

Waddell's Revenge

Lead: In 1861, the US Navy discharged James Waddell so he might join the Confederate Navy, but they neglected to give him his back pay. It was a big mistake.

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

Content: For twenty years James Waddell served the US. Navy as an effective and respected officer. An orphan, raised by his grandparents in North Carolina, he owned no property in the South nor did he own slaves, but he was caught up in that emotional

struggle between loyalty to state and loyalty to nation that affected so many on both sides in the run-up to the American Civil War. Like Robert E. Lee, he could not bear arms against his people or the South. When he completed his last cruise in January 1862, the Navy offered Waddell a good command to keep him from resigning, but when he persisted, forced him to sign a parole promising not to fight against the United States. He went home to Annapolis expected to sit out the war in honor of his promise, but when the letter accepting his resignation arrived from Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, it did not contain his back pay. He considered this failure to have voided his parole oath. In late March Waddell received a

commission in the Confederate Navy.

After two years of shore duty, during which he had not fired a shot in defense of his homeland, Waddell got his chance. In October, 1864 the trim, three-masted British steamer *Sea King* slipped down the Thames River near London bound for the Madeira Islands off the coast of Atlantic North Africa. There the *Sea King* was transformed into *CSS Shenandoah* and set sail around the world to prey on Yankee shipping. Supplies of water, food, coal, cannon, and ammunition were stacked everywhere. So swift had been its departure, that cannon restraints had been left behind making the main armament useless. Ten days later the *Shenandoah* captured its first prize,

the *Alina* a small freighter out of Searsport, Maine. It did so with a tiny 12-pound signal gun. The short deadly but career of the *Shenandoah* had begun.

Next time: Waddell's Revenge.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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Resources

Bradley, Jesse N. "A Rebel Officer's Revenge in Spades Against the Union Navy," *Smithsonian* 7 (8, November, 1976): 122-131.