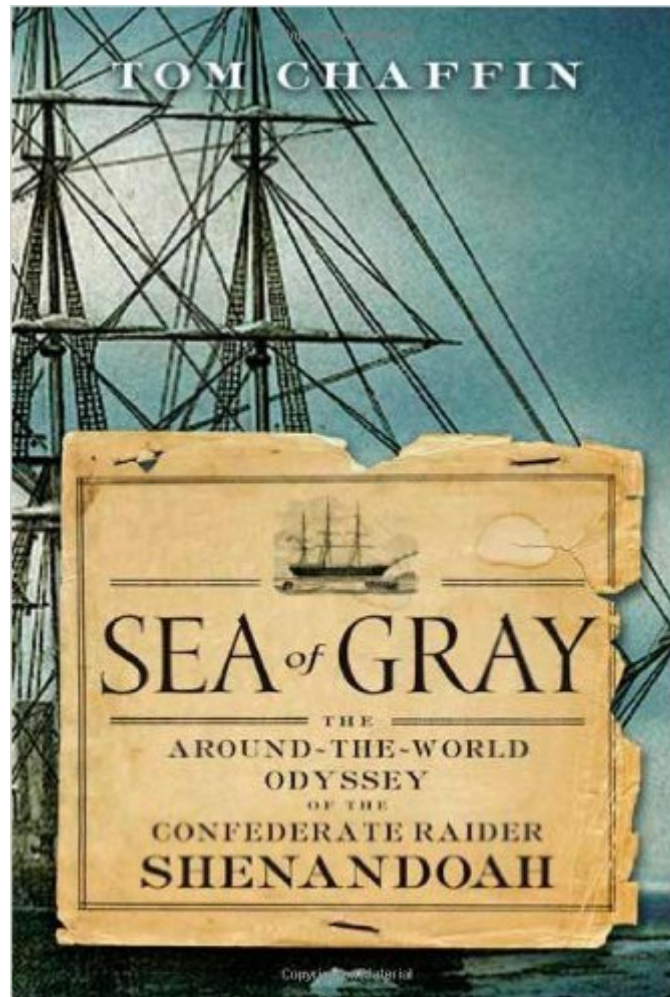


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Sea Of Gray: The Around-the-World Odyssey Of The Confederate Raider Shenandoah



Synopsis

The 58,000-Mile, Around-the-World Cruise of the Confederacy's Last Ship Afloat The sleek, 222-foot, black auxiliary steamer The Sea King left London on October, 8, 1864, ostensibly bound for Bombay. The subterfuge was ended off the shores of Madeira, as the ship was rechristened and outfitted for war. With new gun ports cut to accommodate additional cannon, the CSS Shenandoah commenced the last, most quixotic sea story of the Civil War, the 58,000-mile, around-the-world cruise of the Confederacy's third most successful merchant raider. Before its voyage was over, thirty-two Union merchant and whaling ships and their cargoes would be sunk. But it was after ship and crew had rounded Africa's Cape of Good Hope, stopped long enough in Australia to cause a diplomatic crisis, and navigated the ice floes of Siberia's Sea of Okhotsk, the Bering Sea, and the Arctic Ocean that their journey took its most fearful turn. Four months after the Civil War was over, the Shenandoah's Captain Waddell finally learned he was, and had been, fighting without cause or state. In the eyes of the Union, he had gone from being an enemy combatant to a pirate, a hangable offense. Hunted by Union and British men-of-war, his polyglot crew rife with hints of mutiny, and with dwindling supplies, Waddell elected to camouflage the ship, circumnavigate the globe, and attempt to surrender on English soil. Assembled from hundreds of original documents, including intimate shipboard journals kept by Shenandoah officers, Sea of Gray is a masterful narrative of men at sea.

