

**Volume 1**

**Number 084**

**Raphael Semmes, Rebel Sailor**

**Lead: Raphael Semmes sailed the Alabama out of Cherbourg, France to do battle.**

**Intro: "A Moment in Time" with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: On Sunday morning June 19, 1864, the Confederate States' steamer Alabama, the pride of the Confederate navy, had just been around the world on voyage of destruction that did serious damage to the United States Merchant marine. From Galveston, Texas through the Atlantic, around the Cape of Good**

**Hope, into the Indian Ocean, the Alabama had captured and destroyed 62 Union ships. At 900 tons and 230 feet long, she could make 13 knots between steam and sail, boasted 8 guns and cost \$250,000 Confederate dollars. She was commanded by the Confederate navy's finest sailor, Raphael Semmes.**

**Born in Charles County, Maryland, in 1809, he settled in Mobile, Alabama. After a long and distinguished service in the US Navy, including conspicuous bravery during the Mexican War, he offered his services to the Confederacy in 1861. Semmes eventually commanded two Confederate naval vessels but on the Alabama he made his reputation. Eleven years later**

**naval solicitor, John A. Bolles said, "Never in naval history has there occurred so striking an example of the tremendous power of mischief exacted by a single cruiser as the Alabama under Raphael Semmes."**

**On the morning she sailed out of Cherbourg it was to meet the challenge of the U.S.S. Kerserge which had discovered the Confederate raider and lay waiting to do take her out. They seemed to be equally matched but Captain Winslow of the Kerserge had hung heavy cable chains over the middle of his ship and boxed them in. Firing was hot and at close range and soon Semmes saw his shells, though apparently exploding against the sides of the Kerserge were doing very little**

**damage. Semmes was fighting an ironclad in disguise.**

**The battle lasted 1 hour and 10 minutes and the Alabama was dying. Semmes recognized that to continue would be fruitless, he hauled down the ship's colors to prevent further loss of life and with his crew abandoned ship. Rescued by an English yacht, he was returned to Virginia and commanded Confederate gunboats on the James River until the fall of Richmond. Semmes ended his career as a practicing lawyer and vigorous newspaper editor in Alabama.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

**Resources**

**McCorvey, Thomas C. *Alabama Historical Sketches*.**  
**Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1960.**

**Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.**