

Grand opening of the Monitor Center at the Mariners' Museum

On March 9-11, 2007, the Mariners' Museum held a grand opening ceremony for the Monitor Center. The official ceremony was held on Friday, with the Governor of Virginia as well as local mayors and public officials as well as Navy and NOAA dignitaries. The Navy divers and team that was involved in the recovery of the turret were also there.

The ceremony began with the color guard (including our Mike as marine sergeant), then the national anthem presented by an opera singer. The naval reenactors stood on one side of the room.

Throughout the day, spectators that had visited the museum were able to go through the navy camp (*photo, right*) which was along side the front of the museum as well as the artillery camp behind the museum. Periodically artillery fired, often in battery, and a period band stood on the USS Monitor's (replica) deck.

Lew and Mike represented the U.S.S. Fort Henry (unit sign, *photo, right*). Navy reenactors from Main, New, York, Indiana and many other states participated.

Saturday and Sunday the museum was open to the public. Various activities were held in addition to the US and CS Navy as well as the US and CS Army camps. President Lincoln was portrayed by George Buss, one of a handful of about 400 Lincoln impersonators that is able to not only look like Lincoln, but answer questions in a "press conference" setting, much like Lincoln would. Mr. Buss has also performed at Ford's Theatre and entertained President Bush in the East Room of the Whitehouse.



“Old Tom” (*photo, right*), the barrel being built in 1863, sat in the Navy camp. This 12-pounder Dahlgren boat howitzer is owned by the Coast Guard, and used by the TMLHA unit, local in the area.

Old Tom was fired during the weekend with our Mike being a member of the crew.



The Monitor Center is a big part of the Mariners' Museum. There are many exhibits to see. One of them is a full scale mockup of the inside of the turret (*photo, right*) as it was brought up off the ocean floor. The mockup includes the inverted guns which had fallen on the inside of the top of the turret as it landed inverted on the ocean floor.

The exhibit was designed to allow the spectator to walk through the turret and see the condition of it before restoration. It is complete with rust, sand, sea shells, and the damage caused by the wreck.



Next to the exhibit above is the full scale mockup (*photo, right*) of the turret as she once was, minus parts and bulkheads so the spectator can see the construction.

The spectator can also go under the turret and see it from below, as well as seeing the support beams and bulkheads, as well as the coal bunkers.

Thousands toured the center over the three days of the event.



President Lincoln (George Buss) along with his "Pinkerton man" and naval personnel, including Mike and Lew from the *Fort Henry*, stand in front of the full scale turret located on the full scale entire model of the U.S.S. *Monitor*.

Lincoln had actually visited the *Monitor* shortly after the battle at Hampton Roads.

Left to right, Lew, Chris, Mike, Bob, George, Billy.



The view of the artillery units (photo, right) as taken from the deck of the *Monitor* replica. Note the shadow on the lower right.



Jeff Johnson (center), chief historian, diver, and the man who gets into the turret and knows every nut, bolt, and flake of rust, stands with Steve Lund (right), master model builder from Los Angeles. The *Monitor* in the photo and the *Merrimac* (*Virginia*) were custom built for this event.

In the background, the full scale replica can be seen along side the *Monitor* Center.

