

# Naval Illustrators

"Kearsarge" Gun Crew. Pen and crayon drawing (8½ x 13¼ inches) by Isaac Walton Taber, signed by Taber. Collection of Robert and Margaret Mayo Trust. Also published as a line engraving, captioned as 'On the "Kearsarge"—A Telling Shot,' in John M. Browne. The Duel Between the "Alabama" and the "Kearsarge." *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, Volume XXXI, No. 6, p 929, April 1886.

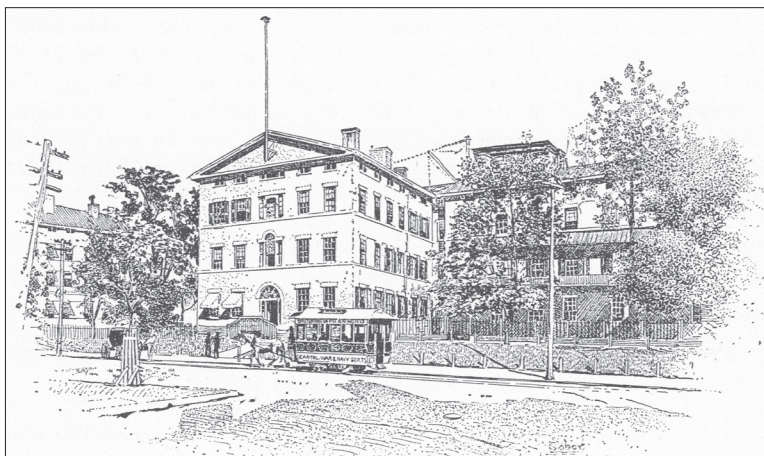


## Isaac Walton Taber: Century's Civil War Illustrator

By Gary McQuarrie

**ISAAC WALTON TABER (1860-1933)**, most commonly known as Walton Taber, was an illustrator specializing in pen and ink drawings (including those based on photographs), with marine scenes apparently his favorite subjects. Because his work was often credited to "I.W. Taber," Walton Taber is occasionally confused with the photographer Isaac West Taber (1830-1912). Walton Taber is best known

for the approximately 250 illustrations he created to produce line engravings for the iconic 4-volume *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (The Century Company, 1887-1888), which included a number of naval-related drawings.



The Old Navy Department Building, Washington, DC. Line engraving, based on illustration by Taber after a photograph, published in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: The Century Company, 1887-1888), Volume I, p 618.

Taber was born in New Bedford, Massachusetts as the third of four sons. His father was a local merchant who served as mayor of New Bedford from 1859 to 1862. Taber began his

education in New Bedford and continued his study of art at the Cooper Union in New York City. He came to enjoy the city's art world and remained a resident there the rest of life. For a period of time, Taber was considered one of the prominent illustrators of his era. Because of his skill at drawing maritime scenes, he was selected to illustrate the initial editions of Rudyard Kipling's *Captains Courageous* (New York: The Century Company, 1896) and Frank Thomas Bullen's *Cruise of the Cachalot* (Leipzig, Germany: Tauchnitz, 1899) and the 1928 edition of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1928), all books based on seafaring adventures. He also created 25 illustrations of western scenes from contemporary photographs for Frances M. A. Roe's *Army Letter From An Officer's Wife 1871-1888* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1909). In addition, Taber created hundreds of illustrations for Century's *The Century Monthly Illustrated Magazine* (The Century Company, from November 1881 to April

1920; originally published as *Scribner's Monthly* by Charles Scribner's Sons from November 1870 to October 1881) and *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folks*, a popular monthly American children's magazine (The Century Company from July 1881 to May 1930; originally published by Scribner & Company from November 1873 to June 1881). It is probable that Taber was a long-time Century staff artist, as only in the late 1890s did his work start to appear in other publications.

