

“Startling News From the Ocean”: Rebel Pirates on the East Coast

By Donald L. Barnhart, Jr.

SECOND LIEUTENANT CHARLES W. READ, officer aboard CSS *Florida*, was less than satisfied. In his mind, hunting down merchant vessels on the high seas did little to alter the Union war effort. A raid on the U.S. coast might offer more substantial results.¹ He devised a daring plan—sail stealthily into a Union harbor and then seize an anchored warship, preferably a steamer. During his search for a potential prize, Read would also attack Union merchant ships, wreaking havoc on the U.S. maritime trade. Such a plan would require a vessel that was fast and sufficiently armed to chase down prey, yet ordinary enough to avoid a second glance.

On May 5, 1863, the three-masted American brig *Clarence*, sailing out of Rio de Janeiro, offered possibilities.

Capture of Clarence

Laden with Brazilian coffee, *Clarence* was overtaken and then forced to lower her sails. With *Florida's* guns trained on her, Read went aboard to look her over. A

rather compact vessel with few distinguishing features, she was graced with a black hull, an almost elliptical stern, and a short bowsprit—appealing features for an unpretentious, coastal raider. Even better, she could be manned by a small crew rather than the full complement required by an ocean cruiser.² After Read's cursory inspection, he composed a written proposal for Commander John Newland Maffitt:

Sir, I propose to take the brig which we have just captured, and, with a crew of twenty men, to proceed to Hampton Roads and cut out a gunboat or steamer of the enemy.

As I would be in possession of the brig's papers, and as the crew would not be large enough to excite suspicion, there can be no doubt of my passing Fortress Monroe successfully. Once in the Roads I would be prepared to avail myself of any circumstances which might present for gaining the deck of an enemy's vessel...³

Second Lt. Charles W. Read

Nothing in his physical appearance would suggest a bold, fearless Confederate raider. Read was slight of frame and five feet, six inches in height. What he lacked in physical appearance, he more than made up for with experience, sheer audacity, and an uncanny knack for deception. Born on May 12, 1840, in Satartia, Mississippi, Read was the eldest of five children. His family later moved to a rented plantation near Edwards, Mississippi. During his teen years, he was employed as a newspaper writer in Jackson, Mississippi. In his spare time, he acted for a local thespian society, a hobby that later proved useful during his naval career. Too restless for a classroom, Read still managed to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy in June 1860—dead last in a class of 25. Because he could only remember the word “savez” (know) from his French class, his fellow cadets nicknamed him “Savez.”⁴ Though academically lackadaisical as a cadet, “Savez” Read, nevertheless, possessed a singular determination to succeed against all odds. A former classmate, Rear-Admiral Winfield Scott Schley later recalled Read:

...He possessed in high degree common sense—or ought I say uncommon sense, as everyone does not possess it—that underlies success in every calling...He had sublime courage, he had conspicuous dash, he had great originality, and was aggressive in all that he did.⁵

Though a commissioned U.S. naval officer before the war, Read abruptly resigned to join the Confederate States Navy. His first

assignment was the steam gunboat *CSS McRae* based in New Orleans.⁶ During the Confederate evacuation of New Madrid, Missouri, Read singlehandedly suppressed panic-stricken troops trying to storm aboard *McRae*, making an example of their mutinous leader. Confederate Midshipman James Morris Morgan recalled:

...Instantly Read's sabre flashed out of its scabbard and came down on the head of the mutineer, felling him to the ground, as in a thunderous voice the usually mild “Savez” roared, ‘Fall in!’—and the mob ranged themselves in line like so many lambs and were marched quietly across the gangplank and on to the ship.⁷

During the Battle of New Orleans, Read skippered *McRae* after her commander, First Lt. Thomas B. Huger, was mortally



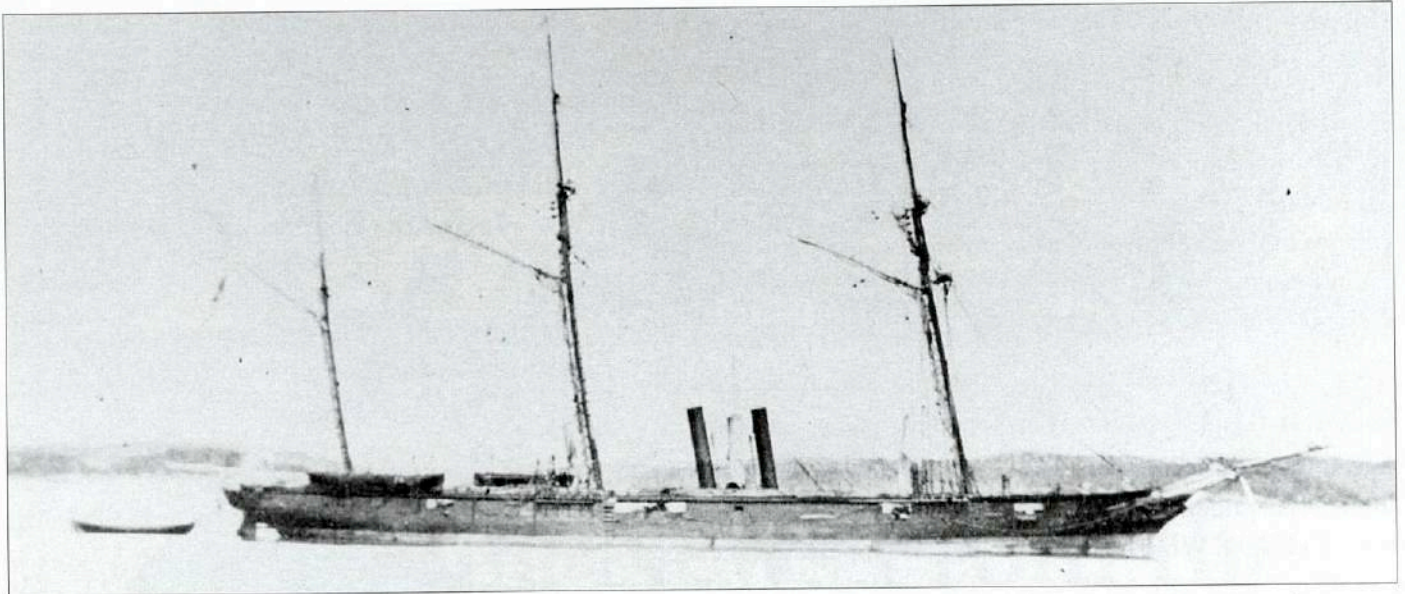
Midshipman Charles W. Read, Mississippi. From: U.S. Naval Academy Photograph Album, Class of 1860, Fischer & Bro. Photographers, Baltimore, Maryland, p 29. Courtesy of U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