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Customer Reviews

"Just as war will have its heroes and its tragedies, so, inevitably, will it have its ironies," writes Tom

Chaffin in *Sea of Gray: The Around-the-World Odyssey of the Confederate Raider Shenandoah* (Hill and Wang). The story of the *Shenandoah* is full of ironies. From October 1864 to November 1865, she had what could look like an extraordinary successful voyage. She was the only Confederate ship to circumnavigate the globe, logging 58,000 miles. She destroyed 32 vessels belonging to Yankees, ransomed six others, took over a thousand prisoners, and gained over a million dollars in prizes. She safely got back to port at the end of her conquests. Of course the cause for the Confederacy was doomed, but the *Shenandoah*'s story is especially ironic; her greatest conquests happened after Lee had surrendered to Grant, so that the cause dear to her sailors' hearts simply did not exist as they fought for it. It is a unique story and a sad one, and while the irony is thick, Chaffin has not forgotten to tell a rousing tale of the sea, full of battles, heroism, confusion, storms, and starvation. The Confederacy's sea strategy was to destroy Union merchant ships by privateers, private vessels that would prey on the commercial fleet, cost the Union in ships and cargoes lost, and cause Union military ships to be drawn from other theaters of war to protect the endangered merchantmen. The *Shenandoah* was converted from a collier to a gunship, secretly at sea. The captain, James Waddell, a graduate of the relatively new Naval Academy at Annapolis, was given the vaguest of orders. His men were to harass Union merchantmen, to take prisoners and prizes, and to sink or burn the evacuated vessels. Captives were left at the next port of call, and some were persuaded to join the *Shenandoah*'s crew. The persuasion might have been as mild as oratory from the captain, but it might be confinement in leg irons or worse. Waddell was not an exemplary leader, and morale was bad, but it got worse as the crew heard from its captives that the war was going badly for the Confederacy. There was no better way of communication than oral reports from captives, and perhaps newspapers that the captured ships carried. In the Bering Sea in June of 1865, they heard from a captive that the war was over (indeed it was, Lee having surrendered at Appomattox in April), but Waddell asked for documentary evidence and there was none. He may have deliberately been trying to deny that the war was lost. Finally in August the *Shenandoah* overtook the bark *Barracouta*, but the crew were disappointed to find her papers were in order and that she was a British vessel. They were further disappointed by newspapers she carried, giving documentary evidence that the Confederacy was no more. Waddell and his crew had finally to accept that their nation had been defeated, which was bad enough, but also that for the four months previous, their raids could be looked upon as nothing more than piracy. They stowed the cannon and filled in the gun ports, intending to make the ship look like the merchantman it had originally been. They should have raced to a safe port to surrender the ship, but the enigmatic Waddell, still keeping his officers guessing as to his real intent, set the

Shenandoah on a course that eventually, after deprivations of food and water, took it back to Liverpool. A pilot there guided the ship to dock and was asked by the first lieutenant, "What news from the war in America?" The dismal answer, which must have drummed a message of futility into all who heard, came back: "It has been over so long people have got through talking about it." The crew members scattered, and the officers, who had feared being hanged, were eventually pardoned. Their memoirs, as well as their on-board journals and contemporary newspaper accounts, have gone into Chaffin's fascinating story of a memorable, strange, and sad voyage.

This book will make a great movie; it has it all, real history made exciting, character studies, naval battles, survival, enchanted islands and alluring women, little known Civil War information, international intrigue, lessons in leadership, raging storms, nautical commerce, and all this is true stuff; it seems like pure fiction but all the sources and documentation are in the back. I look forward to seeing this on the silver screen and the sooner the better.

Tom Chaffin's "Sea of Gray" puts you right on deck, smelling the sea, hearing the wash of the bow wave, tasting the salt spray. Having grown up on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, this book brought me a beautiful evocation and reminder of life on the water. Mr. Chaffin relates wonderful details of an incredible chapter of the American Civil War: intrigue around the world, hidden coves, tactics and strategy, treasure and bounty, gallantry toward the foe, even lost civilizations. It's a testament to real-life's ability to match any imagined fantasy. Tom Chaffin's command of language and the facts, details and nuances of historical events brings this real-life experience vividly to life. A fine, quality volume with maps of the voyage, pictures and engravings make this a truly satisfying read and a complete experience. The end plates - schematics of the Shenandoah's hull and decks and its sail plan - are especially wonderful, satisfying extras. This is a great book about a true adventure, evocatively written, a finely told tale.

Sea of Gray is simply the most complete and best written account of a Civil War event that I have read. I came away from this book feeling that I knew what day to day life on the Shenandoah was like. Mr. Chaffin's ability to reveal the minutia of the Civil War era sailor's toils and troubles is unsurpassed. It brought back many memories of my days at sea while serving in the U. S. Navy. Indeed, Mr. Chaffin is a master storyteller. I wholeheartedly recommend this book . . . a BIG 5 stars!

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