Almost 200 of Taber's 250 illustrations for The Century Company and its *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* are catalogued in *The American Heritage Century Collection of Civil War Art* (Stephen W. Sears, Editor, 1983 edition). The catalogued illustrations include approximately 20 naval-related illustrations (the featured illustration and several others shown nearby). Because photographs could not yet be adequately reproduced in the printing process in the 1880s, many of Taber's illustrations for *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, as well as for



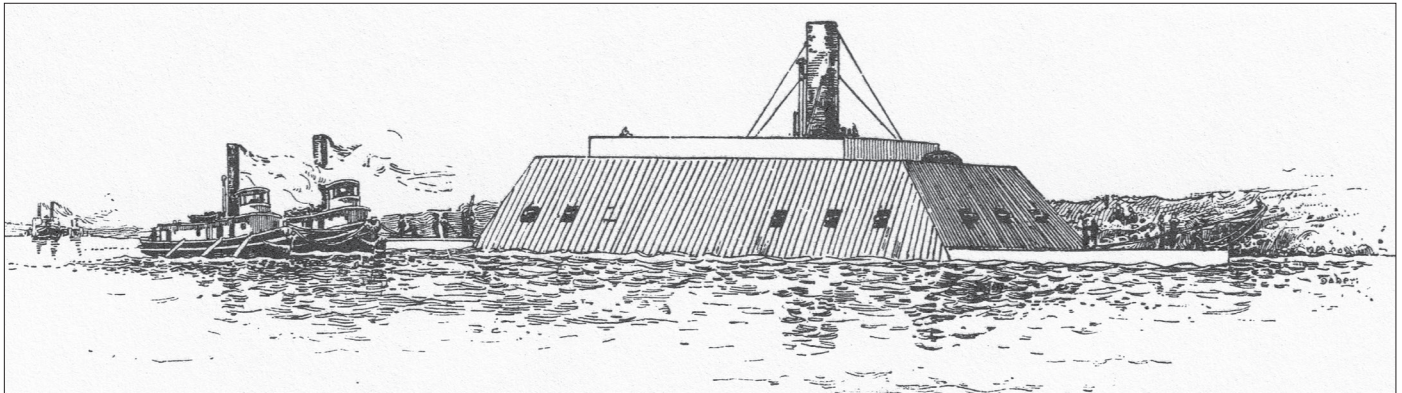
Crew of U.S.S. *Kearsarge* at Quarters. Line engraving, based on illustration by Taber after a photograph (Naval History and Heritage Command Photographs Collection, NH 52027), from: John M. Browne. The Duel Between the "Alabama" and the "Kearsarge." *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, Volume XXXI, No. 4, p 925, April 1886. Also published as a line engraving in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: The Century Company, 1887-1888), Volume IV, p 616.

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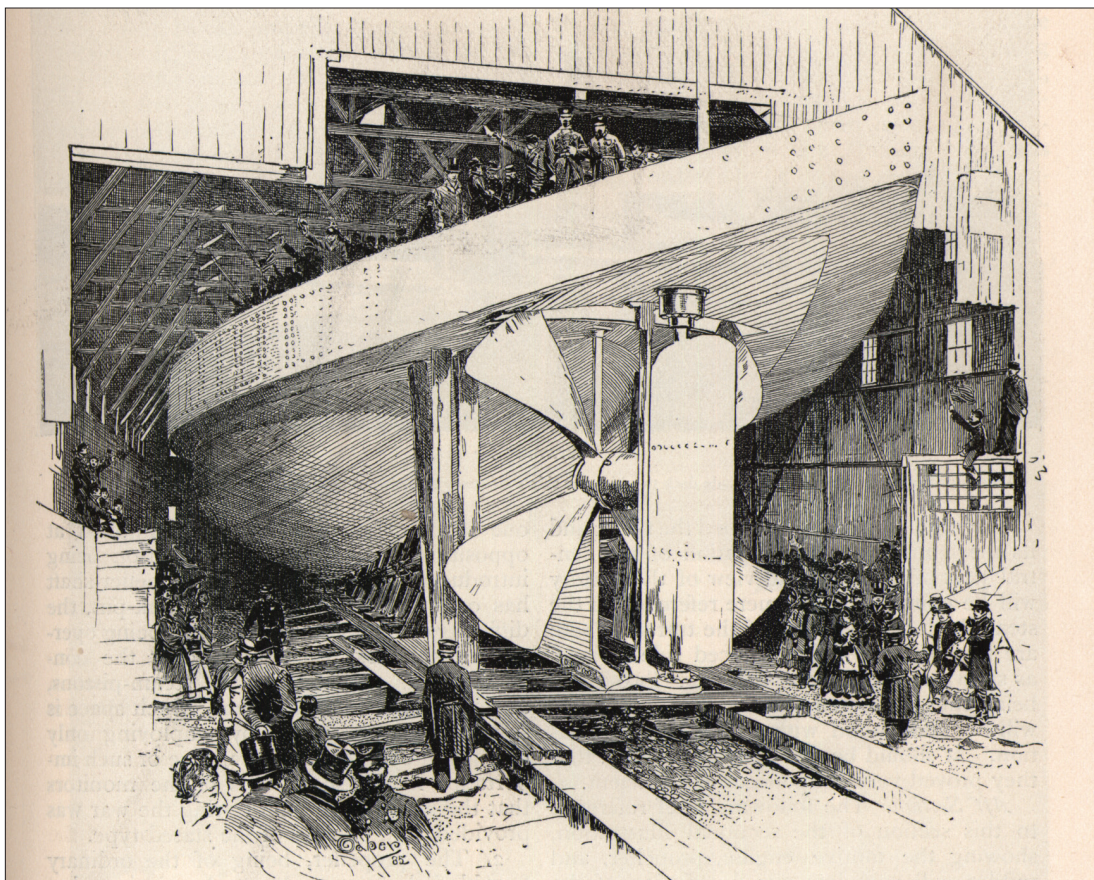
Century's magazines, were based upon actual photographs taken during the Civil War. By sheer number, Taber's illustrations represent a significant fraction of those appearing in the iconic book set.