Rebel Pirates on the East Coast

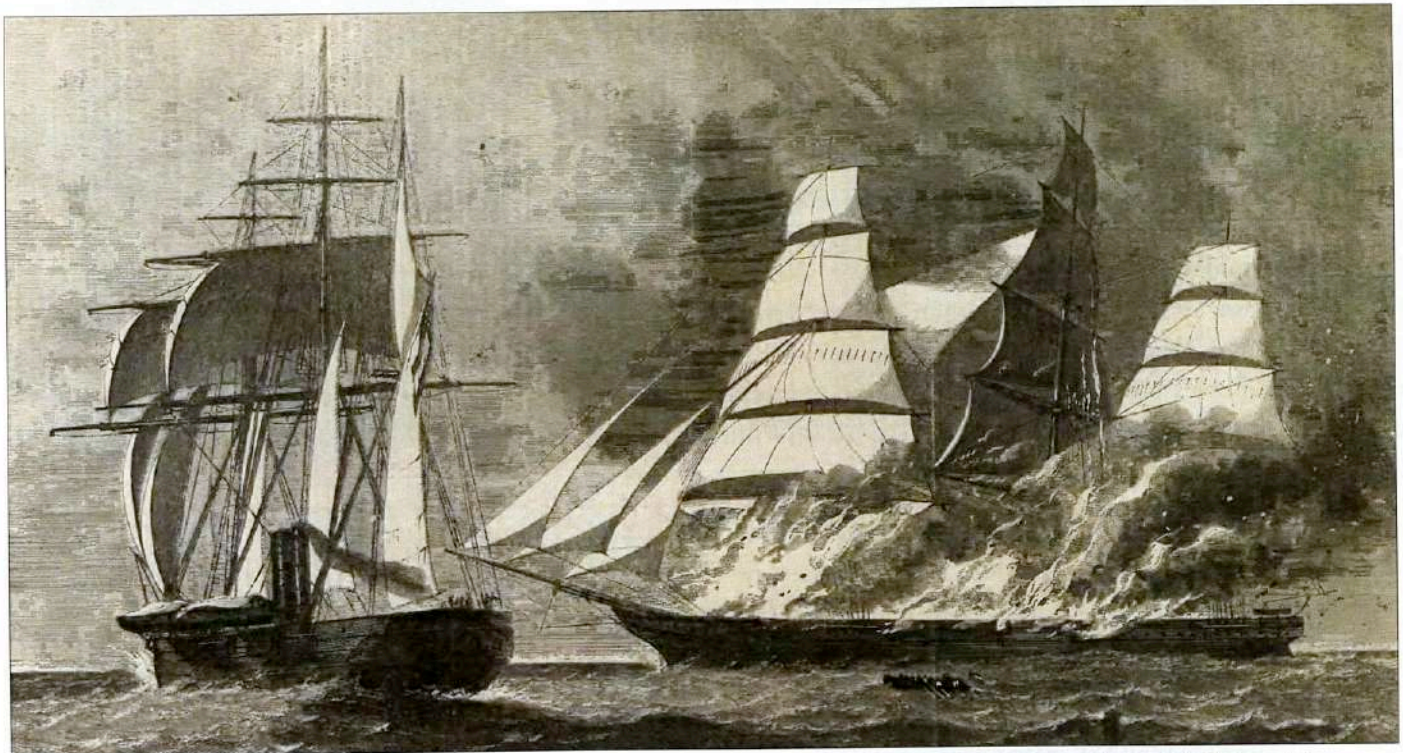
wounded on April 24, 1862. After the surrender of New Orleans, he journeyed to Vicksburg, Mississippi, where he served aboard the river ironclad *CSS Arkansas*, commanding her stern rifles. As executive officer, Read participated in *Arkansas's* daring attack on 30 Union vessels anchored in the Mississippi River near Vicksburg.

His next posting was on November 4, 1862, when he reported aboard *CSS Florida*, a British-built steam cruiser based at Mobile, Alabama, under command of Lt. John Newland Maffitt.⁸

Like all Confederate ocean raiders, *Florida's* mission was twofold: damage the U.S. merchant fleet and draw Union



CSS Florida at Brest, France, circa late 1863 to early 1864. Photographed by L. Cigon, Brest, France. NH 49994 courtesy of Naval History and Heritage Command.



Destruction of the Clipper Ship "Jacob Bell" By the British Pirate "Florida." illustration published in *Harper's Weekly*, Volume VII, No. 325, p 189, March 21, 1863.

warships away from the blockade.⁹ Maffitt commanded *Florida* on her voyage from Nassau to Mobile. Stricken with yellow fever, he could barely stand upright while navigating *Florida* through a fiery gauntlet of Union warships into Mobile Bay.

Decimated by the fever, *Florida* needed new crewmembers—Read was a welcome addition.

