

THE After its decisive victory, the US Navy was allowed to collapse in a sea of indifference, corruption, and mismanagement until the Navy of the 1880s was reduced in strength and modernity to that of a third-rate power

POST-CIVIL WAR

NAVY

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At the end of the Civil War, the US Navy stood at the greatest strength in its history. Large numbers of ships had been constructed while an even greater number were acquired and converted for war purposes. Great and far-reaching innovations in all areas of naval weaponry had taken place, and ships of even greater power were under construction at the end of hostilities.

The Civil War spurred huge advancements in naval ships and armament on the parts of the Union and the Confederacy. This was amply illustrated in the famed battle between the ironclads *Monitor* and *Merrimac* at Hampton Roads. This became the most important naval battle (8/9 March 1862) of the Civil War when it came to the standpoint of naval development.

But the nation was tired of war and its face was turned westward. Reconstruction and the development of the west absorbed national attention and there was no interest in developing or even maintaining the Navy. Most of the converted vessels, including all the vessels on the rivers, were sold out of service at the end of the war.

In February 1868, the new cruiser *Wampanoag* (later renamed *Florida*) ran her trials off Sandy Hook and achieved a sustained speed of 16.6-knots, faster than any vessel in the world. Her engines, designed by Chief Engineer Benjamin Franklin Isherwood, were the product of competition between private and Navy engineers. Her speed was so much in excess of other ships that it was not until 1889 that an American naval vessel would equal it.

The British reacted at first with skepticism but, within a year, the Royal Navy had launched the *Inconstant*, which achieved a speed of 16.5-knots.

The use of competitive trials of steam machinery started during the Civil War and led in many cases to efficient machinery and faster ships. The most famous competition was that between the double-ender gunboats *Algonquin*, designed by E. N. Dickerson, and *Winooski*, Navy built. Despite much favorable publicity in the newspapers, the *Algonquin* failed miserably and was never even put in service.

The fast cruisers were designed to capture commerce raiders such as the CSS *Alabama* and for warfare against commerce. The competitive contracts called for a speed of 15-knots per hour. The *Idaho*, engines by Dickerson, failed her test in 1866, making only eight-knots. In 1867, John Ericsson's *Madawaska* failed to make her contract speed by over two-knots, making only 12.7-knots. The superlative performance of Isherwood's engines in the *Wampanoag* was however thrown away. Her sisters *Ammonoosuc*, (this

