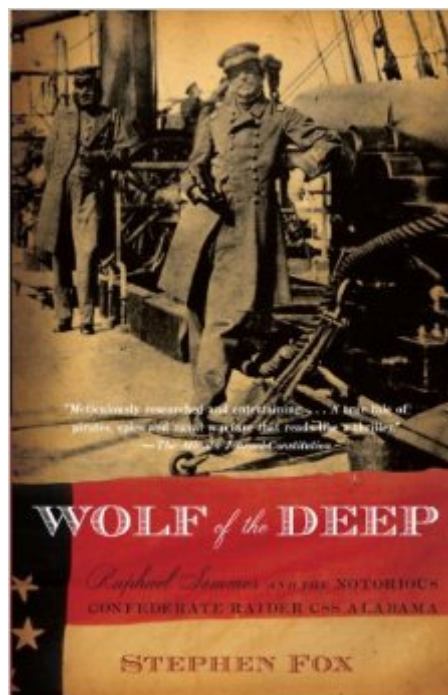


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Wolf Of The Deep: Raphael Semmes And The Notorious Confederate Raider CSS Alabama (Vintage Civil War Library)



Synopsis

The electrifying story of Raphael Semmes and the CSS Alabama, the Confederate raider that destroyed Union ocean shipping and took more prizes than any other raider in naval history. In July, 1862, Semmes received orders to take command of a secret new British-built steam warship, the Alabama. At its helm, he would become the most hated and feared man in ports up and down the Union coast and a Confederate legend. Now, with unparalleled authority and depth, and with a vivid sense of the excitement and danger of the time, Stephen Fox tells the story of Captain Semmes's remarkable wartime exploits. From vicious naval battles off the coast of France, to plundering the cargo of Union ships in the Caribbean, this is a thrilling tale of an often overlooked chapter of the Civil War.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Wolf of the Deep" is about the most successful commerce raider (read 'privateer') in the history of war at sea. The fact that Raphael Semmes was a captain in the Confederate Navy just adds more to the emotional appeal. It turns out the Confederacy might have won after all, if it had done more commerce raiding. Semmes' raids alone were enough to cause hundreds of shipowners to sell their cargoes at a loss, or even the ships themselves, to avoid losing them as United States vessels. Semmes caused consternation out of all proportion to being one captain with one ship. Stephen Fox tells the story with gusto, including lots of pictures, quotes from newspapers of the time, and different perspectives including pro-confederacy and anti-confederacy Brits as well as Americans.

The Civil War is where Americans learned to fight with modern technology and transportation logistics - sadly, using each other; but learn they did. For romance, for military adventure, for political buffoonery, for history: Wolf of the Deep appeals on all levels while telling a right good story. Amazingly, Captain Semmes retired and died in bed after all this brouhaha. You can see a statue dedicated in his honor in Mobile, Alabama.

first off...it bugs me to no end that official and customer reviews refer to both Semmes and the CSS Alabama as "privateers." The Alabama was a ship built and commissioned in England by the Confederate States of America, and Semmes, her captain, was a Confederate Naval Officer. What she did, and did quite well, was commercial raiding, which was to destroy the enemy's commerce whenever possible. The Union ships did the same when they found Confederate blockade runners, and one can say they were performing the nautical version of what Sherman and others were doing on land. That said, this is one outstanding book. I'm not partial to historical biographies, and even less to military ones, but I tore through this one in two days. Military, political, and sexual intrigue--a real flair for characterization---Fox has all of the ingredients for an old-fashioned potboiler--and this is all a true account of an overlooked Civil War navy commander of whom little was thought until late in his career. Semmes and the Alabama are both fascinating characters--but the supporting roles of the crew--and those that love them--and those that plot against them--and the exotic ports of call the lovely Lady Alabama finds herself in and her many harrowing escapes until her final battle--all make for a book you can't put down. Most historical tomes by Brown history professors aren't devoured like the latest beach novel. For me, this one was, but it was a far more satisfying experience.

Raphael Semmes is/was my great great grandfather. It is a matter of pride, if of no other significance, that I share a birth date of September 27th with him. An appreciable amount of my 78 years has been consumed in correcting error and wrongful expressions relative to Raphael Semmes, often by authors who borrowed liberally from his memoirs. For example the use of the words "notorious" instead of "famous"; the term "pirate" by authors better deserving the term; "rebel" by persons purporting to be historians. Fox appears, at times, to have used the philosophy of no proof to the contrary in his conclusions, especially his conjecture that one of Semmes's children had been born out of wedlock. This musing was based upon his time at sea and the unlikelihood of a 10 month pregnancy. Had one read all the error in the advertising of the book, this would come as no surprise. Semmes's character is best described in the words of Warren F. Spencer who wrote a factual book about Semmes during the Mexican War and the War between the States: "One other

person inspired me to complete this writing:Raphael Semmes. His personality comes through all of his writings; his strong intellect constantly challenged me. I have learned from him the meaning of honor and the value of sacrificing one's self for the sake of one's convictions. My travel through Raphael Semmes's life has, in the sunset of my career, given me a new meaning to this period of my own existence. And for that, I thank Raphael Semmes". Spencer provided an accurate recounting of the life of a good man. The value of Spencer's thoughtful approach is well expressed through words of John Paul II: "People have always needed models to imitate, and that need is all the greater today, amid such a welter of confusing and conflicting ideas".

I just can't stress enough how interesting, well-written and -researched, and entertaining this book is. WOLF OF THE DEEP nicely balances a character-driven narrative, plunging deeply into Semmes's personality, whims, family life, and work, with illuminating historical backdrop. There is much to learn, even for Civil War buffs, I think, about the importance of the naval side of this war and its implications; as well about Anglo-American relations and Semmes's crucial impact upon them. I'd had no idea, for instance, that the Brits. were largely behind the Rebel South, looking upon it as an underdog agst. the big bully of the North -- until Lincoln was bold enough to hinge the War around slavery, as Fox points out. Meanwhile, the book reads like an adventure novel, filled with backstabbers, pirates, love interests, scheming politicians, and the like. If you're looking for an entertaining, insightful, probing history of the Civil War and one of its most important yet forgotten players, do yourself a favor and get Stephen Fox's WOLF OF THE DEEP.

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