After repairs and provisioning, the Confederate raider slipped past Union blockaders at night into the open ocean. Until the seizure of *Clarence*, *Florida* plied the South Caribbean, capturing and burning 14 ships. Among them, the clipper ship *Jacob Bell*, possessing a \$1,500,000 cargo of tea and firecrackers.¹⁰

Rebel Pirates Begin a Raiding Cruise

Clarence was quickly readied for her new role. Read selected 22 crewmembers, including 4 officers. Along with the essential supplies, Maffitt provided him with a single, 12-pound naval howitzer. Spare masts, or spars, were also provided that Read would put to good use. *Clarence*'s cargo of coffee later proved useful in bartering for more supplies from a British merchant vessel. At 23 years of age, Read would become the youngest commander of a Confederate raider. He set sail the following day.¹¹

On course toward the Chesapeake Bay, the voyage would not get off to an auspicious start. *Clarence* proved shockingly slower than anticipated—the bottom of her hull was covered with barnacles and the copper plating was breaking loose.¹² Targeted vessels simply outran *Clarence* before they could be overtaken.¹³ Morale dropped as the crew began to question Read's mission or if a mission really existed at all. One crewmember concluded, "Damn me, if I don't believe we're carrying the mail!"¹⁴

To augment *Clarence*'s meager firepower (a single small gun) and keep his disgruntled crew busy, Read ordered his crew to construct five fake or "Quaker" guns from the spare wooden masts. Embrasures for the "Quakers"

were cut into *Clarence*'s sides. At a distance, she would look like a heavily armed warship, thus fooling a merchant vessel into an immediate surrender.¹⁵ On June 6, 1863, in the Atlantic off the Carolinas, Read fired his small gun several times and overtook the supply bark *Whistling Wind*, bound for New Orleans with a load of coal for the Gulf Blockading Squadron. After *Whistling Wind* was relieved of any useful items, she was put to the torch. The fate of Read's second capture was more problematic. On June 7, Read captured the schooner *Alfred H. Partridge*, out of New York, carrying a supply of arms and bound for Matamoros, Mexico. From there, the arms would be hauled across the Rio Grande River into Confederate Texas. To solve the conundrum of seizing a Confederate-bound shipment, Read had the commander sign a \$5,000 bond to guarantee shipment of the arms to the "loyal citizens of a Confederate state." On June 9, *Clarence* overtook *Mary Alvina*, a New Orleans-bound brigantine out of Boston, subsequently setting her afire.¹⁶

Cruising off the Southeast coast offered a tight mix of targets and hazards. As soon as *Mary Alvina* was dispatched, a Union warship was spotted approaching *Clarence*. One of her officers hailed *Clarence*, ordering her to heave to and prepare for boarding. Severely outgunned, Read attempted to fool the warship into thinking *Clarence* was the sunken *Mary Alvina*. Quickly donning oilskins to conceal his uniform, he opened *Mary Alvina*'s captured logbook, and then penned a forged entry to account for the day's activity. The howitzer, "Quakers," and prisoners were hidden below deck. A Union naval officer and ten armed sailors rowed alongside *Clarence* and then boarded her. After examining *Mary Alvina*'s logbook and manifest papers, the officer was satisfied—the warship departed. Read gleefully recounted his deception to the captive skipper, adding "that boarding officer graduated fully twenty numbers ahead of me!"¹⁷

Captured newspapers from *Whistling Wind* and *Mary Alvina* forced a change in Read's plans.

Rebel Pirates on the East Coast

Sailing into Hampton Roads would no longer be possible. Any ship entering the harbor would be subject to a thorough search by patrol vessels. The docks were heavily guarded as well—too much for *Clarence*'s small crew to overpower. Undeterred by the loss of his main objective, Read decided to seek targets off the New England coast instead. But first, he would need a faster ship.¹⁸

