



The Officers of the CSS Shenandoah (New Perspectives on the History of the South)

Angus Curry

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The Confederate Steam Ship *Shenandoah* is renowned as the last vessel to surrender after the Civil War, and the young officers on board—who didn't learn of the war's end for three months—consequently suffered extraordinary physical and emotional stress. This first-hand account of the crew's hazardous last year, told through shipboard diaries and postwar journals, reveals the heavy personal toll they paid during the cruiser's transition from commissioned commerce raider to hunted fugitive.

Many of the *Shenandoah*'s officers had resigned commissions in the United States Navy to fight for the South. Curry examines how their social and professional backgrounds shaped them as leaders and how their expectations clashed with the realities of military rule, chronic personnel shortages, and harsh conditions at sea. He explores the ethical problems faced by Confederate naval personnel who participated in attacks on civilian maritime commerce, and he describes the kinds of rationale employed by the Southern officers to justify their duties.

He also reveals the tension that developed between the cruiser's commander, Lieutenant James I. Waddell, and his subordinates. In frequent public and private outbursts, the officers expressed dissent about the manner in which Waddell operated. After learning of the Confederacy's defeat and being forced into exile, they argued over the appropriateness of their actions, and for years after the war were plagued by accusations of "mutiny" and "piracy." Curry also follows the process by which the former naval officers concealed controversial aspects of the last voyage of the CSS *Shenandoah* in their public recollections, showing how postwar experiences shaped and reconstructed their memories of sea duty.

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