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Hamilton Cochran, *Blockade Runners of the Confederacy*. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1958.

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The Confederate States went to war in 1861 burdened with a great number of disadvantages, chiefly its lack of vital materials. Short of virtually everything necessary to wage war, the South relied on imports to feed its economy and war machine. Lincoln, realizing this great advantage, ordered a blockade of Confederate ports in April of 1861. The effectiveness of the blockade from 1861-1865 mirrored the Union war effort; and the fortunes of the Confederacy mirrored her ability to get vital supplies through the blockade.

One of the most colorful aspects of the American Civil War is the story of the men who braved this blockade, bringing vital war materials, as well as civilian goods, into the fledgling Confederate States of America. As with the new nation itself, blockade running proved a great gamble. Many gambled with their family fortunes—as well as their lives—in these ventures.

As previously mentioned, blockade running soon became a major pillar of the Confederate war economy. During the opening stages of the blockade, small and fast sailing vessels provided the majority of the runners. As the North's grip on the Confederate coastline tightened, wind power alone often proved incapable of piercing the ever growing curtain of Union vessels patrolling the South's inlets and waterways. Soon,

small narrow beamed and fast steamers began to make their impact felt, and proved the most effective way of avoiding Yankee warships.

Confederate Naval history has been the subject of numerous historical works since 1865, and blockade running is no exception. Hamilton Cochran--a now deceased veteran of both world wars as a member of the US Coast Guard--lived a lively literary life, authoring no less than thirteen books, as well as several articles and monographs. Cochran's books, both fiction and non-fiction, usually centered on nautical themes. Thus the genesis of *Blockade Runners of the Confederacy*, a book now nearly 50 years old, but still rightfully considered a classic of naval history. Some of Cochran's work is now outdated, and his scholarship long surpassed by historians like Stephen Wise, but no one is better in spinning a yarn. Simply put, *Blockade Runners of the Confederacy* is a ripping good read.

Cochrane organized his book into quasi-linear chapters, each dealing with a diverse number of themes related to blockade running. His chapters deal with such topics as the goods—both civilian and military—that ran the gauntlet, famous individual runners, the Federal Navy's response, and of course some famous ships. Famed Confederate raider/runner John Newland Maffitt is singled out for special praise, as that illustrious skipper sported a legendary career during the war. Maffitt began the war as the naval aide to no less a personage than Robert E. Lee, working with the famed Confederate general in the construction of Savannah's defense. Later, he served as commander of the famed commerce Raider CSS Florida, which cruised the breadth of the western hemisphere, taking prizes, and battling a nasty yellow fever outbreak. Returning home, Maffitt next took command of the CSS Albemarle, a deadly Confederate Ironclad that terrorized the sound that bore her name in 1864. Famous actions and pursuits are also detailed, all in Cochran's inimical style.

Blockade Runners of the Confederacy is a very enjoyable book, full of folksy anecdotes and little stories. As such, it is hardly the authoritative source on this fascinating subject, nor is it's scholarship of the highest level; its bibliography is a scant

four pages long. Still, it is a remarkably fun book, and ultimately, that is how it should be judged.



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