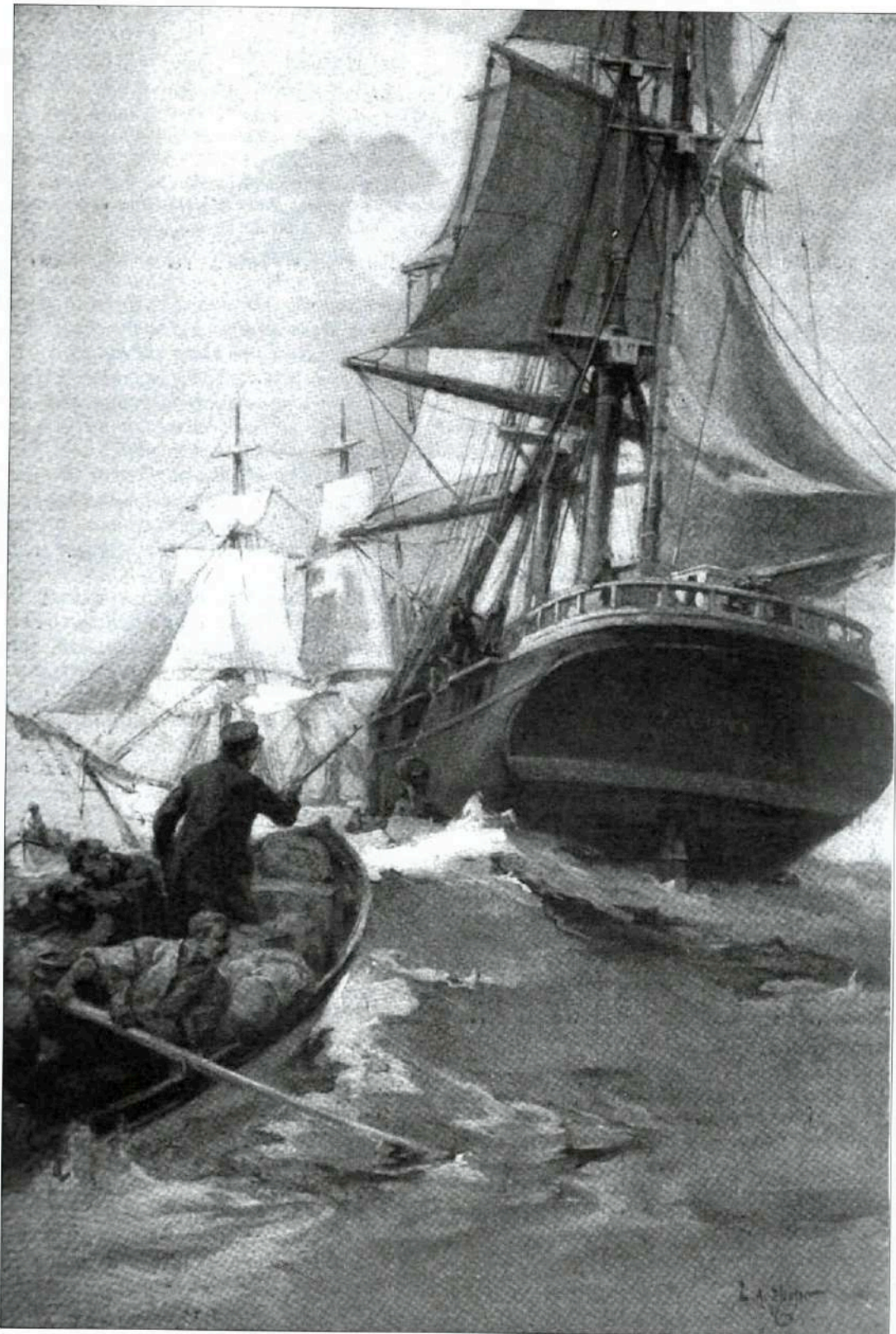
Capture of *Tacony*

On June 12, near the capes of the Chesapeake, the sailing bark *Tacony* was spotted within a morning fog off the Virginia coast. Too slow to pursue her, Read again resorted to subterfuge. Possessing a U.S. flag, Read ordered it raised upside down over his vessel, a universal distress symbol. *Tacony* pulled incautiously alongside.

Accompanied by part of his crew, Read rowed over to the bark and requested fresh water, telling her captain that water supplies on *Clarence* were exhausted. After Read stepped aboard, he leveled his revolver at the captain's head. Because of *Tacony*'s size and speed, he decided to change ships.¹⁹ While transferring over to *Tacony*, opportunity again presented itself. By simply pointing one of the "Quakers" at the approaching schooner *M.A. Shindler*, loaded with medical supplies, Read captured his next ship. Incredibly, the schooner *Kate Stewart* followed the same day and was subdued in the same manner. Now burdened with prisoners, Read bonded (issued a legally binding document as a promise for future payment to the Confederacy for the safety and release of the captured vessel) *Kate Stewart* and transferred the prisoners to the vessel and allowed her to sail for the coast. *Clarence* and *M.A. Shindler* were both



Read's Little Gun Banged Again, Throwing a Shot About as Big as a Baseball Across the Bow of the Chase [of *Whistling Wind*]. After weeks of sailing north from off Brazil, on June 6, 1863, Read and his men captured their first prize, the coal-laden bark *Whistling Wind*. Illustration by Leon Alaric Shafer from: Walter Scott Meriwether. *The Paul Jones of the Confederacy: The Brilliant but Forgotten Exploits of Captain Charles W. Read of Mississippi*, *Munsey's Magazine*, Volume LVIII, No. 11, July 1916, p 265.



Read's Transfer from the Brig Clarence to the Bark Tacony. After capturing the sleeker, faster bark *Tacony* through deception, Read and his men transferred to the new vessel where they promptly captured the schooner *M.A. Shindler* who had seen the distress flag and approached, and then the *Kate Stewart*. Read burned the *Clarence* and *Shindler*, and allowed the prisoners to sail away on the *Kate Stewart* after bonding the vessel. Illustration by Leon Alaric Shafer from: Walter Scott Meriwether. *The Paul Jones of the Confederacy: The Brilliant but Forgotten Exploits of Captain Charles W. Read of Mississippi*, *Munsey's Magazine*, Volume LVIII, No. 11, July 1916, p 267.

Bonding and Ransoming Union Merchants

By Neil P. Chatelain

Confederate commerce raiders had three options after capturing Union vessels. The most desirable was to bring captures into Confederate or neutral ports for adjudication by a prize court. Unable to easily reach these ports, most captures were instead destroyed after taking any useful equipment or essential basic supplies from the vessel. Not every prize could be destroyed, however, and a third option remained: bonding.

A bond was a signed agreement between a Confederate raider's captain and the master of a Union civilian vessel. The merchant's master, owner, and backers promised to pay the Confederacy an agreed value within a specified timetable; often the act was referred to as 'ransoming' a ship. Typically, bonds were for the value of a capture and its cargo. Timetables for fulfilling payments ranged from between 30 days and six months after the end of the war.

Three circumstances typically resulted in the ransoming: 1) Ships carrying neutral goods were often bonded to preserve the sanctity of said cargo; 2) Larger passenger vessels were bonded because smaller Confederate raiders were unable to house numerous prisoners; and 3) Finally, after raiders made multiple captures, they typically ransomed one in exchange for taking on the crews from previously destroyed ships to sail to shore.

Confederate raiders bonded at least 31 Union merchants and passenger liners.¹ No bond payments were ever made to the Confederacy, however, for they stipulated recompense "after the conclusion of the present war" and Union victory brought a reprieve on such.²

