



DEEP IN DIXIE

Bark With A Bite

The year—1863. The time—June 6th through 27th. The events that were to take place during this period were long to be remembered in the annals of U.S. sea action.

Lt. Charles W. Read, Confederate Navy, and his awkward little ship, the *Clarence*, would leave their incredible mission on Yankee shipping and men-o'-war alike, all the way from Cape Hatteras, N.C., to Portland, Me.

Read was dispatched on this particular mission by Capt. John Maffitt of the Confederate man-o'-war, *Florida*, and assigned to the *Clarence*, which Maffitt had commissioned off the coast of Brazil.

Taking advantage of a natural bravado and a flair that could almost be called theatrics, Lt. Read made quite a picture with his reddish moustache, curled up at the ends. He was an accurate vision of a pirate as he boarded the vessel he duped into his power.

While at sea Read changed flags whenever he felt the occasion warranted; sometimes he would haul up the colors upside down in an apparent distress signal, calling for sympathy—until the moment the victim was in range, and too late for any possible defense, finding themselves captured by this small, ridiculous, poorly armed bark.

Northern newspapers were reported as saying, "The Confederates are conjuring up a ship that could travel equally as well submerged or above the water." All shipping was edgy and wary about them; so when Read showed up with his nondescript craft, it was feared as possibly being the "secret weapon"

they had been hearing about.

During Read's first week of maritime mayhem, he accounted for a lion's share of Northern shipping. On one of these days the unsuspecting skipper of the Yankee schooner *Kate Stewart* curiously approached Read's ship to afford a better look at what was taking place. Read's ship was flying the colors upside down, the union facing downward. As soon as the *Kate Stewart* was in range, Read could be heard barking orders at his crew, "Open the portholes and push the cannons out. You men with the lanyards, prepare to fire." A menacing broadside was disclosed ready for firing.

The *Kate Stewart's* Capt. Teague signaled frantically and screamed through his trumpet, "For God's Sake don't shoot! I surrender!"

Capt. Teague complied quickly, but much to his surprise, when he boarded the *Clarence* he discovered the "cannons" he'd surrendered to were just wooden spars, painted black, carved to pass for the real thing at less than a glance.

"Why they're wooden guns," he groaned. "I surrendered to a ship with wooden guns."

"So they are," Read retorted with a smile. "If you'd kept on your course, you'd have been all right. When you put your head in the lion's mouth, you have to take the consequences."

By this time every coastal city was in a state of emergency over Read's exploits. By the command of President Lincoln and U.S. Secretary of the Navy Welles, the Federal Navy was alerted

and searching for Read. There were more than 30 ships giving chase to him, all crisscrossing each other in a nonsensical pattern. Read simply maintained his original course, very seldom deviating except to intercept a Yankee ship.

Originally, he had thought of storming Hampton Roads, Va., but the fates forced him to abandon this plan. Instead, he continued up the coast, finally arriving at Portland, Me. Here, he finally ran out of luck, but not before sneaking out of port the just-completed cutter, *Caleb Cushing*, past the harbor's fortifications in the still of the night, daring to tow it out to sea with whaleboats.

Much to his chagrin, the *Cushing's* available supply of projectiles was unable to be reached in time to ward off his pursuers. In desperation, he ordered his crew to "fire everything you can find." They finally resorted to an over-ripe cheese they found that caused much displeasure to his pursuers' sense of smell when it splattered all over their ship. The captain of the ship was heard to have said, "By God, they're shooting stink bombs at us."

When his adversaries finally saw no more shots forthcoming, they took advantage of the lull to take Read and his hapless crew into custody as prisoners of war.

Submitted by Charles J. Givens
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