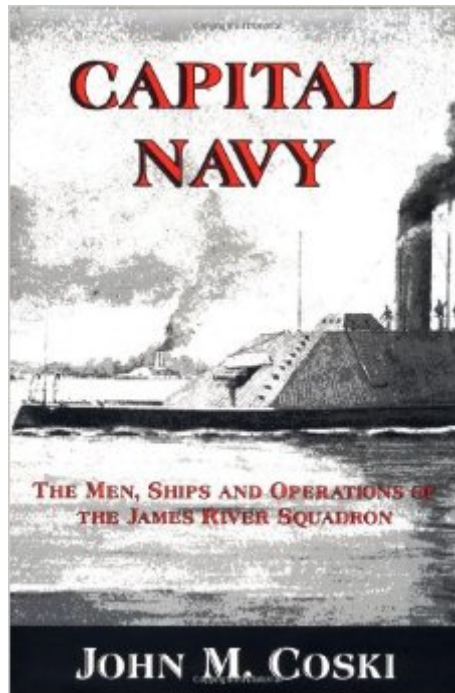


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Capital Navy: The Men, Ships And Operations Of The James River Squadron



Synopsis

The James River led to Richmond and the improvised Confederate flotilla played a role in many Civil War battles in the region. Under the command of the daring John Randolph Tucker, the sailors fought to the bitter end as infantrymen in the Appomattox campaign.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Dr. John M. Coski of Philadelphia wrote perhaps one of the finest sources of information about the Confederate States Navy (1861-1865) that was Headquartered (H.Q'd) in the South's 2nd Capitol--Richmond, Virginia. The research and documentation about what the C.S. Navy did is clearly detailed, even to the most obscure of topics. For example no one knew how a young Jewish boy, who had lived in Richmond and had been allowed to go aboard the C.S. Virginia II while she was constructed before his family fled to the North in 1862, became one of Allen C. Pinkerton's top spies about how the C.S. ironclads were built. Also a Mrs. Baker spied on the progress of the first submarine of its type, that was designed by Commander Matthew Fontaine Maury "The Pathfinder of the Seas," at the secret experimental station below the cliffs of Ft. Darling at Drewry's Bluff 5 miles south of Richmond on the James River. The experiments and research by Commander M. F. Maury, Lt. John Mercer Brooke, Hunter Davidson, William A. Graves to Joseph R. Anderson drastically changed naval warfare on an international level. From Cmdr. Maury's ship (hull research that was partly done later in London, England), spar torpedo and mine designs to Lt. Brooke's naval artillery to the first armored railroad car designs that would permanently change history. The spar torpedo and mine designs were quickly taken in by the North and used at battles such as: Memphis

to Mobile Bay. The armored R.R. car design was to be the Grandfather to the T.A.N.K. that was invented by the British based on a design from an Armoured Car that was used in the Sudan in the late 1870's to the 1880's. That idea was Brooke's. As for the civilian innovator's, Mr. Davidson developed the first electrical mine (please keep in mind that torpedoes were called "mines" and mines were called "torpedoes") that was based on one of Cmdr. Maury's plans and it was first launched to attack submarines. Meanwhile Mr. Anderson experimented with bolts, hull designs, plate production and metal alloys at the Tredegar Iron Works and Brown's (Neilson's) Island sometimes alongside of Cmdr. Maury. These technologies would be used up to World War II, and the protocols, techniques and applications are sometimes used to this very day. The intricate command structure of the James River Squadron was extremely well detailed and Dr. Coski put the puzzle of who (or whom) commanded what, where, when and at times why. The C.S. Secretary of the Navy, Stephen Russell Mallory, was obscurely quoted by Dr. Coski. Mallory described the Union ironclads as "chained and sulky bulldogs...", "that were basically unable to sail up the James River because of Cmdr. Maury's obstructions to all nautical navigation." [Coski, p.159.] This is a MUST read book for those who like to read a book that has 'all of the pieces of the naval puzzle' during the American Civil War. Superb research. This book will serve throughout perpetuity as the one book for both Confederate and Union Navy authorities. I spoke with the internationally acclaimed Historian Virgil "Pat" Carrington Jones--the author of "The Civil War At Sea," etc.,--and he said that "This is an outstanding piece of work." I gave this book a 10 and a KUDOS for a job with high merit extremely well done.

Just finished this book and it's NOT the kind of quick overview most CW books are. Coski goes as deep as I've ever seen in this outstanding work of creative nonfiction. I was fascinated by such characters as "Savez" Read, USNA Class of 1860, and the rumors (?) of a Confederate submarine built in Richmond in 1861. Plan for several riveting evenings with this one.

I knew very little about Civil war naval actions and even less about actions on the James River. This small book was able to instruct and entertain me at the same time. No small feat considering how much time was spent waiting and how little time fighting. Why Richmond, as short of resources as it was, spent so many resources on a navy escapes me. They did and this book is the story of that effort. John Coski maintains the right level of technology, ship building, problem solving, research and tedium through out the book. This gives the reader both a real feel for and appreciation of what happened. Peopled with a large number of unfamiliar names, introductions were quick but I could

recall them easily. The Richmond Navy Yards are the heart of the story. Peopled with a large variety of workers, many Black, they struggle to construct the heart of the squadron. Shortages, problems and the draft are constant problems speeding and slowing construction. For the men at Drewry's & Chaffin's Bluff, Richmond is luxury. Much of the time in tents sometimes with little food in bad weather, they wait for the Union Navy. The men on the ships consider the men at the batteries to be living in luxury. Trapped in ironclads that are ovens or iceboxes, secure behind a wall of torpedoes and sunken obstacles, they wear down the ships and themselves patrolling. At last, the James River Squadron came out to fight in January 1865. The operation is well-documented and great fun to read. This is a Savas Beatie book and they continue to do an outstanding job. The book is full of period illustrations, pictures and the excellent maps we expect from this house. In addition to the naval maps, a general campaign map for 1862 & 1865 insure we understand the overall situation.

Much has been said about the CSS Virginia (ex-Merrimack). Much less has been said about the naval operations in Virginia waters after her demise. "Capital Navy" fills a previous void in Civil War naval history with well-researched and very readable text, with the added bonus of fine illustrations by David Meagher. An excellent work, all the way around.

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