



A Confederate Biography: The Cruise of the CSS *Shenandoah*

Dwight Sturtevant Hughes

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"The cruise of a ship is a biography," wrote the Confederacy's foremost sailor, Raphael Semmes. A ship can be, therefore, a central character in a life story through which we view the momentous past more clearly.

From October 1864 to November 1865, the CSS *Shenandoah* carried the Civil War around the globe to the ends of the earth through every extreme of sea and storm. Her officers represented a cross section of the Confederacy from Old Dominion first families through the Deep South aristocracy to a middle-class Missourian: a nephew of Robert E. Lee; a grandnephew of founder George Mason; a son-in-law to Raphael Semmes; grandsons of men who fought at George Washington's side; an uncle of Theodore Roosevelt.

They considered themselves Americans, Southerners, rebels, and warriors embarking on the voyage of their lives, defending their country as they understood it, and pursuing a difficult, dangerous mission in which they succeeded spectacularly after it no longer mattered.

Shenandoah was a magnificent ship. Her commerce-raiding mission was a central component of U.S. Navy heritage and a watery form of asymmetric warfare in the spirit of John Mosby, Bedford Forrest, and W. T. Sherman. She contributed to the diplomatic maelstrom of the Civil War, as evidenced by a contentious visit to Melbourne, Australia.

Later, at the Pacific island of Pohnpei, Southern gentlemen enjoyed a tropical holiday while their country lay dying, mingling with an exotic warrior society that was more like them than they knew. Their observations looking back from the most remote and alien surroundings imaginable, along with the viewpoints of those they encountered, provide unique perspectives of the conflict.

Finally, *Shenandoah* invaded the north, the deep cold of the Bering Sea. She fired the last gun of the conflict and set crystal waters aglow with flaming Yankee whalers. Seven months after Appomattox, *Shenandoah* limped into Liverpool. Captain Waddell lowered the last Confederate banner without defeat or surrender.

This is, as Admiral Semmes describes, a biography of a cruise and a microcosm of the Confederate-American experience. See aconfederatebiography.com

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