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Tales from a Boston Customs House: Lewis Augustine Horton

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Tales from a Boston Customs House: Lewis Augustine Horton

Abstract

One morning as he was preparing the morning paper, Boston-based Washington dispatch examiner Joseph O'Hare's eye caught a dispatch noting the Congressional Medal of Honor was being awarded to a Lewis Horton for courageous acts while rescuing crew members of the U.S.S. *Monitor* off the coast of Cape Hatteras in 1862. O'Hare was particularly struck by the name of the man, since a double arm amputee veteran named Lewis Augustine Horton worked at the local customs house. O'Hare related the dispatch to Horton, noting the similar name, to which Horton reportedly responded in genuine surprise, "By Jove! It may be for me. I was one of the volunteers that went out in the Rhode Island's cutter and saved the crew of the *Monitor*." [excerpt]

Keywords

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Disciplines

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THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

Tales from a Boston Customs House: Lewis Augustine Horton

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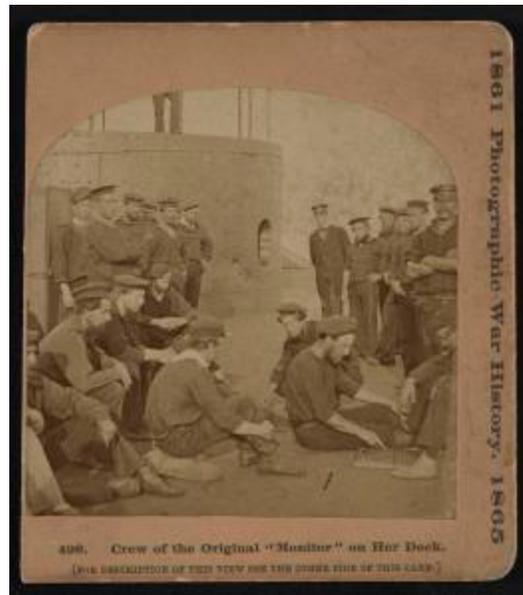
By Sarah Johnson, '15

One morning as he was preparing the morning paper, Boston-based Washington dispatch examiner Joseph O'Hare's eye caught a dispatch noting the Congressional Medal of Honor was being awarded to a Lewis Horton for courageous acts while rescuing crew members of the U.S.S. *Monitor* off the coast of Cape Hatteras in 1862. O'Hare was particularly struck by the name of the man, since a double arm amputee veteran named Lewis Augustine Horton worked at the local customs house. O'Hare related the dispatch to Horton, noting the similar name, to which Horton reportedly responded in genuine surprise, "By Jove! It may be for me. I was one of the volunteers that went out in the Rhode Island's cutter and saved the crew of the *Monitor*."



In December of 1862, Horton was an ordinary seaman aboard the U.S.S. *Rhode Island*. On the night of December 30, the *Rhode Island* was towing the *Monitor* of Hampton Roads fame when a terrible storm started. In the storm the *Monitor* sprung a leak and began to sink. Horton and six other seamen volunteered to undertake a rowboat rescue

mission to save the crew. All but four officers and twelve men were rescued. After two successful trips, on the third trip the men found the *Monitor* had completely sunk. After waiting for a period of time for potential survivors, the men turned the cutter about and began to make for the *Rhode Island*. The *Rhode Island* appeared to be about two miles away, but the rain and fog from the storm severely reduced visibility and the men lost sight of her. The men chose to row northwest in hopes of coming across another vessel patrolling the coast and continued to row all night long to keep them out of the strong northeast current that threatened to send them deep into the Atlantic Ocean.



Listed as missing in action, the men were recovered after eighteen hours exposed to rough seas by the schooner *A. Colby*, fifty miles from where the *Monitor* sank. Horton and his comrades were able to rejoin their crew on January 10. These seven became the first non-combatants to receive the Medal of Honor.

Just under a year later, on November 3, 1863, Seaman Horton had both arms blown off at the elbow in a gunnery accident when the gun he was loading prematurely discharged. What was left of the arms that had rowed to the rescue of drowning seaman were amputated within the hour and the ship's surgeon wrote Horton's family telling them he most likely would not survive the accident. When Horton heard of this, however, he ordered a letter to be dictated to his family assuring them he would not only live, but that he would walk amongst them soon. To be continued...

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