Taber's friends included New Bedford artist Clifford

Warren Ashley and Achushnet artist Clement Nye Swift. When Taber visited the New Bedford area, he reportedly stayed with Swift. To promote his fellow illustrator's art, Ashley arranged an exhibit of Taber's illustrations at the New Bedford Free Public Library. Taber may have been active (at least socially) with the Salmagundi Club for



The Confederate Iron-Clad "Louisiana" On the Way to Fort St. Philip. Line engraving, based on illustration by Taber, published in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: The Century Company, 1887-1888), Volume II, p 48.



Launch of the 'Dictator' from the Delamatex Iron Works, December 27, 1862. Line engraving, based on illustration by Taber, from: John Ericsson. *The Monitors*. *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, Volume XXX, No. 12, p 291, December 1885. Also published as a line engraving in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: The Century Company, 1887-1888), Volume I, p 620.



Line engraving, based on illustration by Taber from a photograph, from: P.D. Haywood. Life on the "Alabama." *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, Volume XXXI, No. 4, p 901, April 1886. Also published as a line engraving in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: The Century Company, 1887-1888), Volume IV, p 601.



Diversion on Deck (CSS Alabama crewmen). Line engraving, based on illustration by Taber, from: P.D. Haywood. Life on the "Alabama." *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, Volume XXXI, No. 4, p 903, April 1886.

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artists and patrons in New York City, although membership records are lacking.

