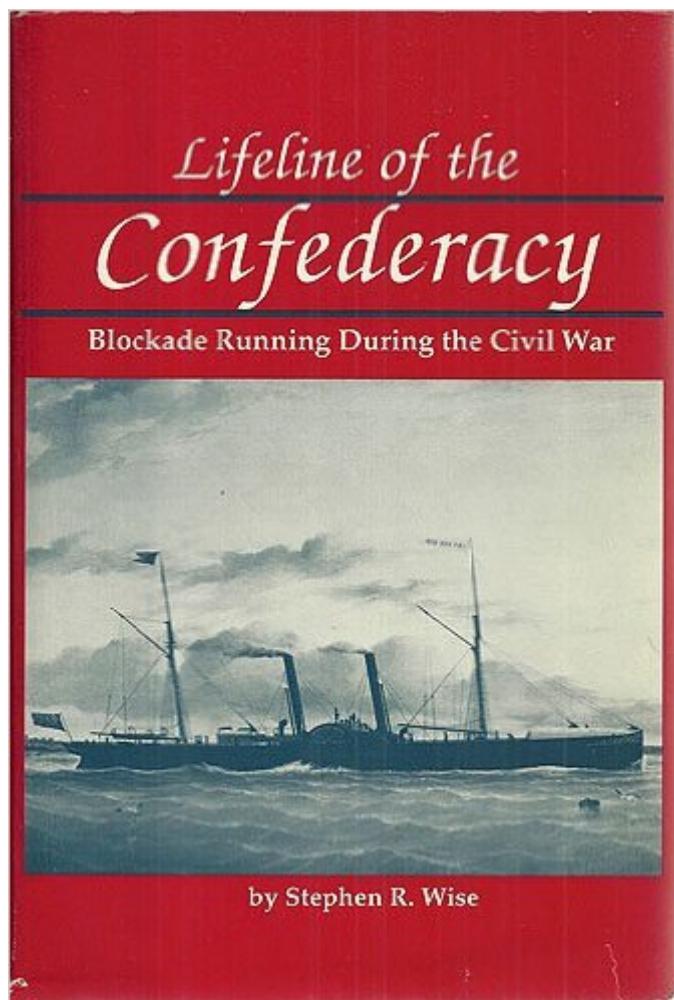


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Lifeline Of The Confederacy: Blockade Running During The Civil War (Studies In Maritime History)



Synopsis

One of the finest original works on the Civil War. -- Civil War News --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Stephen Wise, the author of Gate of Hell: Campaign for Charleston Harbor, 1863, has written another excellent book. This objective treatise about Confederate steam powered blockade running is thorough, without being exhausting to the reader. It covers the subject with ample maps, sketches/photos, tables and text. Summarizing from the book: nearly 300 steamers made 1300 attempts, of which 1,000 were successful. 221 vessels were captured or destroyed. The South imported 400,000 rifles (60%), 1/3rd of its lead, 2/3rd of its salt peter for gunpowder, as well as a great number of blankets, clothing, shoes, and leather goods. This is not a romanticized, detailed retelling of many blockade running stories. A reader in search of such a tactically oriented story telling work would likely be disappointed. However, neither is the book simply a dry collection of statistics and organizational descriptions, for it also has concise retellings of many pertinent blockade running attempts. These accounts provide the reader with a feel for the trade, the skill and resourcefulness of the captains, and how methods evolved over time as both the blockade runners, and the blockaders improved in quality and numbers. The book focuses almost exclusively on steam powered blockade runners, dismissing the numerous sailing ship attempts as having a negligible impact on the war effort. One of the few omissions from the book is adequate statistics and detailed