Sources

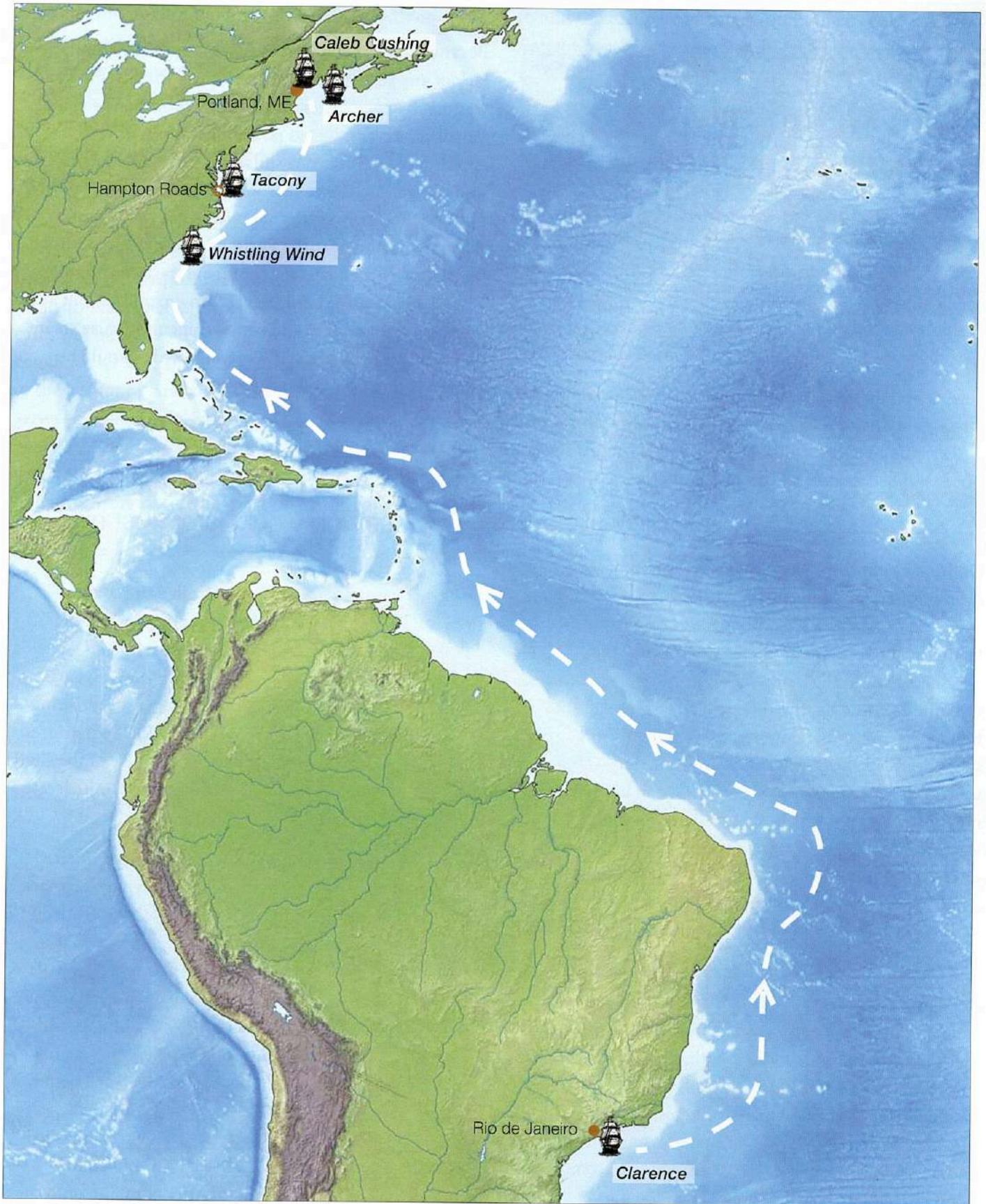
1. J. Thomas Scharf, *History of the Confederate States Navy: From Its Organization to the Surrender of Its Last Vessel* (New York: Rogers & Sherwood, 1887), p 814-818.
2. Ransom bond for the ship "Washington," Semmes Family Papers, Raphael Semmes Papers 1859-1913, Civil War Activities, 1861-1865, C.S.S. *Alabama*, Ransom bonds of Captured Ships, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

burned.²⁰ Soon Read gave chase and captured the brig *Arabella* and bonded her.

After being informed of Read's depredations, and no doubt greatly embarrassed, Union Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles ordered any vessel available to hunt down *Clarence*.²¹ "Charter or seize half a dozen moderate-sized, fast vessels," he demanded. "Put on board an officer, a dozen men, plenty of small arms, and one or two howitzers; send them out in various directions."²² Yachts, ferry boats, and even training vessels from the U.S. Naval Academy joined the search.²³ No sooner had *Kate Stewart* docked at Philadelphia, she was dispatched to search for her former captors.²⁴ Hyperbolic press accounts helped fuel the search, but also the public's growing fear.

On June 15, *Tacony* seized and burned the brig *Umpire* off the coast of Delaware. On June 20, her next prize was simply too much to handle—*Isaac Webb* was a huge packet ship containing 750 frightened Irish immigrants. In addition, she was crewed with "packet rats," unruly, back-alley sailors more motivated by a sound beating than an encouraging word. With no means to hold his immigrant captives, Read released the ship after bonding her for \$40,000. The same day, Read captured and burned the fishing schooner *Micawber*. A day later, the clipper ship *Byzantium* and the bark *Goodspeed* were both subdued and burned.²⁵

The Union Navy's search, now focused on *Tacony*, was coming up short and was unmercifully ridiculed, especially from irate insurance firms. One attorney wrote to Secretary Welles, "As matters stand now, our glorious flag is gradually disappearing from the ocean, either by destruction or the large war insurance, obliging the sale of our ships to foreigners."²⁶ Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew offered a more stinging rebuke, "The ignorance of the rebels as to our defenseless condition is our most effectual protection in the absence of action by the Navy Department."²⁷



Course of Second Lt. Charles W. Read's raiding cruise and locations where he captured ships he used in the raids, beginning with the capture of *Clarence* and ending with the capture of *Caleb Cushing* in Portland, Maine. Detail of Atlantic Ocean map from freeworldmaps.net. Course and locations added by the Editors.

Rebel Pirates on the East Coast

CITY INTELLIGENCE.
STARTLING NEWS FROM THE OCEAN.
Capture of Eight Vessels by a Confederate Pirate.
Statements of Some of the Captains.

Newspaper headline reporting the alarming capture of ships by the Confederate pirate Second Lt. Charles W. Read. *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), June 15, 1863, p 8, col 2.

Near the coast of Maine, Read found new targets—dozens of fishing schooners.

On June 22 and 23, 1863, he captured seven of them (*Marengo*, *Florence*, *Elizabeth Ann*, *Rufus Choate*, *Ripple*, *Ada*, and *Wanderer*). Read bonded *Florence*, oldest of the fishing schooners, and used her to transport the prisoners back to the mainland—the others were burned. On June 24, Read captured the clipper *Shatemuc* and bonded her; later that day, he captured the fishing schooner, *Archer*, which became his new ship—*Tacony* was now too recognizable.²⁸ Read wrote in his private notebook, “At 2:00 a.m. set fire to the *Tacony* and stood west. The schooner *Archer* is a fishing vessel of 90 tons, sails well, and is easily handled. No Yankee gunboat would ever dream of suspecting us.”²⁹

Capture of Caleb Cushing Goes Awry

Read proceeded up the coast. Off Portland, Maine, on June 25, *Archer* picked up two fishermen, Albert Bibber and Eldridge Titcomb, of Falmouth, Maine. Though informed they were prisoners of war, both thought the Confederates were just two-bit smugglers looking for safe passage into Portland. Read plied them with brandy and cigars for information.³⁰ He learned of two ships docked in the harbor: the screw steamer *Chesapeake* and the armed U.S. revenue cutter, *Caleb Cushing*. Without pause, he decided to seize both vessels.³¹

Because of its distance from Civil War fronts and the lack of any genuine Confederate naval threats, Portland was mostly complacent concerning its harbor defenses. Patrol vessels conducted no searches of small vessels entering the harbor.³² At sunset on June 26, *Archer* sailed undetected into Casco Harbor. Bibber assisted Read in piloting the newly converted raider into the harbor. After anchoring near the Portland docks, Read outlined his plans to his officers for capturing the two Union vessels. His engineer, Eugene H. Brown, quickly put a damper on them. It would be too difficult to raise steam on *Chesapeake* by himself. Port authorities would be alerted before they could get away.

