

# Naval Illustrators



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NEW YORK, AUGUST 12, 1865.

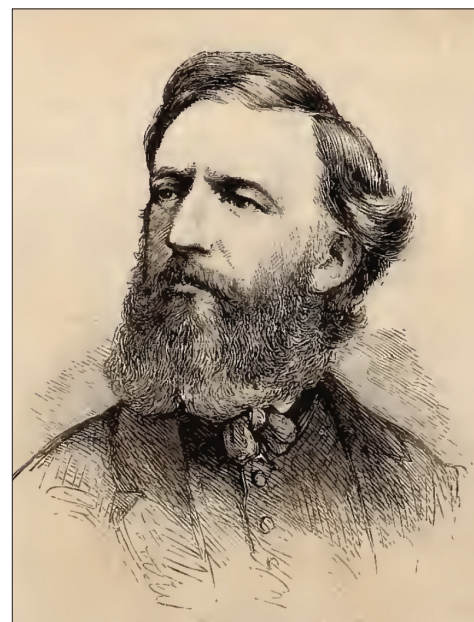
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## William T. Crane: 'Special Artist' for Leslie's

By Gary McQuarrie

**WILLIAM T. CRANE (1832-1865)** worked for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (Leslie's) as a 'Special Artist' throughout the Civil War. Leslie's published 244 of Crane's line engravings based on his sketches and drawings (the most for any Leslie's identified 'Special Artist'), and these and other line engravings based on his artwork were published in versions of *The Soldier in Our Civil War*, a 2-volume special edition pictorial history of the conflict containing Leslie's illustrations, as well as in other Leslie's special-edition pictorial publications about the war. Though many of Crane's sketches and drawings remain, biographical information on him is sparse. Leslie's published notice of his death provided some details. He was born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1832, and from an early age demonstrated a keen interest in drawing. Leslie's praised his ability, the truthfulness of his sketches, and his legacy of illustrating many important military events of the war. His loving devotion to his brother and parents was also emphasized. Despite being unscathed during the various war campaigns he followed, Crane died shortly after the end of the war, succumbing unexpectedly at a young age to a throat disease on July 14, 1865 in his bed at the National Hotel, Washington, DC, where he had been stationed for some time to furnish sketches of current events.

Crane was Leslie's 'Special Artist' in South Carolina, stationed at Port Royal, but he also sketched drawings in North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida during the war. Crane captured the energy of battles with "an expressive display of rapid pencil lines and exploding inkblots." He was considered a



The Late W.T. Crane, formerly of the Corps of Special Artists of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. Line engraving published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XX, No. 515, p 333, August 12, 1865

master at the technique of the “testimonial,” in which officers in command would provide a testimonial to the accuracy of the drawing(s) made by the artist. In the summer of 1863, U.S. Army General Quincy A. Gillmore assigned Crane to illustrate the army’s systematic destruction of Fort Sumter in a series of drawings during an extended bombardment of the fort. Gillmore included Crane’s sketches in his official report to the War Department (*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Volume XXVIII: Part I—Reports, p 597, 599, 601, 603 [Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1890]), and line engravings based on his sequential drawings of the fort’s destruction were published in *Leslie’s* (shown nearby). Indeed, Gillmore’s testimonial to this artwork was published on the cover of *Leslie’s*, Volume XVI, No. 415, p 389, September 12, 1863, typifying *Leslie’s* efforts to distinguish itself from competitors on the basis of the accuracy and truthfulness of its pictorial depictions of the war:

### Our Sketches.

HEADQUARTERS DEPT. OF THE SOUTH,  
Morris Island, S.C. Aug. 24, 1863

*Having found it necessary to employ Mr. W.T. Crane to make sketches of the progressive demolition of Fort Sumter by our batteries, I most cheerfully bear testimony to the general accuracy of his delineations.*

Q.A. Gillmore,  
Brig. Gen. Commanding.

It appears that Crane, along with Alfred Waud and Theodore Davis, were perhaps the only ‘Special Artists’ who had “the will, courage, and constitution to follow the armies from Fort Sumter through the end of the war,” given that they lived the life of soldiers, traveling and enduring the same conditions and physical challenges. Crane was also considered a skilled “name dropper” with higher-ranking officers, a trait that no doubt helped him gain information and access to events. Crane’s many drawings comprised both army and naval scenes, including forts protecting harbors and coastal areas of those states that he covered. Given his assignment in the Carolinas, he witnessed many naval events, including the Union ironclad attack on Fort Sumter, as well as numerous other naval events involving the Charleston Harbor and its defensive forts. Based on a review of line engravings by the