explanation of why this was so (size, vulnerability, etc.) There is a treasure trove of information in this work for anyone seeking a better understanding of the strategic aspect of arming and supplying the South. The strengths and weaknesses of the Union blockade are exposed from the vantage point of the blockade runners. Wise illustrates the failings of "King Cotton" diplomacy early in the war. He demonstrates how Southern blockade running was hampered by a lack of central control, multiple competing efforts, and over reliance on private enterprise. The South had ample opportunity early to ship cotton and bring in war materiel while the Federal blockade was a token force. Unfortunately, the Confederacy's policy of cutting off the cotton supply prevented it from effectively using its only valuable financial asset, and arms flowed in much more slowly than they should have early in the war. As a result, the rights to cotton were sold at $\frac{1}{2}$ market value rather than obtaining better compensation, and cotton bonds were discounted even more as Southern military reverses occurred. What stands out is the transformation of Wilmington, NC from a minor developing port into the premiere deepwater port for the South, and the final lifeline for Lee's army in Virginia. 226 pages of the primary text includes 25 maps. Following that are 101 pages of detailed appendices about attempts at each port, those captured/destroyed/lost, and a summary of the known specifications for each steam blockade runner. Notes and bibliography occupy a further 50 pages. Additionally, there are 36 drawings, photos, and sketches of steamers, and prominent figures. Note: My softcover copy does not seem to have the binding problem mentioned by another reviewer--at least not so far. I've seen that sort of problem in books before, but not in this one, so perhaps I have a different printing.

Stephen R. Wise's opus on the blockade runners is not to be missed! He ably describes the blockade itself, the ships and men that challenged it, and backs it all up with valuable charts and tables. Truly definitive.

Stephen Wise has managed to both write a comprehensive history packed with information which is also very readable. Truly a remarkable feat. The book succeeds at both imparting the general course of the blockade running and the many fascinating incidents which make up the history of blockade running.

WELL WRITTEN! THIS COVERS A LITTLE KNOWN PART OF THE CONFEDERACY MAINLY THE NAVAL EFFORTS TO SUPPLY THE SOUTH WITH GOODS AND SERVICES. I HAD NO IDEA OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THE EFFORT TO SUPPLY THE WAR EFFORT. THE NUMBER

OF SHIPS USED IS STAGGERING.

This excellent book is well worth the price for anyone interested in the American Civil War. The author is well known to Civil War students (I hate the word "buff") and the publisher is safe. SouthCarolina Press has published very little in history that is not above average. Unlike some readers I find no problem with the paperback binding, and the print is easy to read. The South depended on the export of agricultural products, particularly cotton for trade for manufactured goods, especially war material to sustain the population and the war effort. The decision to blockade the Southern ports was as important to the Northern victory as the Anaconda plan to squeeze the South geographically and contain its movements. And there was a large coastal area composed of the eastern seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico. Much of the coast lacked means of transporting exports or imports to and from the coast, but a few major ports did a remarkable job during the first years of the war when the Union had too few ships to effect a good blockade. Then things went bad for the South. Texas was lost which hurt the trade with Mexico, Vicksburg and other Mississippi River ports were closed and New Orleans was lost. The whole area of the Confederacy known as Kirby-Smith's Confederacy, the South west of the Mississippi was lost. The few ports that remained for the Confederacy were even more important. Confederate raiders such as the Alabama destroyed Northern commerce and the blockade runners brought as much as they could out of and into the South. The hunger for cotton gave the blockaders extra motive for effectiveness. When an outbound ship with a load of cotton was captured the product was shipped North and the crew and officers profited. The effectiveness of the blockaders eventually took King Cotton from his throne and cost the South dearly. The importing of arms and powder was curtailed by the blockade effectiveness as much as the lack of product to exchange with Europe or the islands. Blockade running vessels which were stopped by the Union Navy became blockade vessels. The Union Navy's success in shutting ports limited the ability of the South to produce blockade runners and limited the necessary trade even more. This book does not tell the marvelous stories that have been left for us of adventures on running the blockade, that is left for other books and writers. What this volume offers us in great detail is the equally interesting stories of how the blockade was managed by both sides.

This is an excellent account of a fascinating subject. However a word of WARNING. Buy a hardcover copy as the binding on the paperback edition is the worst I have ever seen. It broke immediately. But I now have a HB copy for my library.

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