So, Read modified his plans—he would seize just *Caleb Cushing*.³³ This decision would later cost him.

Since 1853, *Caleb Cushing* had patrolled the coast between Portland and Boston, protecting merchant vessels as part of the U.S. Treasury Department’s Revenue Cutter Service, a forerunner of the U.S. Coast Guard. Among her duties was boarding suspect fishing vessels, assisting in putting down mutinies, and, prior to the war, searching for fugitive slaves. Because of the Civil War, her duties now included searching for Confederate raiders such as *Tacony*.³⁴

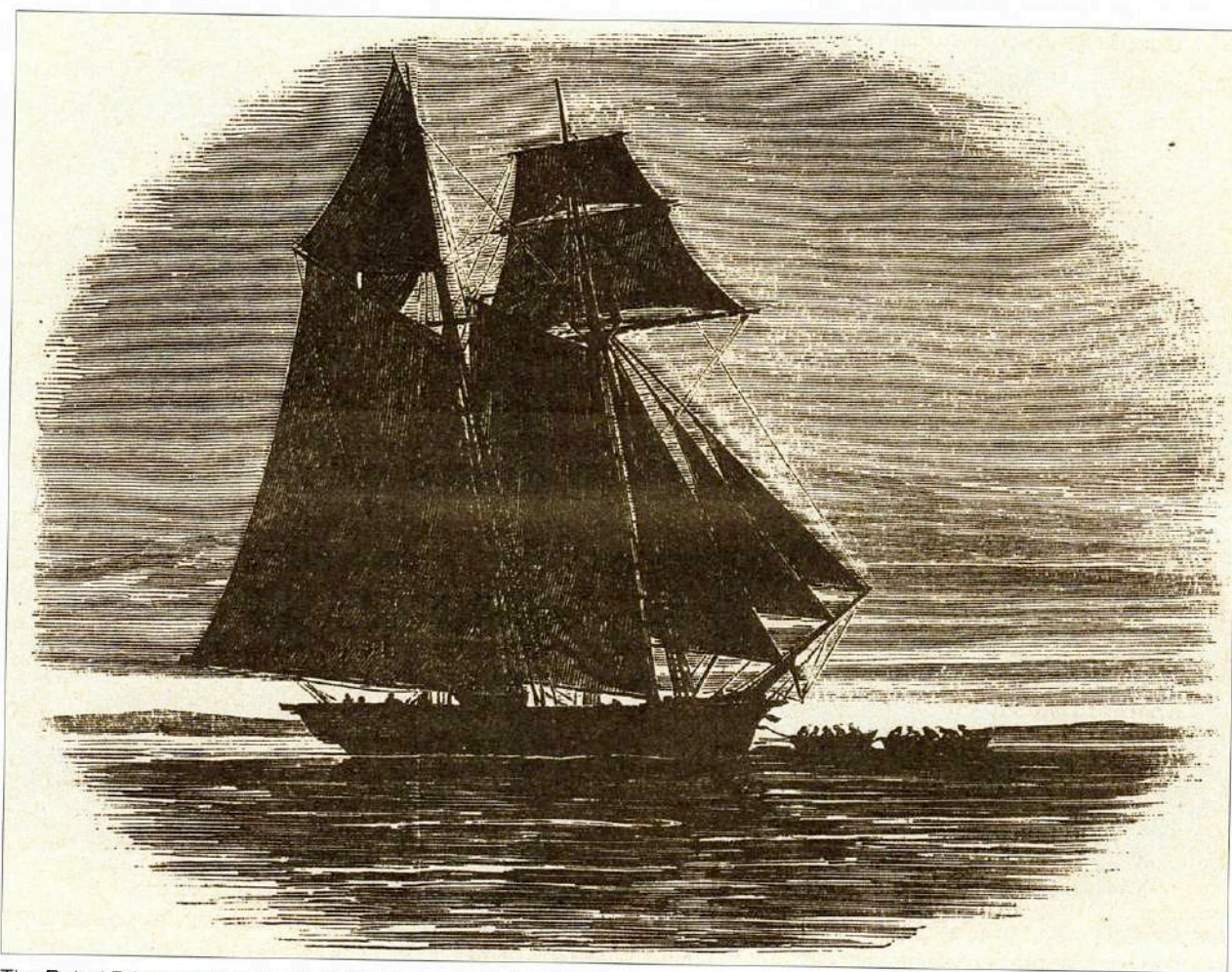
A somber mood prevailed over *Caleb Cushing*. Their commander, George Clark, had died from a heart attack the previous day. The new commander was scheduled to arrive the next day on the paddle steamer *Forest City*. Most of the crew were asleep in their hammocks, while others attended a raucous party going on at Portland’s swank Ottawa House Hotel on nearby Cushing Island.³⁵ *Caleb Cushing*’s deck was low to the water, making her easier to board. Read could not have arrived at a better time. At 12:30 a.m., he made his move. Using two rowboats, with rag-muffled oarlocks, and accompanied by most of his crew, he rowed over from *Archer* and came alongside *Caleb Cushing*.³⁶ After climbing onto the deck, Read roused *Caleb Cushing*’s crew from its slumber. He leveled his pistol at a sleepy lieutenant’s

head and loudly commanded, "Keep quiet and we will not harm you! Make a noise and you are a dead man! You are a prisoner of the Confederate States of America!"³⁷ Lt. Dudley Davenport, temporarily in command, and the rest of *Caleb Cushing's* crew were clapped in irons. From that point on, Read's plan went terribly awry.

