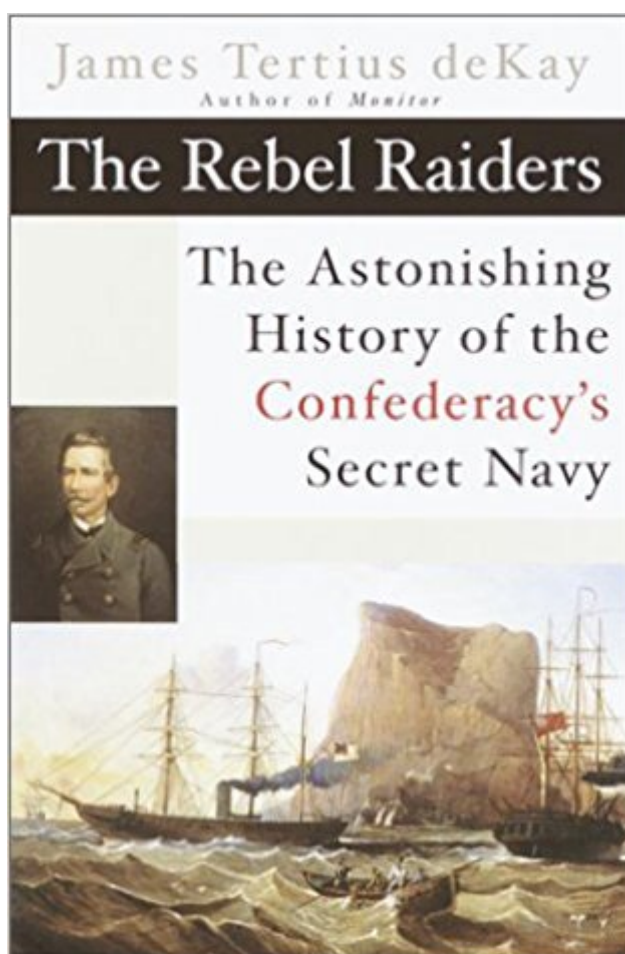


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The Rebel Raiders: The Astonishing History Of The Confederacy's Secret Navy



Synopsis

During its clandestine construction in Liverpool, it was known as "Number 290." When it was finally unleashed as the CSS Alabama, the Confederate gunship triggered the last great military campaign of the Civil War; a maritime adventure unparalleled in our history; an infamous example of British political treachery; and the largest retribution settlement ever negotiated by an international tribunal: \$15,500,000 in gold paid by Britain to the United States. This riveting true story of the Anglo-Confederate alliance that led to the creation of a Southern navy illuminates the dramatic and crucial global impact of the American Civil War. Like most things in the War between the States, it started over cotton: Lincoln's naval blockade prevented the South from exporting their prize commodity to England. In response, the Confederacy came up with a unique plan to divert the North's vessels and open the waterways—a plan that would mean covertly building a navy in Britain, a daring strategy that involved an unforgettable cast of colorful characters. James Bulloch—“Northerner by circumstance, Southerner by birth, he risked his life to enter England and build a fleet under the very noses of Northern spies; Lord John Russell—the British foreign secretary who was suspected of subverting his own legal system to allow the secret ships; Charles Francis Adams—“son and grandson of presidents, who exhausted every avenue to stop the Confederate-British collusion; Raphael Semmes—the fanatically loyal Southern captain who disabled or destroyed sixty Northern ships before meeting his match near Cherbourg, France; and The Alabama—a wooden gunship that took to the sea named for a Southern state to wreak havoc on the Northern cause. With *The Rebel Raiders*, naval historian James Tertius deKay brings to dazzling life an amazing, little known piece of history that is at once an important work of Civil War scholarship and a suspenseful tale of military strategy, international espionage, and a legal crisis whose outcome still affects the world.

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Customer Reviews

DeKay (Monitor) here presents the drama of the Confederacy's commerce raiders, built in Great Britain early in the Civil War and designed to disrupt Northern trade and consequently divert the North's naval blockade of Southern cotton. He recounts the immensely successful efforts of Confederate purchasing agent James D. Bulloch to contract with English builders, focusing on the famous Alabama, launched in 1862 amid swirling controversy as the U.S. ambassador to England, Charles Francis Adams, tried unsuccessfully to convince the British administration to seize the ship. Captained by Raphael Semmes, the Alabama wreaked havoc on the Union merchant fleet, eventually seizing or destroying 66 vessels. Northern intelligence efforts had uncovered Bulloch's deceptions early on, and on June 19, 1864, the Alabama was finally sunk off Cherbourg, France, by the Union warship Kearsarge. Of equal importance is the postwar tale of the Alabama Claims, in which America's outrage over England's support of the South at times threatened war or reprisals against the British for the destruction of America's merchant marine. The claims were submitted to an international tribunal and England paid America a hefty \$15 million in 1873. Although recent books on this subject (including Charles M. Robinson's 1995 book on the Alabama, among others) have already minutely detailed this topic, DeKay's engagingly written book is carefully and knowledgeably constructed, and will appeal to the uninitiated. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

