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Jay W. Simson, *Naval Strategies of the Civil War: Confederate Innovations and Federal Opportunism* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2001)

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There is much promise in this work, in an area which the author correctly describes (as do most naval historians) as relatively unexplored. Since its focus is on strategy and is not simply another narrative, or “history”, of the naval events of the American Civil War, it offers a fresh perspective on how rival decision-making in navies Union and Confederate determined the character of several notable operations in the conflict. Indeed, *Naval Strategies of the Civil War* contains an impressive array of information within its 230 pages, and each of its thirteen chapters are equally-balanced and generally well-written, if not somewhat biased towards the South. The subtitle itself is suggestive of this.

There are essentially two main arguments at work here. First, that the Confederate Secretary of the Navy, Stephen R. Mallory, hoped ironclad steamships would break the Union blockade of Southern ports, and when this largely failed adopted a more defensive use for them as ‘fleets in being’—which the author regards as largely successful in deterring naval and amphibious assaults. Second, that Gideon Welles, the U.S. Navy Secretary, was obliged to carry out the ‘Anaconda Plan’ of slow blockade and the opening of the Mississippi (recommended by Winfield Scott and endorsed by Lincoln) but was nevertheless persuaded by professional naval officers to strike and capture ports when the opportunity arose. Two lesser arguments follow: that Mallory’s coastal-defense strategy was hamstrung by poor army-navy cooperation and a critical inability to work harmoniously with his officers, in addition to the well-known defects of naval and industrial matériel at the South’s disposal; and that the Union Navy, by comparison, suffered less in this regard.

Central to this exposition of Civil War naval strategy are the ironclads themselves, though the author does not openly say so. Success or defeat both tactically and strategically is depicted as a matter of whether these “ultimate weapons”, more than torpedoes (or mines), submarines, or commerce raiders, could gain the initiative. For the author, however, this was more a question of quantity rather than quality; if only the South could have finished more ironclads than it was forced to burn on the stocks, waiting for armor plate or machinery, many of its naval disasters might have been averted or even reversed. There are several cases in point here. First, of course, is the story of

the C.S.S. Virginia (or 'Merrimac'), against the Union blockading squadron at Hampton Roads, and then against the tiny Monitor, for "once the North flexed its industrial might and began producing ironclads of its own, the South had no chance to achieve naval supremacy." Union flag officer David G. Farragut's capture of New Orleans was a product of fortuitous timing, and a surprising departure from the Anaconda Plan; if the Union navy had waited, the author argues, the Confederates would have completed the ironclad-rams Louisiana and Mississippi and, deferring to Jack Green and Alessandro Massignani's *Ironclads at War* (1998), "could have made New Orleans and Mobile impregnable." The daring exploit of the C.S.S. Arkansas at Vicksburg, meanwhile, "won a great strategic victory". But would she have won more if better made, or much less if the Union ironclad gunboats which confronted her were better armed or armored? How did the C.S.S. Tennessee fare against the fifteen-inch guns of the monitor Manhattan at Mobile Bay? Even the overwhelming naval bombardment against Fort Fisher at the close of the war could have been "prevented", the author suggests, if the Southern rams being built had come into play, though the Union armada also consisted of three monitors (in addition to the broadside-ironclad U.S.S. New Ironsides) mounting eight guns proven effective against the Tennessee, the Atlanta, and the Virginia II. Something needed, therefore, in this discussion of strategy is a closer examination of the weapons themselves. Ironclads as "ultimate weapons" in this period were not so much about numbers, but about character, and the author's assertion that "in and of itself, the blockade could never have brought about the collapse of the Confederacy" rather misses the point of the tactical mechanics of strategic coastal assault vs. defense.

There is an excellent account in *Naval Strategies of the Civil War* of Confederate shipbuilding efforts in Europe, especially Great Britain. On the other hand its Afterword overstretches an application of "successful" Confederate to failed German naval strategy of the First World War. For a work which is not "intended as a history of the naval side of the American Civil War" it remains crippled from too much familiar narrative and too little real analysis. Hence, one factor that seriously undermines the hitting power of this book is its complete lack of references or footnotes, hardly compensated by utilizing secondary works such as Greene and Massignani's (which does not bother with them as well.) This automatically relegates this important contribution to the realm of the layman rather than the scholar, though it has rightly addressed a very broad topic in specific terms.



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