Caleb Cushing's anchor chain could not be slipped from its capstan—it had to be raised, a time-consuming task because of the anchor's weight and lack of manpower to lift it. To make matters worse, Portland's early morning calm was punctuated by an utter lack of wind; the vessel could not set sail. The only alternative was to tow her out of the harbor by rowboat before sunrise.³⁸ Awaiting the arrival of *Forest City*, Baggage Master Reuben Chandler observed *Caleb Cushing* suspiciously leaving her berth under the sole power of two rowboats. Its crewmembers, hungover from last night's partying, arrived at the docks

to find their ship departing without them. Arriving on *Forest City*, the new commander of *Caleb Cushing*, Lt. James H. Merryman, was also made aware of the vessel's sudden departure. Mere curiosity became general alarm as Portland residents realized what was happening. Chandler wrote, "What a row there was! Every man jack in Portland rolled up his sleeves and started for the dock armed with everything from ancient blunderbusses to cutlasses." Armed residents poured onto *Forest City's* deck, almost causing her to list. *Forest City's* skipper, Captain John Lipscomb, ordered the steamer's fire hoses turned on boarding residents to force them from his deck.³⁹

Fortunately, U.S. Customs Collector Jedediah Jewett brought order to the chaos. Unaware of Read's seizure of *Caleb Cushing*, he thought the cutter's lone Southerner, Lt. Davenport, and turncoat crewmembers had hijacked the ship.



The Rebel Privateers Towing the U.S. Revenue Cutter *Caleb Cushing* Out of Portland Harbor, June 27. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 407, p 264, July 18, 1863.

Rebel Pirates on the East Coast

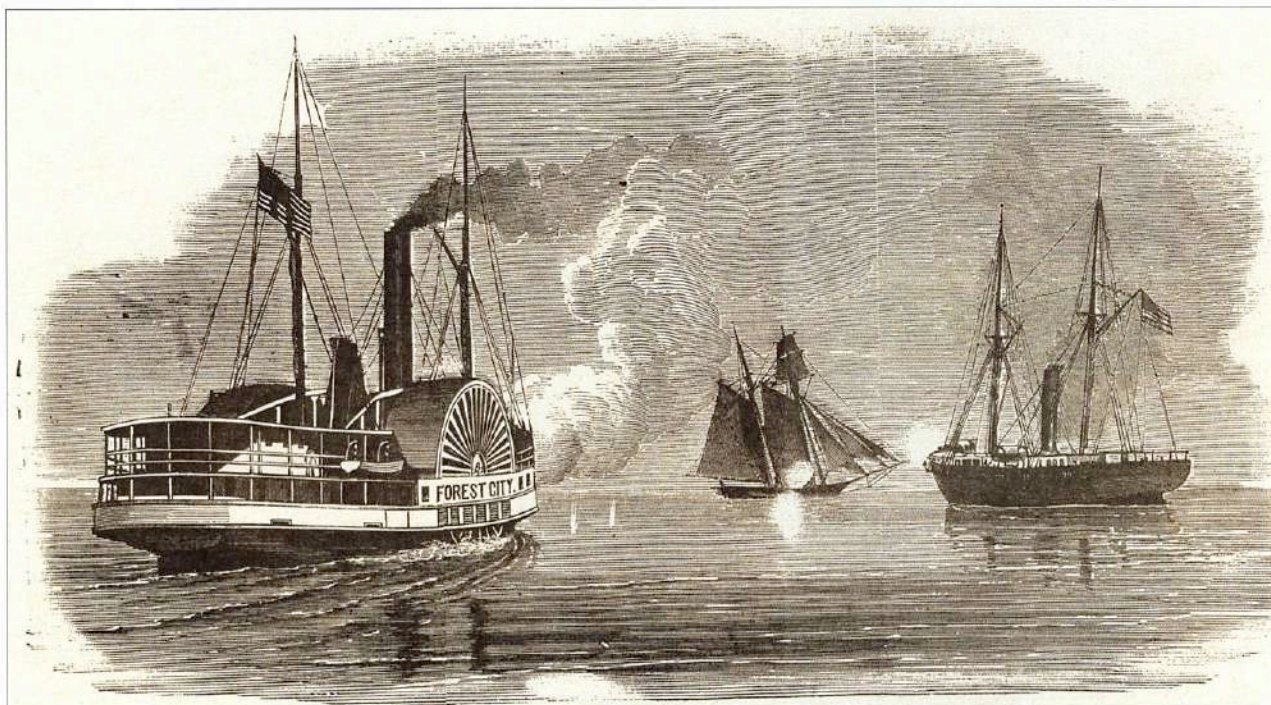
Utilizing both *Forest City* and *Chesapeake*, Jewett coordinated recapture of the cutter.

In a report to U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase, Jewett stated, "I at once came to the conclusion that this was an exigency when I ought not to wait for orders from you, but assume the responsibility of her recapture for the government. I at once sent messengers to Fort Preble for guns and men of the Seventeenth Regulars, to be ready for a steamer that I would have at the port wharf; also sent a messenger to Camp Lincoln, to Colonel Mason of the Seventh Maine Volunteers, for men."⁴⁰

Merryman found his stranded crew that consisted of "the boatswain, gunner, and 14 seamen of the *Caleb Cushing*." He deftly assumed command of *Forest City* before "making dispositions for the recapture of his cutter." Loaded with Portland residents armed with muskets, *Forest City* steamed across the harbor to

Fort Preble. Chandler reported, "Civilian army taking potshots at boxes and other things in the water to get into practice."⁴¹ Upon arrival at Fort Preble, the light draft steamer *Casco* ferried members of the Seventeenth Maine, a 6-pound gun, and a 12-pound gun over to *Forest City*.⁴² Meanwhile, the steamer *Chesapeake* was also preparing to pursue the captured cutter. Cotton bales, for makeshift barricades, and two 6-pound brass cannons were dragged aboard. The 7th Maine Volunteers, from Camp Lincoln, arrived along with their marching band. As the 7th boarded, ample supplies of food and whiskey were stacked on her deck. The band entertained the residents on shore with a rousing medley of patriotic tunes.⁴³

