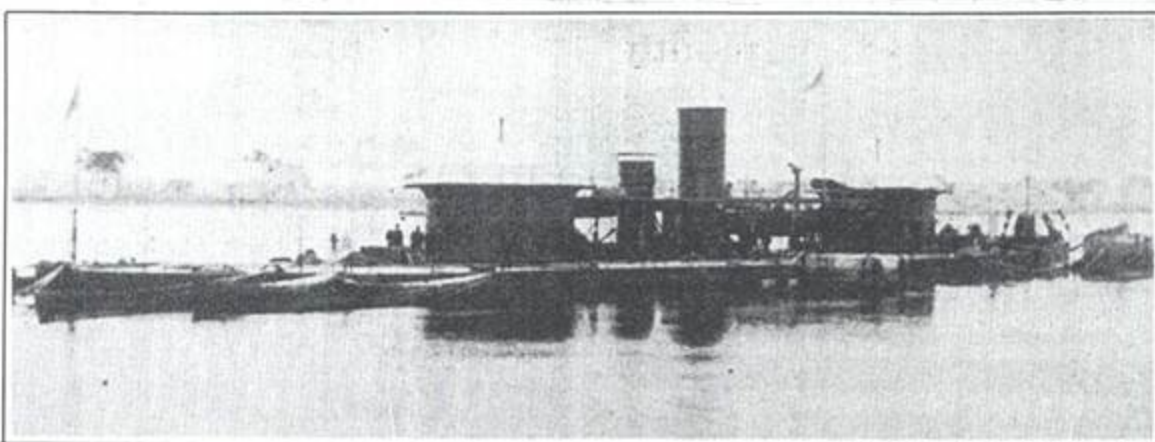
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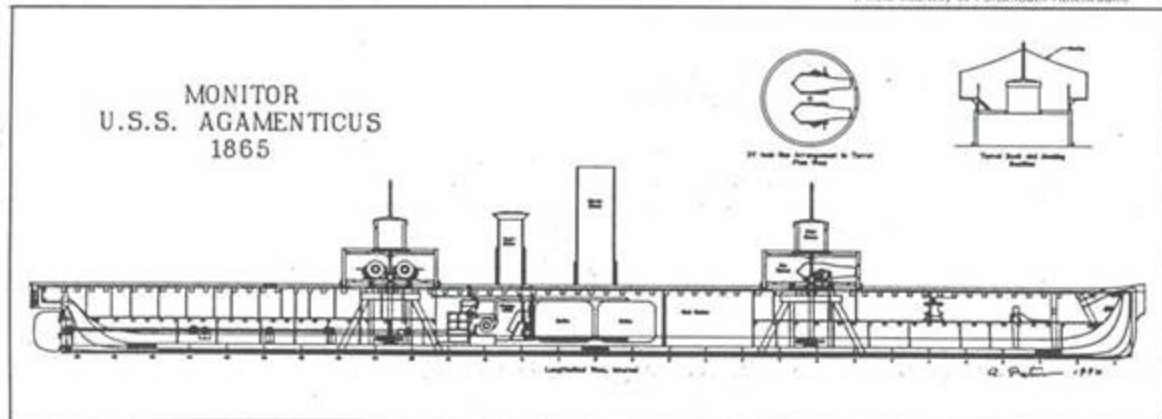
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