

DEEP IN DIXIE



One-Ship Scourge of Union Shipping

PANIC SWEEPED through the Navy building in Washington, D. C., on the afternoon of Saturday, June 13, 1863. Gongs clanged. High officials rushed about shouting contradictory orders.

A frantic telegram had arrived. It warned that Confederate sea raiders were burning Yankee ships off the Virginia capes and were posed to strike at New York and Boston.

The news crystallized apprehension that had been building for days. Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles had heard rumors of an impending combined attack by the raiders Alabama and Florida. Tenseness was heightened by the activities of Gen. Robert E. Lee, who was edging northward with 70,000 seasoned veterans.

The Confederates were up to something!

Within hours, panic was widespread. Mayors of coastal cities demanded protection. President Lincoln was alerted; it was feared the raiders might sweep up the Potomac and seize Union officials.

THE RESPONSIBILITY for this mass hysteria lay with one small ship that was armed with a single brass six-pounder and five dummy guns. She was the brig Clarence, commanded by Lt. Charles W. Reed, who looked more poet than sea raider.

After fighting in the futile defense of New Orleans, he had been named second in command of the raider Florida under John N. Maffitt.

When the Florida had captured the Clarence, Reed was placed in com-

mand of the brig. The young Mississippian figured the ship's papers would enable him to pass Fortress Monroe in Chesapeake bay unchallenged. He could then prey upon Federal shipping at Hampton Roads and Baltimore.

Maffitt, a daredevil in his own right, was intrigued. He gave Reed the go-ahead. Within days the young lieutenant had seized 22 Yankee ships and burned 13 of them.

Gifted at bluffing, Reed used his "Quaker guns"—black-painted spars in gun-barrel lengths—to intimidate skippers of merchantmen. Doubtless he would have caused far more havoc except for some 20 women passengers who were aboard one of his prizes, the Kate Stewart. Unwilling to take them aboard the Clarence, he released their vessel, knowing full well that an alarm would be sounded the moment she reached shore.

It was. Thus the frantic telegram to the Navy department.

MEANWHILE, Reed had transferred operations to a larger ship, another prize, the Tacony. He moved northward, capturing and burning. On June 22 he pounced on the New England fishing fleet. For three days the seas were alight with his torches.

Thirty-eight armed vessels were searching for him, Union officials being sure the Alabama and Florida were joining in a vast attack.

On June 24, Reed and his 20-man crew, still armed with their single cannon, captured the schooner Archer. The Southerners, realizing that descriptions

of their previous command had been widely-circulated, transferred to her.

Reed knew that he would be caught eventually and figured he would be hanged as a "pirate." But he wanted to accomplish a grand feat. The chance to do so came on June 26 when the Archer discovered two lobstermen who agreed to pilot the raider into the Portland, Me., harbor.

There, the Southerners seized the new revenue cutter Caleb Cushing and began to tow her out to sea. But they were detected, attacked, and—after a furious fight—captured. But not before they had blown up the Cushing.

Taken into Portland, they were set upon by a mob that tore their clothes off. Finally they were moved to Fort Warren, in Boston, where they concluded at last they would not be hanged. After a year's confinement they were exchanged as prisoners of war.

In his book, "Sea Devil of the Confederacy," the story of Maffitt, historian Edward Boykin wonders why Reed's story has remained so long in obscurity. Even when the Union branded him a pirate, Federal Admiral David D. Porter said, "Reed had the stuff in him to make a gallant naval commander." Today, few Americans would dispute that statement.

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