DeKay's modest monograph pulls together four separate stories from the naval aspects of the American Civil War. All have been told before but never integrated as they are here. The first story is that of James Bulloch, the Confederate agent who carefully and capably set out to have Confederate commerce raiders built in neutral England. The second is that of the anti-American attitudes of British politicians, far more extreme than conventional histories let on, and U.S. Ambassador Charles Francis Adams' heroic fight against them. The third is a thoroughly readable narrative of the raider Alabama and her capable, quirky captain, Raphael Semmes. The final story is about the Alabama claims--suits for damages done to the U.S. merchant marine by Confederate raiders, which became the first successful case of international arbitration. Sound and remarkably free of fury, deKay's commendable effort nicely expands coverage of the naval aspects of the Civil

Really not much more than a history of CSS Alabama. Granted the Alabama was the best known, but there were some others. Most (but not all) of the information contained I already knew, but that's probably because I was reared in Alabama.

"The Rebel Raiders: The Astonishing History of the Confederacy's Secret Navy." By James Tertius deKay, Ballantine Books, 2002. There are many astonishing revelations in this book. Perhaps you thought that the American civil war was fought in America. Or perhaps you thought it was decided at Gettysburg. The story is not so simple. The English ruling class strongly favored the South. So much so that they flaunted their own laws and found ways for the Confederacy to build and outfit raiders in England. These few raiders destroyed the American whaling fleet and ran insurance rates (that's right, insurance rates; it was just business) so high that the American mercantile fleet was driven from the seas (and suffers to this day). The cotton textile industry in England was in disaster. Workers were naked and hungry. The ruling class was on the verge of recognizing the South and forcing an armistice on the two parties. Then the North launched the most effective barrage of the war. Charity in the form of food and clothing came from the North to the unemployed textile workers in England. The English under class, against their own short-term interest made its voice heard, and England remained neutral.

Part I Bulloch

Chap 1. Montgomery - Stephen Mallory, the Confederacy's Secretary of the Navy selects James Bulloch to build a raider navy in England. Mallory has never met nor heard of Bulloch, but on the recommendation of a mutual friend (Judah Benjamin, the Attorney General) and a brief interview decides Bulloch is the man. It was an excellent choice. Astonishing.

Chap 2. Liverpool - Bulloch arrives in Liverpool and presents himself to a man he has never met, Charles Prioleau, the managing director of Fraser, Trenholm & Company, the Confederacy's unofficial English bank. Unexpected, and with no credentials (could not be taken through Yankee territory), Prioleau agrees to fund the venture. Astonishing. Prioleau introduces Bulloch to an English lawyer who sets about gutting English law to allow the building of warships, on the grounds that warships without guns aren't warships. Astonishing. Do these guys know a secret handshake?

Chap 3. Number 290 - Bulloch contracts the building of warship 290, which will become the Alabama. It is obviously a warship, but as no weapons are on board, the English customs inspector ignores it.

Chap 4. Nemesis - American Quaker, Thomas Dudley comes to England to oppose Bulloch.

Chap 5. The Enrica - 290 is named Enrica. Dudley and Bulloch vie.

Chap 6. The Passmore Affidavit - William Passmore, English able seaman attests that he was recruited to join

the crew of 290, with the clear understanding that it was to be a warship engaged in combat against the North. This is clearly against English law. Chap 7. Escape - The English drag their feet and Bulloch barely gets Enrica out of England. Part II Semmes Chap 8. Terceira - Enrica receives her guns and supplies in a neutral port. Semmes takes command. The ship becomes CSS Alabama. Chap 9. First Blood - American whalers around Azores are destroyed by Alabama. Chap 10. The Grand Banks - more destruction. Chap 11. Off the Georges Bank - and yet more destruction. Chap 12. The Pirate Semmes - battle in the press. Chap 13. "An Instance of Sublime Christian Heroism" - England is close to meddling in US affairs. Not so astonishing if you are the biggest baddest nation on the planet. America sends charity to England. The English working class wins one for Lincoln. Astonishing. Chap 14. USS Hatteras - Semmes lures Union gunboat USS Hatteras out into the Gulf of Mexico and sinks it. Semmes rescues the survivors. Hatteras has 2 dead and 5 wounded. Chap 15. Straws in the Wind - Oreto, christened CSS Florida joins the war. Chap 16. Brazil - more ships seized. CSS Georgia joins the battle. Semmes turns a captured ship into his auxiliary vessel. Chap 17. The Laird Rams - At Laird's, Bulloch's two seagoing ironclad rams are almost ready to go to sea. These ships would pulverize the Union Navy's wooden ships. They could even shell Union harbors. These two ships could turn the tide of the war. The US Congress debates whether to authorize a raider war on British mercantile shipping. The British begin to wonder about the beast they unleashed. They need not worry for about half a century. The US cabinet considers sending a squadron of ships to destroy the rams at dock. US envoy Adams flatly informs Lord Russell that there will be war if the rams put to sea. Russell decides to detain the rams. Chap 18. Simon's Bay - CSS Alabama is getting worn out and the crew is getting surely. The Sea Bride is captured and sold. Semmes puts the proceeds into the ships operating funds instead of paying it out as prize money. The crew becomes openly defiant. Chap 19. Singapore - Semmes finds that the American mercantile fleet won't come out of harbor. Chap 20. To Cherbourg - Semmes takes Alabama to Cherbourg in France, looking for a dry dock and intending to pay off the crew and request replacement. Chap 21. Battle - No dry dock facilities are available and the USS Kearsarge shows up. Semmes figures if he waits that more Union ships will show up, so that his best chance is to fight now. He chooses to fight. The CSS Alabama is badly in need of repair. She is leaking. Her powder is moist. Her fuses are defective (only about one in three explode). Her machinery is broken. Alabama is defeated and sunk. Alabama has nine dead, twelve missing and 21 wounded. The Kearsarge suffers three wounded. Chap 22. The Shenandoah - Bulloch purchases Bombay trader Sea King to be christened CSS Shenandoah, which destroys the American Pacific whaling fleet. Much of it after the war is over. Too proud to turn his ship over to Yankees, Captain James

