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William C Whittle Jr. *The Voyage of the CSS Shenandoah*. Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2005. 312 pp. Index.

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The story of the Confederacies' commerce raiders is one of the great naval epics of the American Civil War. Although in existence a scant four years, the Confederate Navy played a vital role in the Civil War. The story of how the southern states created a navy from virtually nothing is a great story in its own right, and many of the Confederate Navy's exploits have become legendary. Commerce raiding is as old as naval history itself and Stephen Mallory—the Confederate Secretary of the Navy, as well as the only member of Jefferson Davis' cabinet to hold his position throughout the entire course of the war—quickly realized its potential. Mallory devoted a large percentage of the Confederate Navy's scant resources in acquiring ships for attacks on Union shipping.

One such vessel, indeed the last major commerce raider purchased by the then dying Confederacy, was the *CSS Shenandoah*. Originally launched as *The Sea King* and built as a fast merchantman, she had an iron frame, teak decking, ample sails, and a retractable single screw powered by a steam engine. She also had ample stores and bunkers for use as a troop transport. The ship's design made her a perfect commerce raider. Eagerly acquired with dwindling Confederate funds in September of 1864, the *Sea*

*King* set sail in October of that year for Madeira, where the ship rendezvoused with the tender *Laurel*. Loaded with provisions and cannon, the *Laurel* quickly outfitted the larger *Sea King* as an armed raider, and rechristened her *CSS Shenandoah*. Also aboard the *Laurel* were several Confederate naval officers. Among these officers were James I Waddell, the ship's commander, and First Lieutenant and Executive Officer William Whittle.

Whittle himself had enjoyed an interesting career prior to joining the *Shenandoah*. A Virginian by birth and an 1858 graduate of the Naval Academy, Whittle went south when the war began. He served with the famed Rebel raider and blockade runner *Nashville*, oversaw the construction of Confederate warships in Louisiana and Georgia, and spent time in Europe as a naval envoy. When the *Shenandoah* was launched, he proved an able and valuable officer. He also kept a daily log of experiences aboard the *Shenandoah*, a document that was thought lost until its rediscovery in the late 1980's.

*The Voyage of the CSS Shenandoah* is basically Whittle's log, ably annotated by D. Alan and Anne B. Harris. Whittle had an able pen, and well documents the *Shenandoah's* remarkable career. She spent twelve months at sea, circumnavigated the globe, took no less than 38 prizes, and did not surrender until November of 1865—well after the end of hostilities (her crew did not receive news of the Confederate surrender until informed by a British Bark). She then surrendered herself in Liverpool, England, largely to avoid charges of piracy.

The University of Alabama Press has done a remarkable job of rescuing Whittle's fascinating journal from undeserved obscurity. This book offers a fascinating look into the life of a seaman in the age of steam and sail. The sheer difficulty of converting the *Sea King* into the *Shenandoah* is well documented: the ship had to be provisioned, guns had to be mounted, and ammunition storage compartments had to be built. Whittle was also in chare of disciplining the often unruly crew, no easy feat, as the *Shenandoah's*

compliment—largely created by enticing sailors from captured prizes—were a difficult bunch.

Other details emerge from Whittle's rich journal. Daily rounds of chess between the ship's officers helped while away the seemingly endless hours between actions. The crew enjoyed reading, singing, and dancing. *Shenandoah* was far from a dry ship, and Whittle details both the boons (good morale) and the bane (many black eyes) of the grog ration. Other highlights include Whittle losing his temper with one high-minded wife of a capture Yankee captain, and the seemingly strange phenomena of having Black crewman serving aboard a Confederate warship.

This fine volume also contains a few photographs of the principle players in the saga, but unfortunately leaves out any pictures of the ship itself. Another minor criticism is the index, which is too short and lacks detail—a setback that limits the research value of the book. This is a strange oversight, considering the general excellent production values of the book as a whole. All told, *The Voyage of the CSS Shenandoah* is a good read, very well annotated, and a must for anyone interested in Civil War or Confederate naval history. It will no doubt take a rightful place as a cornerstone volume in the study of Confederate naval history.



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