Read's misfortune slightly turned; the wind picked up. Read ordered the rowboats to return to *Caleb Cushing*. She could now sail under her own power but at an agonizingly slow pace. Somewhat relieved, Read settled down to breakfast below deck with his prisoner, Lt. Davenport. He gently chided, "I am sorry, Lieutenant, to meet you under these circumstances, but this is one of the fortunes of war. You being a Southern man, ought to



The Steamers *Forest City* and *Chesapeake* Attacking the *Caleb Cushing* and *Archer*, June 27, 1863. After taking additional guns, men, and supplies on board, both vessels promptly pursued and caught up to the slower *Caleb Cushing*, effecting the capture of Read and his men after they fired the vessel and tried to escape in rowboats, and then the capture of *Archer*. Illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Volume XVI, No. 407, p 264, July 18, 1863

be ashamed of yourself." Unfazed, Davenport replied, "You have acted humanely, sir, and in case we are taken, I'll represent you favorably to the United States authorities."⁴⁴

Now 20 miles off Maine's coast, the breakfast suddenly ended. Read was informed of two steamers approaching, both armed.

He ordered the cutter's 32-pounder gun prepared for firing. Unfortunately, only five shots were found onboard. The prisoners told Read there were no more available. Unbeknownst to Read, but not his prisoners, the rest of the shots were concealed in a hidden

ammunition locker. After firing his available shots unsuccessfully, he resorted to firing whatever was available—scrap metal, bolts, and a rancid head of cheese.⁴⁵ Because of her vulnerable paddle wheels and less-than-barricaded deck, *Forest City* kept a respectable distance, letting the cotton-barricaded, screw-driven *Chesapeake* overtake *Caleb Cushing*. After the firing stopped, both steamers approached the now helpless cutter from either side. Read could only await the inevitable surrender; the cruising raid was finally over.⁴⁶

Read ordered *Caleb Cushing* set on fire before he, his crew, and prisoners boarded the cutter's rowboats. Provided their own rowboat, the prisoners were tossed the keys to their manacles. With dozens of muskets trained on them, the rebels waved white handkerchiefs or displayed Masonic signs to surrender. They were



The Revenue Cutter "Caleb Cushing" Blown Up by Read and the Other Pirates Who Had Seized Her. Read and his men could find only a few rounds of ammunition to fight off the pursuing armed Union vessels, so they set the ship afire and tried to escape in *Caleb Cushing's* rowboats but were readily captured. Illustration published in *Harper's Weekly*, Volume VII, No. 341, p 441, July 11, 1863.

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taken aboard *Forest City*.⁴⁷ Sailing nearby, *Archer* was readily captured as well. *Caleb Cushing* blew up in a terrific explosion after the fire set off 500 pounds of gunpowder onboard.⁴⁸ The public, enraged by Read's piratical actions, threatened him and his crew with an immediate hanging. To avoid a public lynching, Read and his crew were taken to Fort Preble for confinement, and subsequently Read was transferred to the prison at Boston's Fort Warren.⁴⁹

Read and his men had captured and/or burned 16 vessels and captured and bonded 6 others in only 21 days.⁵⁰

Although Read's East Coast raids damaged Union merchant shipping and commercial fishing, tied up the U.S. Navy in an extensive search involving almost 40 vessels,⁵¹ and raised maritime insurance rates to precipitous levels, these actions were more useful in boosting Southern moral, especially after Confederate defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg. In addition, the surprising resourcefulness of the Confederate States Navy was fully revealed, forcing Union naval commanders to cast a wary eye over their shoulders.

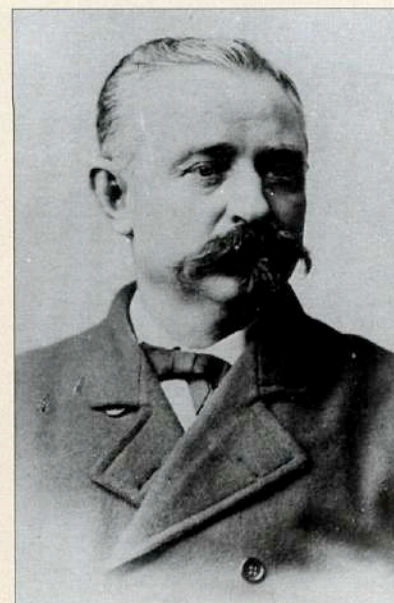
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Read's Postwar Life

Read would be released from Fort Warren in a prisoner exchange in October 1864; however, he continued in his wartime exploits and was recaptured in May 1865 and again sent to Fort Warren. After several requests from his jail cell to take the oath of allegiance to the United States, Read received permission to take the oath in late July 1865 and was released. Out of a paying navy job, Read tried his hand at several activities, including hauling fruit from the Caribbean, smuggling, and the duplicitous sale of a used gunboat to the Columbian government. A regular paycheck came when he became a Mississippi River bar pilot—a job for which he was more than qualified.⁵² In the early 1880s, Read became the New Orleans Harbor Master, and in 1888, he was elected president of the city's Board of Harbormasters.⁵³

Read married Rozaltha G. Hall in Raymond, Mississippi, in early December 1867, and they relocated to New Orleans. Together, they would have six children over the next 12 years, but only three of the children survived childhood. His wife died of yellow fever in mid-1877, and Read's sister took his three younger children into her family to help rear them. Read's son Mallory would eventually become a pilot at New Orleans. In late February 1884, Read married Nebraska Carter, and together they had one daughter.⁵⁴ Read was diagnosed with Bright's disease in late 1889 and with his health seriously declining for several months, he died from pneumonia following an episode of influenzae on January 25, 1890, in Meridian, Mississippi.⁵⁵ Read was buried in Rose Hill Cemetery in Meridian.⁵⁶



Charles W. Read in civilian clothes, circa late 1880s. NH 47247 courtesy of Naval History and Heritage Command.

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