

Innovative Sailing: A Definitive Biography Of The Confederacy's Naval Tactician

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Review

INNOVATIVE SAILING

A definitive biography of the Confederacy's naval tactician

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Symonds, Craig L. *Confederate Admiral: The Life and Wars of Franklin Buchanan*. Naval Institute Press, ISBN 1557508445

Biographies of Civil War era naval officers are a scarce commodity and those of Southern officers are most rare. Craig L. Symonds has created a superb piece of writing in **Confederate Admiral**, his new volume on the life of Franklin Buchanan. The result is an impressive telling of the life of the Confederacy's first admiral. This work will be the seminal history of Buchanan.

Historians and enthusiasts of naval engagements of the Civil War know Buchanan as the captain of the C.S.S. *Virginia* at Hampton Roads and also of the C.S.S. *Tennessee* at Mobile Bay. Buchanan and Raphael Semmes are perhaps the most recognized naval officers that served in the Confederate navy. More has been written about these two men than all other Confederate naval officers combined. What has been lacking, particularly in the case of Buchanan, is a true biography and Symonds now has succeeded beautifully in writing it.

Buchanan's service as an American naval officer, a career that spanned 50 years, was remarkable. He began as a midshipman on the *Java*, a square-rigged frigate, and later commanded the coal-fired side-wheeler *Susquehanna*. He was the first commandant of the U.S. Naval Academy, the first American to set foot on Japanese soil, and the commander of the first U.S. flag vessel to sail up the Yangtze River in China.

Buchanan, assuming his native Maryland would secede as a slave-holding state, resigned his commission after Sumter. When Maryland stayed in the Union, he tried to get his commission back, and, when this effort failed, he joined the fledgling Confederate navy and became one its great strategic architects. Buchanan's prowess as a naval tactician is covered in detail. He was

an innovator serving in a naval service that desperately needed him. After the War he returned to his Eastern Shore home, the Rest. He served as president of the Maryland Agricultural College in 1868-69. He died at his home on May 11, 1874.

What clearly emerges from this work is Buchanan's attitude toward politics, slavery, life in the upper South, and the angst of serving two masters -- his country and his region. The book contains excellent photographs, engravings, and maps, and the scholarship is first rate.

Gary D. Joiner is a professor of history at Louisiana State University in Shreveport, where he teaches Civil War and Reconstruction. He is a member of the on-site board of the United States Civil War Center.