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Tom Chaffin. *Sea of Gray: The Around-the World Odyssey of the Confederate Raider Shenandoah*. New York: Hill & Wang. 2006. Pp. x, 432. \$25.00.

The Confederacy dies hard.

That is what Tom Chaffin, author of *Sea of Gray*, would have you believe. His book owes a great debt of gratitude to Stanly Horn's *Gallant Rebel: The Fabulous Cruise of the C.S.S. Shenandoah* (1947), and one might go so far to call it a modern update of Horn's loosely historical tale: both glorify the journey of the Confederate raider the *Shenandoah*, as it circumnavigated the globe, bent on destroying Union whaling vessels and any other ship that stood in its way. Yet Chaffin carves his own niche in the naval historiography of the period. Although they cite many of the same works, this updated retelling includes a greater array of sources, from primary accounts by the ship's crew, to secondary works on the era published in the last sixty years, and in years prior to Horn.

Chaffin's work begins with a detailed description - based on multiple first person accounts - of the *Shenandoah's* destruction of a whaling fleet in the Bering Strait, two months after the end of the Civil War. Eight ships are burned and sunk, two are set free, and the confederate soldiers celebrate, while the confused whalers struggle to make sense of what has just taken place. Chaffin is at his best retelling specific moments in time such as these, and vignettes like this one are sparsely sprinkled throughout his work, bringing the reader into the scene through the journals and logs of those who witnessed the action firsthand.

After an attention capturing opening, the story returns to a broad history, paying attention to the use of ships in the Civil War, especially how the Confederacy was forced to seek help abroad in search of a fleet. Instead of a direct attack on the Union Navy's blockade of the US coast, the strategy accorded to the *Shenandoah* and a great number of other Confederate raiders was to disrupt the commerce of the Union, thus diverting their attention beyond the battlefield. Shrouded in mysterious kismet from its christening, the *Shenandoah* gathered crew and set sail from England, navigating around Africa and into the Arctic, with a heavily documented three week stop in Melbourne, to finally reach their destination: the whaling waters of the Bering Sea.

Along the way the *Shenandoah* and crew take various "prizes," burning and looting both Union and non-Union ships. The crew of the *Shenandoah* is

roused into a patriotic fervor each time, and, like the ship itself, is personified as a unified mass rising and falling throughout the journey in emotional tides. In times of boredom, the crew resorts to self-entertainment, such as chess, gymnastics, or even sewing. Ship tension brews briefly between Captain Waddell and Lieutenant Whittle, and later between the entire crew and the Captain. The brief mention of freed black men serving on the crew is an interesting note explored in far too sparse a detail, considering the context.

The *Shenandoah*, like the Battle of New Orleans, gained fame for its voluminous amount of unnecessary destruction, outlasting the war itself. When the realization finally sets in, Captain and crew retire their gun docks and make their way back to England where the trip around the world that began in conflict and war, comes to a surprisingly peaceful and uneventful end.

Chaffin places the *Shenandoah* at the forefront of his tale, establishing it as a character in its own right. Included are ship diagrams (detailing stern, fore mast, main hatch, aft hold, berth deck, etc) and a number up maps - visual references for the reader to follow along during the extended journey. Chaffin also does a fine job creating a world where sailors live for the battle, and weaving in a story of a ship whose final, glorious voyage is the last gasp of a nation in defeat.

However, the world Chaffin creates is a simplistic world of content sailors and manageable crews. The extreme violence experienced by the crews - especially of conquered ships - is given lip service as the *Shenandoah* claims the manned vessels as inanimate "prizes." Explorations into deeper themes, such as racism, class consciousness, or nationalism are wanting. Confederate pride is addressed on a superficial level, as are issues of masculinity and identity. The sources may not lend themselves to such examination, but without it little is gained by this retelling of a Civil War vessel.

Chaffin may have written a more historically accurate version of Horn's 1947 book, yet with limited themes, depth, or analysis, has aimed for shallow waters, targeting a strictly militarily-minded reader. *Sea of Gray* may inevitably sit on bookshelves alongside nautical adventures or as a companion piece in a collection of Confederate history, yet professional historians and novices alike will find much wanting in the idyllic tale more suited for a centennial celebration of the final days of the Confederacy than in contemporary historical studies.

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