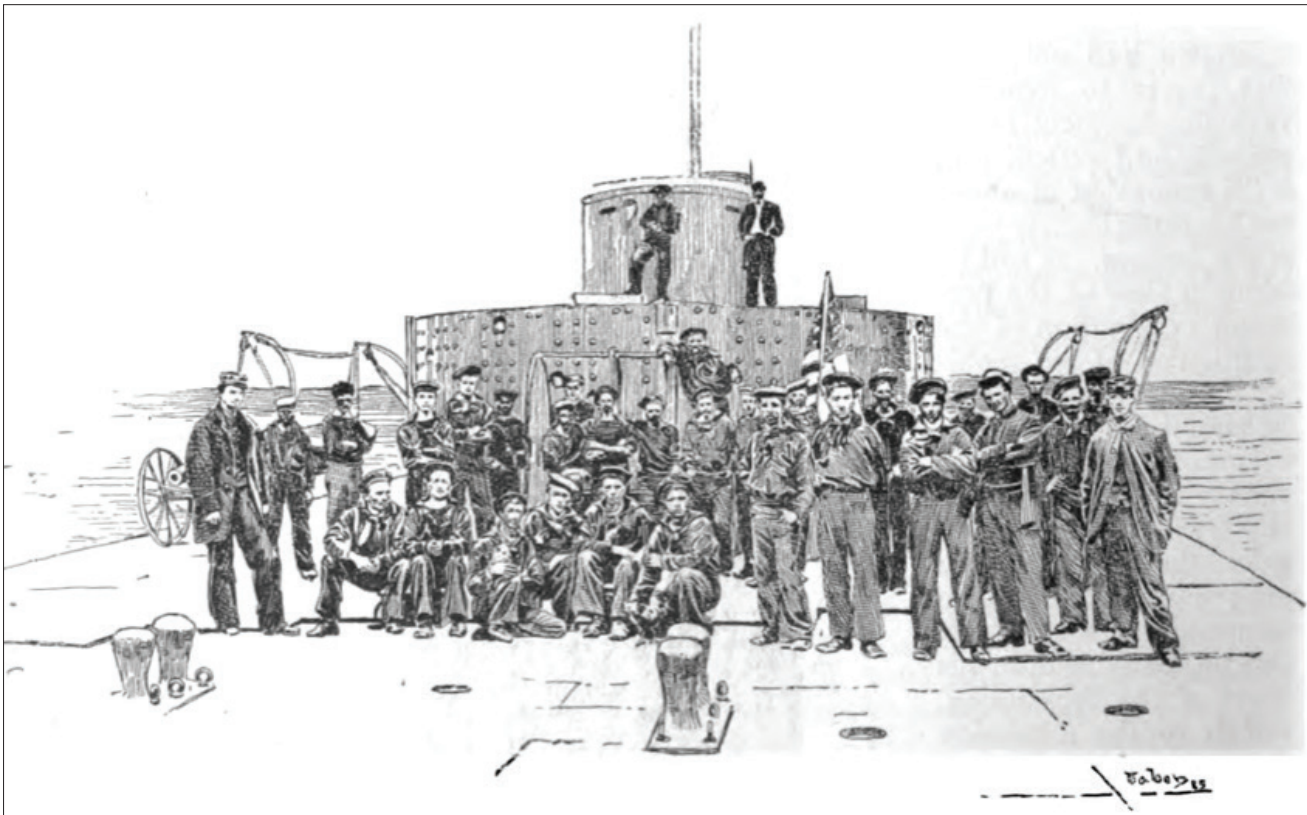
Taber endured misfortunes in his later age, beginning to lose sight in both eyes, preventing him from working. A cataract operation subsequently restored his vision and he attempted to resume his career. In the 1930 U.S. Census, Taber was listed as a lodger at 508 West 145th Street; during 1930, when his income from selling his artwork was minimal, he suffered a fall, resulting in a fractured leg. He was left to recover at Harlem Hospital with no place to recuperate until a group of artist friends arranged for him to be transferred to the Burke Foundation Convalescent Home in White Plains, New York. He would live only another three years, dying from throat cancer on February 17, 1933, in New York City. Taber is buried in St. Michael's Cemetery, in the borough of Queens.

Though financially poor in his final years, Taber left a rich legacy of a large number of illustrations that appeared in notable books and widely read popular magazines of his time, as well as hundreds of illustrations, including naval-related drawings, that were produced as line engravings in the enduring historic book set, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*.

## Sources

Mary Jean Blasdale. *Artists of New Bedford: A Biographical Dictionary* (New Bedford, MA: Published at the New Bedford Whaling Museum by The Old Dartmouth Historical Society, 1990), p 186.

Stephen W. Sears, Editor. *The American Heritage Century Collection of Civil War Art* (New York: Bonanza Books, distributed by Crown Publishers, Inc., by arrangement with American Heritage Publishing Company, Inc., 1983 edition), p 380-391.



On Deck (Crew of the Monitor *Lehigh*). Line engraving, based on illustration by Taber after a photograph taken on the James River, Virginia during the Civil War (Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-33939), from: John Ericsson. *The Monitors*. *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, Volume XXX, No. 12, p 290, December 1885.



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