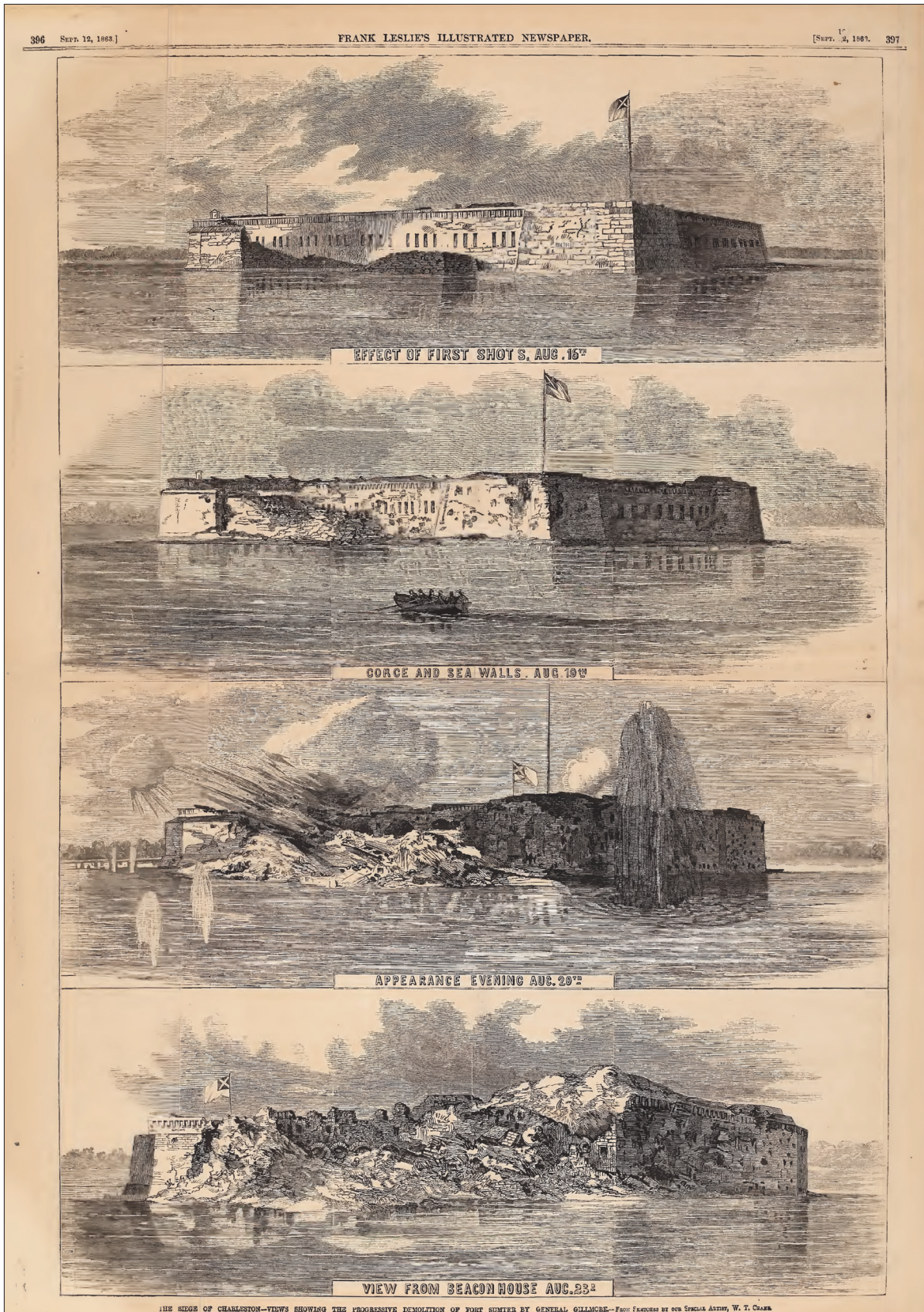
Captain Quincy A. Gillmore (Major General from July 10, 1863), U.S. Army. Photographed by Brady’s National Photographic Portrait Galleries between 1860 and 1865. Library of Congress (LC-DIG-cwpb-06490, LC-B813-2239 [Prints & Photographs] LOT 4192).

Editors of *Civil War Navy—The Magazine*, Crane and his fellow ‘Special Artists’ at *Leslie’s*, Henri Lovie and William Waud, appear to be responsible for the preponderance of Civil War naval-related illustrations appearing in the newspaper and subsequent special edition publications containing *Leslie’s* line engravings of war scenes. The line engravings based on his sketches and drawings of the Union ironclad *Montauk* (shown nearby) reflect the incredible detail and accuracy of Crane’s artwork.

Crane’s final sketches, in conjunction with another of *Leslie’s* artists, illustrated the execution of the conspirators of the assassination of President Lincoln (Volume XX, No. 512, p 280-281,



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The Siege of Charleston—Views Showing the Progressive Destruction of Fort Sumter by General Gillmore.—  
From Sketches by Our Special Artist, W.T. Crane. Line engravings published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*,  
Volume XVI, No. 415, p 396-397, September 12, 1863.



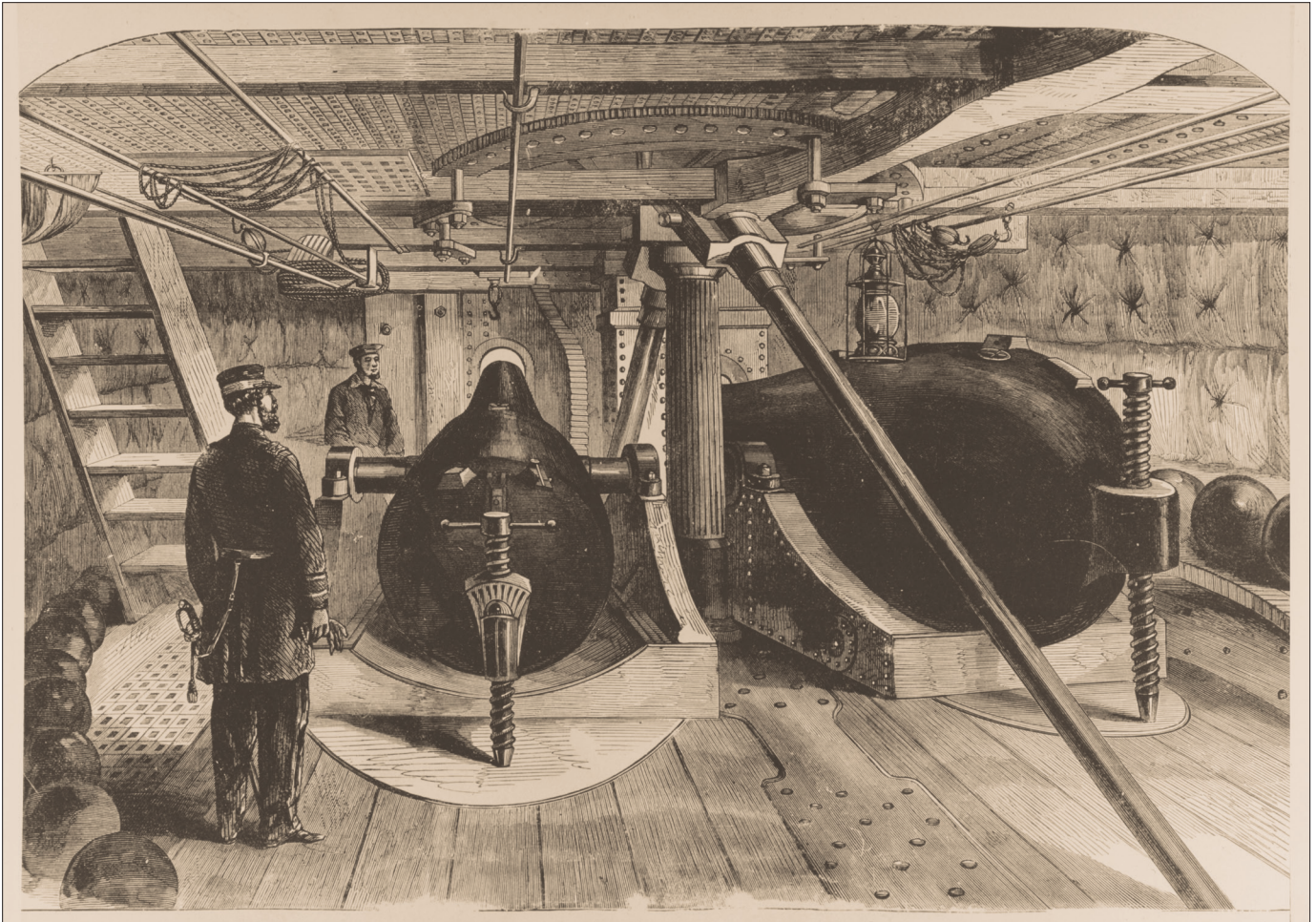


INTERIOR VIEWS OF THE UNITED STATES MONITOR "MONTAUK."  
 From Sketches by W. T. Crane.  
 First Illustrated in "The Soldier in Our" (shown here).

Our Ironclads—Interior Views of the U.S. Monitor "Montauk."—Now Off Charleston.—From Sketches by our Special Artist, W.T. Crane. Line engraving published in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, Volume XVII, No. 437, p 328-329, February 13, 1864. Also published in Paul F. Mottley, T. Campbell-Copeland, Editors. *The Soldier in Our Civil War*, Volume II, (New York: Stanley Bradley Publishing Company, 1890), p 186-187 (shown here).



# William T. Crane: 'Special Artist' for Leslie's



Our Ironclad Fleet--Interior of the Turret of the Monitor "Montauk."—From a sketch by our Special Artist, W.T. Crane. Line engraving published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVII, No. 437, p 332, February 13, 1864. Also published in Paul F. Mottelay, T. Campbell-Copeland, Editors. *The Soldier in Our Civil War*, Volume II, (New York: Stanley Bradley Publishing Company), p 188. NH 58705 courtesy of Naval History and Heritage Command.

July 22, 1865). The Becker Collection of Drawings of the American Civil War Era (Boston College, Boston, Massachusetts; [idesweb.bc.edu](http://idesweb.bc.edu)) contains Crane's drawings from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida that were made between 1861 and 1865. Based on his identified drawings in The Becker Collection and in selected line engravings published in *Leslie's* and in Volume II of *The Soldier in Our Civil War* (in which numerous line engravings were noted to be based on his sketches), Crane produced a particularly large volume of on-scene war drawings, many of which were used to create highly accurate and enduring line engravings of naval ships and events of the conflict.

## Sources

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