Waddell returns to England to surrender his ship. Part III Adams Chap 23. The Claims - the war is over and Britain finds that the side it did not support now has the largest, most-modern, most experienced Navy and Army in the world. The upstart is angry and dangerous and wants reparations. The USS Miantonomoh, a double turreted sea going monitor visits England on a good will tour. It could destroy any British vessel in the harbor and leave unscratched. The Irish Republican Army erupts onto the scene. Congress passed a watered down neutrality act, based on the British act, that would allow the Irish Republicans to outfit of merchant raiders in America, man them with Americans and operate then against the British. Astonishing. Britain's government will not settle, but wealthy interests in England begin to consider that maybe they had more to lose by not settling. Chap 24. Sumner's Speech - Senator Sumner gives a rousing speech in the senate attributing half the cost of the war to British perfidy. The speech is a sensation. Chap 25. Geneva - Bismarck's German Confederacy appears on the world scene. Britain faces the possibility that there are now two dangerous upstarts on the planet that might unite against her. It looks like a really good idea to settle the Alabama claims. The two belligerents settle their differences at an international tribunal instead of at the battlefield. Chap 26. l'Envoi - The precedent set by the Alabama tribunal eventually becomes international law. Astonishing.

James Tertius (is that Ter-tee-us, or Ter-shus?) de Kay is one of the most fun writers of military history alive. He's only hurt by the fact that he writes things on obscure and unusual topics, or treats them from an unusual angle. One of his books (Chronicles of the Frigate Macedonian) is essentially a biography of a ship, and another (Monitor) is that combined with a portrait of the man who designed her. One book mainly recounts a battle (The Battle of Stonington) in which no one was killed. The Rebel Raiders recounts the Confederacy's efforts to build commerce raiders in Britain, and the American authorities' attempts, largely unsuccessful, to stop them. The first portion of the narrative is devoted to the construction of the ships in Britain, and James Bulloch's efforts in this regard. The second portion recounts Raphael Semmes' cruise in command of the Alabama, culminating in the famous battle off Cherbourg. A third part, shorter than the other two, recounts the efforts of the American government after the war to recoup the losses suffered by the American merchant marine because of the Alabama's cruise. Many ships that weren't sunk were sold to the British, who wouldn't, of course, pay full price or sell them back after the war. De Kay is especially good at personalities, and this story abounds with them. Bulloch and Semmes are portrayed as interesting characters, and Charles Francis Adams, the American minister in London (a 19th Century ambassador) is active throughout the story. It's fascinating. I do have a few criticisms.

There's no index, and the one map given is inadequate. There was an attempt to recount all of the vessels purchased in Britain during the war, but the Stonewall, which made it out of port, and wound up in Cuba only to find out the war was over, isn't mentioned. Perhaps he's left that out for another book. Given all of that, this is a wonderful book, and I recommend it strongly.

The confederacy's navy during the civil war is a very impressive display of piracy on the high seas. While most of the attention always focuses on the iron ships it is often forgotten that there were several others out there raiding the north's commerce. This book puts quantifiable numbers and daring high seas escapades onto the same page. It is a very fast read and one that gives a new perspective on the civil war. The South's daring strikes and the north's eventual efforts to hunt down and put a stop to these raiders are cataloged here and make for interesting reading. There is also a very interesting subset that looks at European policies towards the United States during this time period and a perspective that is not often gathered can be seen here. This is a must have for true civil war buffs.

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