5-9-2017

A Compact with the Whales: Confederate Commerce Raiders and New Bedford's Whaling Industry 1861-1865

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in History

Bridgewater State University

May 9, 2017

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On the late afternoon of June 28, 1865, Captain Thomas G. Young, master of the whaleship *Favorite*, stood defiantly atop the roof of his cabin with bomb guns and firearms in his hands. His courage, perhaps inspired by liquor, was stout. Young was determined that his ship would not fall into Confederate possession, as so many whaling vessels had before. As a boarding party from the Confederate cruiser CSS *Shenandoah* approached, Young attempted to make his stand. However, his crew members removed the percussion caps from his guns just moments earlier, and as a result, his guns failed to fire. After one of the most intense encounters ever experienced by the *Shenandoah's* crew, Young finally relented and surrendered.[1] With the odds stacked against him, why did Young react like this? Why did he make this stand, laying his life on the line, to confront the *Shenandoah*, even when he knew he was destined to failure?

Young's story was one of desperation. He feared, and rightly so, that the Confederate cruiser *Shenandoah* would destroy his whaling vessel and in the process would turn him into a pauper. With his vessel destroyed, he would lose thousands of dollars worth of investments, and he would be rendered penniless, returning home with nothing. To the nearly sixty-year-old Young, death at the hands of his enemy seemed preferable to this fate.

To many whaling merchants and masters from New Bedford, Captain Young's desperation was not a novelty. The whaling industry made the Rotches, Robesons, Rodmans, Howlands, Hathaways, Swifts, Frenches, and countless other families among the wealthiest in the nation. However, during the American Civil War, Confederate commerce raiders prowled the world's oceans. These cruisers attacked the maritime industries of the North, in the hopes that they could incapacitate the Northern economy. Although these vessels never affected the United States economy to the point of altering the outcome of the war, they proved effective at crippling the whaling industry. Wars had negatively impacted the whaling industry before, though. During

the American Revolution and the War of 1812, the U. S. whaling fleet was greatly diminished, and at points nearly destroyed. However, the industry always managed to rebound, coming back stronger than ever before. This time though, the industry never quite recovered, and part of this stemmed from the effect of the Confederate commerce raiders.

Many historians argue that the American Civil War was one of the leading causes of the decline of the American whaling industry, and perhaps the most destructive forces were Confederate commerce raiders. These did more to inflict damage upon this industry than any other occurrence during the war. A case study focusing on the city of New Bedford is the clearest and most sensible way to illustrate this. Since New Bedford was the hub of whaling industry and the home of well over half of the whaling fleet, this city best represents the effectiveness of the commerce raiders on the industry as a whole. The CSS *Sumter*, CSS *Alabama*, and the CSS *Shenandoah* single-handedly did the most to lead the whaling industry into its dying days.

Nestled on the shores of the Acushnet River on the Massachusetts south coast, New Bedford is one of the most advantageous ports in the whole state. Initially settled in the mid-1600s as part of the town of Old Dartmouth, the area became the settling grounds for the fringe elements of Plymouth society. Religious outcastes, such as the Quakers and the Baptists settled these regions on the Plymouth Colony's frontier.[2] More than a century later, in May 1765, Joseph Rotch, a prominent Nantucket whaling merchant and Quaker, purchased a large tract of land in New Bedford. This was a major turning point in the city's history. As historian Christina Arato explains, "To Joseph Rotch is credited the capital and expertise that led to the rapid development and remarkable success of the whaling industry and, consequently, the burgeoning of the village."[3] Through the remaining decades of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, the whaling industry multiplied and expanded. By 1850, New Bedford was

the largest whaling port in the world. With well over three hundred vessels and millions of dollars of annual revenue, New Bedford was the richest city in the U.S. in the mid-nineteenth century. Even at this point, the Quakers were still among the most powerful and influential figures in the city.[4] These Quaker merchants and their ardent beliefs still shaped the political and social landscape of New Bedford.

From very early on, the Quakers or, as they preferred to be called, Friends were among the most forward thinking people in the new nation. Many of the early abolitionists, for example, were Quakers. Their faith gave them a strong belief in the equality of people before God. Because of this, many Quakers were appalled by the South's "peculiar institution" and some worked to abolish slavery in the North. "Quaker manumission" was the name of the process by which slavery was slowly terminated in most Northern states.[5] Thus, it was no surprise that New Bedford, with its strong Quaker influence, developed into a hub for fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad. Although statistics are difficult to determine because of the clandestine nature of the Underground Railroad, historians like Lee Blake, the President of the New Bedford Historical Society, estimate that between 1840-1860, there were approximately 300-700 fugitive slaves being harbored in the city at any given time.[6] The New Bedford Vigilance Committee, intended to protect and aide runaway slaves while in the city, was one of the most active and effective anywhere in the North. Mobs chased out slave catchers who came to New Bedford in search of fugitives. As a result, animosity grew between Southerners and Northern cities like New Bedford.[7] It was no mistake when war broke out, that the Confederate government wanted to harass the maritime industries of the North. Not only could they cripple the Northern economy by attacking the merchant marine, but they could also get revenge for all those years that port cities like New Bedford hid their stolen human property and fomented the seeds of abolitionism.

In April of 1861, Confederate guns opened fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, and within a week of this incident, both presidents signed laws that dramatically affected New Bedford's whaling industry. On April 17, Confederate President Jefferson Davis legalized the practice of issuing letters of marque to private citizens.[8] In effect, this was a governmentally sponsored form of piracy. Individual citizens, owning ships or in easy access to them, applied for letters of marque, and attacked the northern merchant marine under the sanction of the Confederate government. If successful, privateers received prize money and sold the captured vessel's cargo for profit. Within a few months, there were over two dozen of these privateers operating in the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.[9] Two days later, on April 19, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln issued orders commencing a blockade of all southern coastal ports from South Carolina to Texas. A little over a week later, on April 27, the blockade was extended to include coastal ports in Virginia and North Carolina.[10] In order for this blockade to be effective it would have to cover about 3,500 miles of coastline. For even the largest contemporary navy, this would be impossible, and it was especially difficult for the small, U.S. Navy dispatched to stations across the globe. This was a "herculean task," and something had to be done fast in order to effectively establish a blockade.[11]

One possible solution was proposed by Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Gustavus Fox. Fox proposed the buying of old merchant vessels that could be sunk in southern harbors, blocking the major shipping channels. In effect, they could blockade important ports without having to place vessels on active patrol in those locations. George Morgan, the government's purchasing agent, authorized I. H. Bartlett and Sons to offer New Bedford merchants ten dollars per ton for ships. With the average whaling vessel being somewhere between two-hundred-and-fifty and five-hundred tons, an old, dilapidated whaler could offer a $2,500 to $5,000 pay day.

Not bad for a vessel that was far past its prime and was no longer viable for a whaling cruise.[12]

By November of 1861, sixteen old whalers sailed for Charleston Harbor, where most were sunk

in the Main Shipping Channel. Later in January 1862, roughly ten more New Bedford whalers

sailed for Charleston Harbor and were sunk there.[13] In all, approximately twenty-six old New

Bedford whaling vessels were utilized in this fashion and famously became known as the "Stone

Fleet." But this was only the beginning of what would be four more years of difficult war for

New Bedford's industry.

As the Stone Fleet sailed for the South, Confederate privateers were lurking in the Gulf of

Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. When President Davis issued the proclamation allotting for

letters of marque and reprisal, the maritime ports of the North responded with outrage. On April

23, the *Whalemen's Shipping List* reprinted an article which had appeared the previous week in

the *New York Times*. Undoubtedly, the sentiment of the New York journalist who wrote the

article was shared by nearly all in New Bedford, when he wrote, "The letters of marque and

reprisal is a war upon private property, and stands in marked disgraceful contrast with that of the

President's proclamation in which he declares that 'the rights of private property shall be

respected.' The next step of the Confederates in rebellion will be to confiscate all debts from

Southern men to Northern creditors."[14] To the New York journalist, the latter half of that

statement might have been more concerning considering many of those debts he was talking

about were held by New York creditors, but to the New Bedford merchants, the first half of this

statement was incredibly disturbing. Should the Confederate's idea come to fruition, these pirates

would harass and destroy not just any property, but their property. To them, the war was

certainly a justified cause, but their investments, their property, their wealth were now on the

line, and the war was not even a month old. If this was any indication of what was yet to come in this war, many New Bedford merchants were uneasy about their future economic wellbeing.

Even at this moment, when others may have backed down, many New Bedford merchants became even stronger in their support for the war. One article entitled, "A Quaker's Opinion of the War," which appeared in the same April 23, 1861 edition of the *Whalemen's Shipping List* plainly demonstrated the Quaker merchant's thoughts on the war. The article told of a Quaker merchant who approached one of his clerks and asked if the young man was going to enlist to fight for the Union. When the clerk hesitated because he was afraid that he might lose his job should he enlist, the Quaker merchant retorted, "If thee will enlist, not only shall thee have thee situation, but thee salary shall go on while thee is absent. But if thou will not serve thee country, thee cannot stay in this store."[15] Whether or not this story was factual or not can be debated among historians. However, regardless of the veracity of this article, it proved a clear point. No matter what economic dangers these merchants faced, they would remain ardently loyal to the Union cause, and although their religion did not allow them to fight, they would encourage all those whom they had influence over to enlist. If President Davis's goal was to perhaps force the hand of Northern merchants by threatening their shipping with letters of marque, it did not work. These Northern merchants would not seek a peaceful termination to the war, if anything their resolve grew stronger. The best Davis could hope for was that these newly christened privateers would be successful in harassing and maybe even crippling the Northern merchant marine.

Approximately twenty-five private vessels took up President Davis's offer in 1861 and began work as privateers. Due to a multitude of factors, these vessels proved much less productive than originally expected. Over the next year, Confederate privateers captured or

destroyed approximately thirty U.S. vessels.[16] Although this number may seem relatively

productive, it was a far cry from what the Confederate government had originally hoped for.

Because most of the privateers operated along the Southern or Northern coast, they were well

within the range of the lurking Union naval blockade. As a result, the privateers did not have free

reign over the seas, but rather had to remain in hiding for large portions of time, awaiting a dark

night, or a temporary lull in their opposition's naval activity. Many privateers worked in

conjuncture with blockade runners, but these endeavors also proved dangerous and difficult. The

net result was little productivity, and although the Confederate government continued the

practice of issuing letters of marque, it was clear to the Confederate Secretary of the Navy,

Stephen Mallory, that if his government wished to wreak havoc on the Northern maritime

economy, privateering was not the answer and an alternative would have to be identified.[17]

Even though they achieved little success, privateers did capture three whalers. All three

were from Provincetown, Massachusetts.[18] Even though New Bedford was not directly affected

by these events, the fear and aguish which the privateers manifested in the populace was beyond

comparison. Nearly every edition of the *Whalemen's Shipping List* starting in April 1861, and

continuing for the rest of that year, had at least one article about the fiendish privateers lurking in

the Atlantic Ocean. One particular article in the April 30 edition proclaimed that all Northern

ports should be wary of a pirate invasion.[19] To think New Bedford would have been invaded by

one of these privateers seems foolhardy to the contemporary reader, but to the people of the time,

it was a very real threat. This demonstrated the hysteria which existed, not only in New Bedford,

but in all Northern port cities. It is true that these activities did not break the Quaker merchants'

will to fight, but these activities instilled fear in these men. Although privateers did not capture a

single New Bedford whaler, their activities indirectly affected the industry's economy by arousing anxiety among Northern merchants.

These economic facets made whaling less profitable and diverted important funds away from investment. Interest rates began to rise as a result of the privateering activities. Insurance premiums nearly doubled within a few months but coverage remained the same. The major insurance companies like the Union Mutual Marine Insurance Company and the Pacific Mutual Insurance Company offered their $200,000 of capital on risks not exceeding $20,000.[20] Just as insurance prices rose, whalers protested for higher lays based upon the new danger they now faced at sea.[1] The whalers pleading succeeded and higher lays were given to everyone from the green-hands to the mates.[21] These combined factors cut into the merchant's profit margins and caused the first economic hardships inflicted during the war. The Confederate privateers had not scored a single New Bedford vessel, but they had negatively affected the industry. Just by being on the waters, privateers delivered the first prominent economic blow to New Bedford's whaling economy.

As the privateers floundered, Secretary Mallory realized that if Confederate forces were going to cause any major disruptions to the Northern merchant marine, they were going to have to take their work to the high seas. In early 1861, as the Confederate government bought up every spare vessel it could, Confederate operatives purchased the merchant steamship, *Habana* in New Orleans. The 473 ton vessel was commissioned as the CSS *Sumter* on June 3, 1861 and was placed under the command of Lieutenant Raphael Semmes. Mallory tasked the fifty-one year old Semmes with breaching the blockade, sailing to the open ocean, and doing "the enemy's

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[1] The lay system was the standard utilized by almost all whaling ships. Each whaler would be paid according to his share of the total profit brought in by the vessel at the end of the cruise. This share was known as a lay. Effectively by pushing for a higher lay, the whalemen were raising the share of the catch which was considered theirs at the end of the voyage.

commerce the greatest injury, in the shortest time."[22] This mission was slightly different than that of the privateers who were private citizens and mostly operated close to the coast. All commissioned sailors and officers constituted the crew of the *Sumter,* and they would operate in the vast expanses of the Atlantic. This cruiser was not considered a privateer, but was the first of what would be termed Confederate commerce raiders. Hopefully the *Sumter*, by traveling far away from the North American coast and harassing U.S. interests in international waters, could draw Union naval vessels away from the blockade to protect Northern mariners.[23]

In late June 1861, Semmes and his crew broke through the Union blockade near the mouth of the Mississippi River and headed towards the Atlantic. By the end of July, the cruiser captured ten vessels off the coast of Cuba and then turned southward, heading towards the Brazilian coast. In the following months, the *Sumter* captured five more vessels, and as November turned to December, Semmes and his men patrolled the North Atlantic. Semmes's main target was the merchant vessels which journeyed through these waters from North America to Europe. Hopefully, by patrolling the frequented routes, they could capture heavily laden mariners and interrupt international trade.[24] Although they never intended to attack a whaler, on the morning of December 8, New Bedford received its first taste of the effect Confederate commerce raiders would have on the industry in the coming years.

That morning was a stormy one. With a thick fog and rough seas, the crew of the *Sumter* barely spotted the sails in the distance. Approaching the vessel, Semmes showed the United States flag and the listing vessel did likewise. Seeing that the vessel was a whaling bark, the *Sumter* raised the Confederate flag leaving the whaler with few options of escape. As a result, the vessel surrendered almost immediately. The boarding party determined the bark was the *Ebenezer Dodge* of New Bedford. Just twelve days out and bound for the Pacific Ocean, the

Ebenezer Dodge hit rough weather and had sprung a leak. The damaged ship was of no value to the *Sumter* so after removing the provisions and supplies, Semmes ordered his crew to burn the bark around 6 PM.[2] Taking the *Ebenezer Dodge's* twenty-two man crew as prisoner, Semmes continued his voyage towards the Strait of Gibraltar where the cruiser added two more captures to its log. In late January of 1862, Lieutenant Semmes was forced to abandon the vessel at Gibraltar because it could not be repaired, and the *Sumter's* voyage was over.[25]

The *Sumter* only captured one New Bedford vessel, but this was a premonition of what was to come. Because the *Ebenezer Dodge* had just begun its voyage and was yet to capture a single whale, there was no product lost. But as the whaling bark burned, B. Franklin Howland, the vessel's owner, lost nearly $30,000-$40,000 of value in his ship.[26] With this event, New Bedford's worst fears were also realized. Now the threat of destruction at the hands of Confederates was not just a premonition, but was a reality, and as the Confederate government prepared more cruisers for duty as commerce raiders, the prospects for whalers were starting to look bleak. As for Lieutenant Raphael Semmes; he was not done with New Bedford's whaling industry. In fact, his harassing of the industry had only begun.

Although Semmes was forced to sell the *Sumter* off of Gibraltar, Confederate operative James Bulloch worked arduously to purchase vessels from shipwrights and merchants in Great Britain. Clandestinely, Bulloch worked the British market, keeping his purpose concealed as to not violate Britain's neutrality in the war. This was of critical importance to the Confederate government. According to international law, Britain's neutrality meant the British government could not knowingly supply war material to either side of the war. Eager to maintain this neutrality, Great Britain refused to openly help the Confederate war effort. The Confederates

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[2] Because whaling voyage lasted for years at a time, and these vessels traveled for thousands of miles before arriving at the fishing grounds, whalers were always heavily laden with extra supplies. For a Confederate commerce raider, capturing a vessel like this was the perfect time to do some much needed supply requisitioning.

appeased the British because they were one of the only possible allies they had. As a result, Bulloch purchased these vessels under an alias, and supplied the ships with materials from several different chandleries to ensure secrecy.[27] He secured several purchases in the early years of the war, including the CSS *Alabama* which launched from Birkenhead Ironworks in Liverpool on July 29, 1862. Since Semmes was without a vessel, Bulloch summoned him to Liverpool to take command of the newly christened steamer. With a vessel and commander, Bulloch sent Semmes off to harass Union shipping wherever it could be found.[28]

Semmes decided on his first target shortly after the *Alabama's* departure. In his memoirs he recalled, "I resolved to strike a blow at the enemy's whale-fishery, off the Azores."[29] In late summer, the Gulf Stream carries thousands of tons of krill and plankton northward from the Tropics and dumps them off the coast of the Azores in the Northern Atlantic. For centuries, right whales migrated to this location to feast on ample supplies of food in preparation for the winter months. This feeding frenzy lasts from late August until about October 1, and as a result, whalers journeyed to these waters to take advantage of the gathering of so many right whales.[30] This species of whale is very docile and relatively easy to hunt and kill. Thus, whalers from New Bedford and other Northern ports would frequently make the Azores their first stop on their way to the Pacific and Indian Oceans, or their last stop on the way home. With no protection being offered to these whalers by the U.S. navy, they stood little chance against the well-armed and speedy *Alabama*. Semmes realized the precarious predicament whalemen found themselves in. He later stated, "Unlike the ships of commerce, the whalers are obliged to congregate within small well-known spaces of ocean and remain there for weeks at a time, whilst the whaling season lasts. It was the most obvious thing in the world, that these vessels, thus clustered together, should attract the attention of the Confederate cruisers."[31] Arriving off the Azorean

coast in early September, his timing could not have been better. He was on the whaling grounds at the peak of the season, and his aptitude paid off. By October 3, the *Alabama* captured eleven whalers.[32]

This fact was felt keenly by whaling merchants. These men knew the nature of their industry and foresaw exactly what Semmes described. This was undoubtedly the reason why whalers, more than any other maritime industry, decried the privateers and commerce raiders. Merchants sailed the oceans either individually or in small groups, making them almost impossible to find on the wide oceans of the world. However, whalers, like all fishermen, were found in the same spots, at the same times every year. When the *Whalemen's Shipping List* denounced privateers and Confederate cruisers on a weekly basis throughout the course of the war, they did it because they knew that they were easy prey for these vessels. Ultimately it was whalers that stood to lose the most to these activities.

Foresight could not stop the *Alabama* though. On September 5, 1862, the cruiser secured her first capture. The vessel proved to be the *Ocmulgee*, a whaler out of Edgartown, MA. She was captured a mere eleven days after the *Alabama* had been commissioned, and was the first of many vessels that the prolific Confederate cruiser added to her logs over the next nearly two years. After capturing another whaler two days later on the seventh, the *Alabama* came across her first New Bedford whaler on September 8.

Late that afternoon, the lookouts on the *Alabama* spotted a large ship to the northwest. Sunset was nearing so the Confederate crew had to act fast. Showing the American colors as they approached, the ship was quickly recognized to be an American whaler. After securing the vessel's surrender, the ship's master turned over his papers to Captain Semmes. These identified the vessel as New Bedford's *Ocean Rover* which was returning from a nearly three and a half

year voyage with a full hold. After spending several years in the Indian Ocean, the captain of the whaler decided to make one final stop at the Azores to top off what was a highly successful voyage. This proved to be an awful mistake as all the *Ocean Rover's* hard work was burned later that night.[33] Approximately eleven hundred barrels of whale oil were incinerated, costing the owner of the *Ocean Rover* $70,000.[34] However, the whaling captain apparently heard of how Semmes allowed the crew of the *Ocmulgee* to row to shore in their whaleboats, and he requested his crew be allotted the same privilege. The *Alabama* was about five miles from shore though, and Semmes wondered whether or not the whaler could make the journey. The master replied that it was a short distance for whalers so Semmes acquiesced to his request. The crew of the *Ocean Rover* returned to their vessel and worked feverishly to load as much as possible into the six boats. When they returned to the *Alabama* with whaleboats so full they were almost sinking, Semmes expressed concern for the wellbeing of the boats and crew. The New Bedford captain, as optimistic as ever called back, "Oh! No! They are as buoyant as ducks, and we shall not ship a drop of water." Content with the response, Captain Semmes allowed the crew to depart. As they paddled towards shore, into the sunset, Semmes gawked at the beauty of the scene, remarking that they looked like Venetian gondolas paddling through the narrow cannels of Venice.[35]

As the *Ocean Rover* burned the next day alongside the *Starlight* and the *Alert*, the *Alabama's* first capture had been a decisive one. Seventy thousand dollars was no small sum and this dramatically affected the vessel's owner and the psyche of New Bedford. By the time news arrived back in New Bedford several months later, local papers angrily criticized the Confederate pirate. In an attempt to deface the *Alabama's* honor, New Bedford papers like the *Republican Standard* claimed Semmes burned the captured whaleships at night in order to play upon the sailor's natural impulse to help his fellow mariners in anguish. They argued that when they saw

the flames, sailors would immediately go to help the vessel in distress, and the *Alabama* would be slyly waiting for them.[36] This simply was not the case though, as Semmes knew that burning the vessel at night would probably have the opposite effect by alerting the whalers that the Confederate commerce raider was near at hand.[37] Articles like this one were a great example of the propaganda the New Bedford press sought to perpetuate. The more they vilified the commerce raiders, the more likely the U.S. navy was to intervene and come to the rescue of whalers. But more importantly, articles such as this one demonstrate how fear gripped these people and in that aspect, the Confederates were achieving their goal. However, no matter how much New Bedford's and other Northern city's periodicals criticized the *Alabama*, these criticisms were not going to stop the further destruction of the industry.

Nearly a week later, beginning on September 13 and continuing for the next five days, the *Alabama* captured and destroyed four more New Bedford whalers. The first vessel was the *Altamaha* which surrendered without a fight. Although this vessel had been at sea for five months, the master had little success in capturing the great leviathan. As a result, only about $3,000 of product was destroyed when the *Altamaha* was ignited.[38] As inconsequential as this capture was, the *Alabama* caught sight of another vessel later that night which led to a much more eventful chase and propitious outcome.

With the moon shining brightly, the *Alabama* spotted another whaler in the distance and made chase. They gained quickly on the vessel and within a few hours they were within a mile of the vessel. Semmes ordered the customary warning shot fired and prepared for boarding the whaler. However, it was evident that this ship was not willing to give up yet. Captain Semmes was not in the mood to play games at such a late hour and thus fired a second warning shot. This second round quickly brought the ship's master to his senses and he immediately stopped his

course and ran down his colors. It was now nearly daylight so Semmes sent a boarding crew to the vessel and returned to his quarters for a nap. When he arose the next morning, he found the *Benjamin Tucker* of New Bedford was his new prize. This whaler left New Bedford eight months prior and was off to a decent start on this voyage with about three hundred and fifty barrels of oil onboard.[39] The crew of the *Alabama* gutted the *Tucker* of all valuable supplies and materials, brought the thirty person crew on board the vessel, and set the whaler on fire by 10 AM. As the ship burned, nearly $18,000 worth of profit burned with it.[40]

Three days later, the *Alabama* gave chase to another potential capture. This vessel was the *Virginia*, a whaleship a mere twenty days out from New Bedford. The master of the vessel, Captain Tilton, believed he could outrun his pursuers because the *Virginia* was one of the fastest whalers in the fleet. However, they stood little chance against the steam and wind powered cruiser, and within three and a half hours the whaler belonged to the *Alabama*. Having just left port, there was little oil or other whale products onboard, but what it lacked in oil, the vessel made up in supplies. The Confederate crew requisitioned these valuable goods and set the whaler on fire.[41] This cost Captain Tilton and William Hathaway Jr, the owner of the *Virginia,* about $25,000.[42]

With the crew of the *Virginia* onboard, the *Alabama* continued its search and destroy mission. Foul weather blew in that night and the next day, in the midst of a violent storm, the commerce raider caught another New Bedford whaler. This vessel was the *Elisha Dunbar* which Semmes burned immediately, even before viewing the bark's papers. Captain Semmes took this uncharacteristic move because the weather was becoming worse as the day drew on and wanted to do away with his newest capture before the storm intensified further. Similar to the *Virginia*, this bark was only twenty-four days out from New Bedford so not much in the way of product

was destroyed. However, the extensive supplies on the vessel were all burned along with the *Elisha Dunbar* herself, costing merchants W. and G. D. Watkins $25,000.[43]

In only five days, the *Alabama* captured four New Bedford whalers costing four separate merchants approximately $71,000.[44] In 1862 the whaling industry brought in $61,056 in whale oil with the total importation value of whale products at $5,051,782.[45] Just the destruction of these four whalers caused $10,000 more in damages than the worth of all the oil brought into the port during the entire year. These mere five days also cost New Bedford merchants almost two percent of their entire profit for that year. On the surface, this may not seem like much, but when one considers that the average whaler returning to port usually brought in $50,000 to $70,000, the loss of these four vessels cost somewhere around $250,000 in potential profit in addition to the $71,000 in just supplies and already caught product. In addition to this sum, each one of those vessels was worth an average of $40,000 meaning that the total valuation of the ships destroyed was around $160,000. When these losses are added up, these four days cost New Bedford merchants a net loss of nearly $500,000 in actual damages and potential profit. This astronomical sum was a blow that this weakened industry could not afford.

With his vessel destroyed and reputation tarnished, Captain Tilton, master of the *Virginia,* lost no time in criticizing the vile Raphael Semmes when he returned to port. In one article carried by all the local newspapers, Tilton bemoaned the conditions the Confederates forced him and his crew to live in. He explained that as prisoners they lived on deck, in the midst of a horrible storm, being at all times soaked and sometimes awaking, "nearly under water." The food was inedible and the crew had to wash in salt water. Tilton argued the vengeful Semmes and his crew sought to punish the whalers and they were no better than thieves and pirates.[46] Captain Semmes rebutted this claim after the war, feeling his honor was infringed upon. He

knew his position was a murky one in that he attacked private merchants instead of fighting an enemy vessel in the open. At a time when war was still a "gentleman's affair," this means of warfare seemed detestable to most polite society. However, what Semmes and his crew were doing was nothing new in the annals of war, and when these very Yankee whalemen sought to infringe upon the economics of the South, they did not think anything of it. He believed he was a commerce raider, but certainly this did not make him a pirate. Thus, in his own defense, he fired back at Tilton after the war. Although he did acquiesce that the prisoners were kept on deck and probably got wet several times, they were surely not wet the entire time, and there was simply nowhere else for them to stay. If he had put them on the berth-deck, his own crew would have been without a place to sleep. And, as for the food and salt water baths, Semmes snidely remarked, "It was certainly a hardship that Captain Tilton should have nothing better to eat than my own crew, and should be obliged, like them, to wash in salt water."[47]

This quibbling may seem immaterial to the modern reader, but back in this time period, this was no laughing matter. Captain Tilton fought back with the only thing he had, his words. Like Tilton, all New Bedford merchants and masters had no other way to protect their vessels against this very real threat. Their only hope was to stir up enough discontent to force local politicians to lobby the naval department to help. However, these words had little more effect than to infringe upon Semmes's honor. In the end, the federal government took little action to protect the whaling industry, and the whalers' only hope was to continue to support the war effort in the hope that it would quickly terminate. This was one example of a desperate act from a desperate people.

But the *Alabama's* rampage had just begun. Through the month of October, the commerce raider caught and burned eight more American merchant vessels, but none of these

were whaling ships. As they continued to sail in the Atlantic, they suddenly stumbled upon a

New Bedford whaler on November 2. This vessel was only four days out from port and was

amply stocked with fresh provision and supplies.[48] This was the *Levi Starbuck* which had just

begun a thirty month voyage to the Pacific Ocean's whaling grounds. Even though the *Starbuck*

was fresh out of port, Confederate sailors destroyed approximately $25,000 of valued goods

when they set her ablaze.[49] It was by pure luck that the *Alabama* had found this vessel. No longer

on the whaling grounds, the two vessels merely crossed paths. Unfortunately for Edward

Howland, the owner of the *Starbuck*, his vessel crossed paths with the wrong ship and yet

another New Bedford whaling vessel met a watery grave.

Equally unlucky were the barks *Lafayette* and *Nye*. The following April of 1863, the

Confederate cruiser prowled the waters off the coast of Brazil and stumbled upon the *Lafayette*.

She was four or five miles off the *Alabama's* bow and within a couple of hours the commerce

raider was upon her. After the *Alabama* fired the customary warning shot, the first mate of the

Lafayette had no recourse but to surrender. The Captain of the bark had died at sea several weeks

earlier, and in a panic as the *Alabama* approached, the first mate of the whaler threw the bark's

papers overboard. This act did not save his ship though. Within an hour of her capture the

whaling vessel was on fire.[50] This was a $20,908 bonfire for the owners of the *Lafayette*.[51]

Subsequently, on April 24, the *Alabama* captured her ninth New Bedford whaler. This

vessel was the *Nye* which was returning from a thirty-one month cruise in the Pacific Ocean,

"during which her crew had become almost as much Sandwich Islanders, as Americans in

appearance." The crew had already shipped home two cargoes of oil, but still had about four

hundred and twenty-five barrels onboard as they returned home. The one remaining capstone to

finish off such a successful voyage would be to sail down the Acushnet River and into the harbor

to deliver these last barrels for their final payday. However, the *Alabama* would not allow such a triumphal return to port.[52] The overly oily *Nye* easily went up in flames and the $31,000 worth of product was destroyed.[53]

All three of these vessels, the *Levi Starbuck*, the *Lafayette*, and the *Nye* were captured, in a way, accidentally. None were caught on whaling grounds, and all were unlucky enough to cross courses with the *Alabama* on their way to the whaling grounds or on their way home. A jubilant Semmes remarked, "The fates seemed to have a grudge against New England fishermen, and would persist in throwing them in my way, although I was not on whaling-grounds."[54] Whether it was the fates or the vengeful whales which kept sending whalers the *Alabama's* way, the effects of these unexpected encounters could not be overlooked. Yet even though these were the last of the New Bedford whalers that Semmes captured, the *Alabama's* journeys were far from over. By May of 1864, this Confederate cruiser captured and destroyed fifty-five U.S. merchant vessels equaling about $4,613,914 in damages.[55] Ultimately, in June of that same year, the *Alabama* met her own watery grave at the hands of the USS *Kearsarge* off the English coast. But the damage was already done.

Semmes's *Alabama* captured a total of sixteen whaling vessels with exactly half of these being from New Bedford. The Confederates destroyed approximately $218,000 worth of product, supplies, and vessels from New Bedford whalers, which equates to over $3,000,000 in modern value.[56] To say that sum was devastating is an understatement. If one were to imagine a modern city losing over three million dollars in less than a year, images of places like Detroit and Flint, MI after the motor industry's collapse would come to mind. The effect of the capture of just eight vessels on New Bedford was certainly traumatic in 1863. This also affected the war as well. As Semmes remarked to one disgruntled whaler, "Every whale you strike will put money

into the Federal treasury, and strengthen the hands of your people to carry on the war. I am afraid

I must burn your ship."[57] Captain Semmes was right. By harming the industry, he altered the

New Bedford merchants' ability to fund the war. At this point, half way through the war, the

Stone Fleet and activities of Confederate commerce raiders reduced the New Bedford whaling

fleet by over twenty-five percent.[58] This effectiveness would not be overlooked by Southern

authorities. As the *Alabama* fought her final battle against the USS *Kearsarge*, Confederate

Secretary of the Navy Mallory and other Confederate officials considered sending out a new

cruiser with the sole purpose of destroying the enemy's whaling fleet. They surmised this could

maximize a commerce raider's efficacy, and they were not wrong.

As Confederate officials discussed possible targets for a new cruiser, Bulloch went about

procuring a vessel for this service. He settled on an iron-framed, full-rigged ship with auxiliary

steam power known as the *Sea King*. Recently returned to England from Bombay, this vessel

was the perfect material for a cruiser. As a result, Bulloch began the painstakingly tedious task of

buying and outfitting the vessel. The Confederate naval department searched for a commander of

this vessel and settled upon Lieutenant James I. Waddell. Waddell was a North Carolinian with

over twenty years of experience in the U.S. navy. He was by far the most qualified candidate to

lead this expedition, and his first order of business was preparing the vessel for service as a

commerce raider. By mid-October, 1864, the *Sea King* was rechristened the CSS *Shenandoah,*

and was off on its mission to destroy the whaling fleet of the North Pacific.[59]

Waddell's order from Bulloch, dated October 5, 1864, explicitly stated the purpose of the

mission. In the opening two sentences of this letter, Bulloch wrote, "Sir: You are about to

proceed upon a cruise in the far-distant Pacific, into the seas and among the islands frequented

by the great American whaling fleet, a source of abundant wealth to our enemies and a nursery

for their seamen. It is hoped that you may be able to greatly damage and disperse that fleet, even if you do not succeed in utterly destroying it."[60] Building upon the success of Semmes and his *Alabama* in attacking the whaling fleet off the coast of the Azores, Bulloch hoped Waddell could achieve even more success by attacking the much larger and much more productive Northern Pacific whaling fleet. If the *Shenandoah* could wreak havoc, they stood a good chance of either permanently disrupting or even destroying that season's fleet. This would have little effect on the Presidential election the next month, but if Lincoln did win reelection, the Confederates were going to have to do something to prolong the war. As a result, if they could successfully strike a major blow at the industry, they could reduce the amount of money funding the war effort. This was also a wise endeavor, for as Semmes recognized, the whalers were going to be on the grounds no matter what, and would be undefended as the U.S. navy had no vessels in the Arctic or North Pacific region.[61] The whalers were sitting ducks, and although they feared commerce raiders, they never expected they would be attacked in the far reaches of the northern most ocean. Thus, a voyage like this one was the most cost effective way to inflict the maximum potential of damage on the Northern maritime economy. For the war weary and economically struggling South, this proved the best way to possibly change the course of the war. With the fates aligned in their favor, the *Shenandoah* set forth on what would be one of the most destructive cruises in whaling history.

It was in the South Atlantic that Waddell and his crew caught their first whaler. It was about five in the afternoon of December 4, 1864, in what Captain Charles P. Worth, the master of the idle whaler, described as "thick weather." With a fairly dense mist hanging over the water, Captain Waddell stealthily directed his steamer towards the unsuspecting vessel and its crew. This was the whaling bark *Edward* of New Bedford, which was in the process of "cutting in" a

right whale they had recently captured. Waddell dispatched a boarding party and by the time the busily working seamen realized what was happening, it was already too late. Captain Worth realized the most propitious course of action was to surrender.[62] The crew of the *Shenandoah* spent the next two days stripping the *Edward* of all provisions. Waddell then burned the bark and transported his prisoners to Tristan da Cunha where he dropped them off on the island under the protection of the locals. Several weeks later, the USS *Iroquois* retrieved the crew and delivered them to Cape Town, South Africa where they spent several more weeks until finally making their return voyage home. All in all, Waddell's first whaler was a decent catch.[63]

This first prize was worth about $20,000.[64] When one considers that this estimate accounts for both the value of the vessel and its cargo, it appears that historian Tom Chaffin's appraisal of this being, "a modest amount compared with that of other prizes," is a logical conclusion.[65] The right whale that the crew of the *Edward* was working on was only its first catch, so aside from the worth of the vessel and its provisions, the economic blow was comparatively little. However, a letter written by Captain Worth, dated January 10, 1865, indicated the psychological effect of this capture. In exasperation Worth wrote, "We were robbed of everything we possessed but our clothing and part of that was stolen on board the *Shenandoah*. We were boiling our first whale when captured, which would have made 100 bbls. of oil.[3] My officers, crew, and myself, are dependent on the U.S. Consul at this place [Cape Town], not one of us left with a dollar."[66] This letter was finally published in the March 7, 1865 edition of the *Whalemen's Shipping List* and figured prominently at the top of the second page. Undoubtedly, hundreds of subscribers read this painful cry from one of their own and foresaw the destruction yet to come. With the *Alabama* gone, once depressed merchants found new hope

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[3] Bbls. was a unit of measure of barrels of oil. One bbl is the equivalent of approximately 42 gallons of oil per barrel. Thus, 100 bbls of oil equals 4,200 gallons of oil.

that the world's oceans would once again be safe, but now a new Confederate threat lurked on the oceans and it was certainly one to be feared. Even though their fears were being realized once again, few New Bedford merchants could imagine the rampage the CSS *Shenandoah* was about to embark on.

After a brief layover in Melbourne, Australia to refit, the *Shenandoah* headed north towards the Caroline Islands. It was in the harbor of Ascension Island (modern Ponape Island, Micronesia) that Waddell located his key to success. Four vessels lay at anchor in the harbor, and all were American whalers. Only one, the ship *Hector*, was from New Bedford, but these four vessels were a valuable prize. These whaling vessels had been away for several years and had nearly full holds. Between the *Hector* and the *Edward Carey* of San Francisco, the crew of the *Shenandoah* found nearly five hundred barrels of whale oil. This was no minor sum, as these were worth well over $73,000 dollars.[67] Once the Confederates cleared the ship of everything of value to them, Captain Waddell allowed the local islanders to loot the ships in exchange for the islanders taking the Yankee prisoners. Following a day in which the islanders took anything left on the vessels which had any value, the *Hector* was one of three vessels set ablaze.[68] This cost the master of the *Hector* well over $58,000; not to mention the permanent loss of his ship and his large investments in supplies.[69]

However, Waddell procured something even more valuable from the masters of these four vessels. Amongst the captured materials were the extensive charts and maps of the North Pacific whaling grounds. Now, not only was Waddell armed with the precise charts necessary for navigating the often deadly Pacific and Arctic Oceans, but he knew the exact location of the whaling fleet. Waddell jubilantly recalled in his memoirs, "With such charts in my possession, I not only held a key to the navigation of all the Pacific Island, the Okhotsk and Bering Seas, and

the Arctic Ocean, but the most probable localities for finding the great Arctic whaling fleet of New England, without tiresome search."[70] Waddell held the principal tools to completing the mission Bulloch sent him on nearly six months before. He knew exactly where to find the Arctic whaling fleet, and the many New Bedford whalers that called those waters home. The Confederates never intended to find these charts, but when they did they held the key to the whaler's undoing. Ironically, it was whalers that provided this key.

Armed with these valuable gifts, Waddell turned the *Shenandoah* north, arriving off the Kamchetta Peninsula by late May of 1865. Even though the war was essentially over, the Captain and crew of the *Shenandoah* had no idea and they went about their mission as originally planned. By this time of year, in the reaches of the North Pacific, the solid masses of ice begin to break up, giving way to some of the most abundant whaling grounds in the world. The bowhead whale inhabits these northern waters, and because of their high blubber content, intended to keep them insulated from the harsh Arctic waters, yield large amounts of oil.[71] These were the prizes New Bedford's whaling fleet hoped for, and as Captain Waddell sent a look-out aloft to investigate the breaking ice floe, he heralded, "Sail ho!" Following the tactical norm, Waddell had the Russian flag unfurled, in an attempt to deceive his prey. However, the prey and predator found themselves on opposite sides of a massive ice floe, and in what must have seemed like comedic act, the two followed each other on parallel tracks, with the *Shenandoah* being unable to catch the whaler. The whaler was the bark *Abigail* of New Bedford, and soon the crew of the *Abigail's* luck ran out. As the ice floe ended, the *Shenandoah* moved in, replacing the Russian colors with those of the Confederacy and sending a boarding party to take the new prize.[72] Captain Ebenezer Nye, the master of the *Abigail*, was astonished. After expressing his disbelief, the boarding officer from the *Shenandoah* slyly remarked, "We have entered into a treaty

offensive and defensive with the whales, and we are up here by special agreement to dispose of their mortal enemy."[73] This was not Nye's first encounter with a Confederate cruiser though. Several years before, he had been a master of another whaler which fell prey to the CSS *Alabama*. One discouraged member of the crew proclaimed, "You are more fortunate in picking up Confederate cruisers than whales. I will never again go with you, for if there is a cruiser out, you will find her."[74] Not only had Captain Nye lost his ship and precious cargo, but his reputation was forever tainted.

As the *Abigail* burned, the defiant Nye was said to proclaim, "You have not ruined me yet; I have ten thousand dollars at home, and before I left I lent it to the government to help fight such fellows as you."[75] This proved the Yankee whalers only defense against their adversary. Lacking the ability to fight themselves, merchants and masters donated large sums of money to the federal government in the hopes that the rebellion could be suppressed and safety assured to their vessels. However, such donations only depressed the industry further, as money invested in the war was money not invested in the latest technology or in the construction of new vessels.[76] Not only were merchants and masters like Ebenezer Nye suffering from higher insurance rates, the destruction of property, and the loss of valuable profits, but the war inadvertently directed their money away from their industry, thus fueling the further collapse of the industry.[77] By trying to fund the war in order to protect their industry, they were bankrupting their own businesses.

Far worse, the New Bedford bark *Abigail* gave Waddell another crucial asset, when the bark's second mate, Thomas S. Manning, joined the crew of the *Shenandoah*. Manning was originally from Baltimore, Maryland and was a southern sympathizer. Thus, when the opportunity presented itself, he had no qualms about joining the *Shenandoah's* crew. Not only

was he an experienced seaman, but he also knew the approximate location of the whaling fleet. In conjunction with the captured charts and maps, Waddell had the perfect guide to lead him to his goal.

With Manning providing the directions, the *Shenandoah* continued its cruise arriving off Cape Navarin in the Bering Sea on June 21. It was here that the crew picked up on a trail of floating blubber and smoke, signs that a whaler was nearby. Sure enough they soon found the *William Thompson* and *Euphrates*, both of New Bedford. The *Shenandoah's* crew made quick work of both ships, scavenging valuable rations and then setting the ships ablaze with their few hundred barrels of whale oil providing fuel for the fire.[78]

After a brief false alarm, which turned out to be an Australian whaler, the crew of the *Shenandoah* received concerning news from the crew of the *William Thompson*. The officers and crew of the *William Thompson* had recently stopped off in port in California on April 22, and heard news of President Lincoln's assassination and the capture of Richmond, Virginia and Charleston, South Carolina.[79] With no solid evidence to prove the claims, Waddell shrugged them off as red herrings and turned his sites on more New Bedford whalers.

As June 22 dawned, five more sets of sails were glimpsed by the lookout. Two of these belonged to foreign whalers, but the other three were New Bedford ships. One of these was the *Milo*, which Lieutenant Hunt described as a, "staunch and slow-moving vessel."[80] Easily sailing up to the *Milo,* the *Shenandoah* captured her. The *Milo's* Captain, Johnathan C. Hawes was amazed that a Confederate cruiser was that far north.[81] It seems that this was the general consensus among whalers in the Arctic. In fact, many had gone that far north in the hopes that this region would be a safe-haven from preying Confederate cruisers. This assumption clearly

could not have been more wrong. The unlikeliness of the *Shenandoah's* voyage was certainly a contributing factor toward their efficacy.

In the meantime, the other two New Bedford whalers made a run for it. The *Sophia Thornton* was the slower of the two, and the *Shenandoah* easily caught up to her. After securing this newest catch, the *Shenandoah* steamed after the last vessel, the *Jireh Swift*. A three hour pursuit culminated with several warning shots fired from the *Shenandoah's* thirty-two pound cannon and the immediate capitulation of the *Jireh Swift*.[82] In two days Waddell captured five New Bedford whalers.

However, his success posed another problem; what should be done with all the prisoners? He solved this dilemma by making a deal with Captain Hawes of the *Milo*. Waddell offered to spare his vessel by bonding it if Hawes would take all the prisoners to San Francisco for him. In essence, Waddell would let Hawes go if he took the prisoners and agreed to pay $46,000 to the Confederate government for his ship. Hawes quickly agreed to the deal and as the prisoners were loaded onto the *Milo*, the *Jireh Swift* and *Sophia Thornton* were burned.[83] Although Hawes never paid the $46,000 bond and his vessel was spared, the damage these mere two days had on the New Bedford whaling industry was catastrophic. Four vessels were destroyed, thousands of barrels of whale oil were burned, and thousands of dollars of supplies, tools, and materials were lost. According to estimates, just these two days cost New Bedford merchants $261,205.[84] This was a blow that an already deflated economy could barely stand, and the worst part for New Bedford merchants was, the most treacherous day was yet to come.

Several days later, on June 26, the *Shenandoah* caught three more prizes, but only one of the whalers was from New Bedford. The *Nimrod*, captained by James M. Clark, was this unfortunate vessel. Like Captain Ebenezer Nye of New Bedford's *Abigail*, Captain Clark had

also had his fair share of run-ins with Confederate cruisers. As the master of the *Ocean Rover* two years earlier, Raphael Seems and the *Alabama* captured and destroyed his whaling bark. Ironically, in both instances Confederate Lieutenant S. Smith Lee was the first to board one of Clark's vessels. Lieutenant Lee thought of this second meeting as, "an excellent joke," but Clark did not see the humor.[85] No whaling captain wanted to be like Nye or Clark. It was bad enough suffering one destructive encounter with a Confederate cruiser, never mind two.

As Captain Clark surrendered one of his vessels for a second time during the war, the crew of the *Shenandoah* spotted five more whalers in the distance. Waddell and his crew were able to take three out of the five vessels, and all three, the *Gypsy*, *Isabella*, and *General Pike* were all New Bedford whalers. Now with nearly two hundred and twenty-two prisoners in his custody, Waddell bonded the *General Pike* for $45,000 and sent his prisoners on their way to San Francisco.[86] In the past several months, the *Shenandoah* captured nine New Bedford whalers, a devastating blow to a city which had already lost nearly three dozen vessels since the beginning of the war. However, the next day, June 27, proved to be the most destructive single day for New Bedford's whaling industry in its long history.

Early the next morning, Waddell spotted eleven more whaleships in the distance. First, the *Shenandoah* captured the New Bedford whaler *Waverly* and burned it, and by a little after noon, the *Shenandoah* was approaching the other ten vessels. It turns out nine vessels were gathered around the *Brunswick* of New Bedford which had recently lost a battle with an iceberg. The masters and crew of all ten vessels were in the process of auctioning off the materials, tools, and supplies on the *Brunswick* when the *Shenandoah* sailed up.[87] In an amazing example of stealth and coordination, the crew of the *Shenandoah* utilized their five longboats and the threat from their artillery pieces to secure surrender from nine of the ten vessels. Of these nine vessels

six were from New Bedford, the ships *James Murray*, *Isaac Howland*, and *Nassau*, and the barks *Congress, Hillman*, and *Martha*.[88]

However, the one hold out was the *Favorite* of Fairhaven. Although this vessel was from Fairhaven, this story is telling of the anguish, fear, and desperation shared among all whaling captains whether from New Bedford or not. In addition to this, historically Fairhaven and New Bedford were essentially the same greater metropolitan area, with the two halves only separated by the Acushnet River. With relatives on both sides of the river, business interest on both sides of the river, and connections on both sides of the river, these two separate cities were essentially one in the nineteenth century. Thus, the *Favorite's* story was one of a New Bedford whaler.

Captain Thomas G. Young was the master of the *Favorite*, and as a boarding party from the *Shenandoah* approached, Young made ready for a battle. Standing on the roof of his cabin, he loaded several guns and bomb guns (used for harpooning whales) and prepared to make a stand. As the *Shenandoah's* boarding party neared, they returned to their cruiser when Young ordered them to "Stand off!" In response, Captain Waddell turned the *Shenandoah* so that his guns were trained on the *Favorite*, and gave the order to fire low, when instructed. There would be no warning shot this time. As this transpired, Captain Young was unpersuaded by the *Favorite's* officers and crew as they attempted to talk him off the proverbial ledge. It was reported that the nearly sixty year old Young replied, "I have only four or five years to live anyway, and I might as well die now as any time, especially as all I have is invested in my vessel, and if I lose that I will have to go home penniless and die a pauper." During a lull in the commotion, the officers of the *Favorite* removed the percussion caps from the firearms, rendering them useless. Then the officers and the crew left their salty captain on his bark and surrendered themselves to the Confederate cruiser.[89] Left by himself, Young still refused to back

down. Upon being ordered to lower his colors by a Confederate officer, Young responded, "I'll see you damned first." When advised that the *Shenandoah* would open fire, Young yelled back, "Blow away my buck, but may I be eternally blasted if I haul down that flag for any cussed Confederate pirate that ever floated." However, when Young went to set off one of the bomb guns, it failed to fire because of the missing percussion caps. Finally, Young realized his last stand was hopeless and he surrendered to the Confederates.[90]

Although Young's defiant stand was far from the norm with whaling captains, his story does show the desperation that many of them felt. Young's heroic quote of, "if I lose that [ship] I will have to go home penniless and die a pauper," first appeared in the article, "The Man who Defied Waddell the Pirate," in the *Whalemen's Shipping List* on September 26, 1865.[91] This quote symbolized the fears of many whaling merchants. If they lost their ships, a lifetime worth of investments would be gone. Hopefully, when they returned, insurance would pay for the vessel, but it rarely covered the product and materials lost. And with what money they had left, it was unlikely they would reinvest in the industry. The whaling business was tanking and there were much safer investments to be made in textile factories. But for those like Young, who had everything invested in perhaps one or two ships, the fate of death might have seemed preferable to life of destitution. Even the stoutest Yankee whalers, who had lived through equatorial storms, and the crushing ice of the Arctic feared meeting Young's fate, and this article in the *Whalemen's Shipping List* clearly emblemized that fear.

This fateful day, June 28, 1865, was the single most destructive day in New Bedford's whaling history. Out of the ten total ships captured, seven were from New Bedford, and the *Favorite,* from Fairhaven, was in essence from New Bedford too. This brings the total to eight New Bedford vessels destroyed that day. The *Shenandoah* burned $340,563 of total value, and

bonded one vessel for $37,000. