

Tom Chaffin. *Sea of Gray: The Around-the-World Odyssey of the Confederate Raider Shenandoah*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006. Pp. 432. Paper, \$25.00; ISBN 0-8090-9511-4.

On October 8, 1864, the *Sea King* slipped down the Thames River and sailed into the Atlantic Ocean. The ship arrived at the island of Las Desertas, where it took on supplies. It also revealed its true name, the CSS *Shenandoah*. A Confederate commerce raider in the style of the CSS *Alabama* and *Florida*, the mysterious ship had orders to attack Yankee whaling ships in the Bering Sea. Its desperate mission to throw the northern economy into disarray had no more success than the Confederacy. Tom Chaffin's new book, *Sea of Gray: The Around-the-World Odyssey of the Confederate Raider Shenandoah*, provides an interesting account of the ship's circumnavigation of the globe but fails to address the larger questions of the Civil War.

The *Shenandoah* steamed and sailed around the Cape of Good Hope on its way to Australia. After a brief stay in Melbourne, the captain revealed the ship's full mission to the crew and the vessel proceeded north towards the whaling fleet. It feasted on northern whalers, but contact with ships also brought news of the Confederacy's slow demise. The captain treaded a fine line between piracy and privateering in his refusal to accept the reality that he was fighting for a lost cause. The *Shenandoah* eventually destroyed 32 ships, ransomed six more, and gathered 1,053 prisoners. The value of the prizes totaled an impressive \$1.4 million.

Once the ship's *raison d'être* collapsed, the captain coped with interpreting his ambiguous orders and propping up the crew's sagging morale. He disarmed the ship and decided to make the long trek to Liverpool. In the process, the *Shenandoah* covered the last of its 58,000 miles and surrendered to English authorities on November 6, 1865. Most of the officers and crew made their way back to the United States, although several moved to Argentina, at least three moved to the Confederate colony of Carlota near Vera Cruz, and one stayed in Liverpool.

The book is strongest in its straightforward account of the *Shenandoah's* surprising voyage. Nautical details and attention to the rigors of life aboard the confined quarters of a commerce raider will appeal to Civil War buffs and others interested in maritime history. It is solidly researched and based on a number of journals left behind by the ship's officers. Unfortunately, few references encumber the book, limiting readers who desire more insight into the use of sources.

The book's usefulness for readers of this journal, however, is strictly limited. Most obviously, Chaffin cannot overcome the fact that the *Shenandoah's* voyage had no bearing on the war. Coping with an inconsequential episode could have been mitigated by using the *Shenandoah* to discuss the important issues of the war. Readers, for instance, gain almost no understanding of why sailors chose to serve in the Confederate Navy. Nor does Chaffin discuss in any meaningful way the dire straits of the Confederacy that led to the ship's desperate mission. *Sea of Gray* approximates the voyage of the *Shenandoah*: an interesting detour that lacks much significance.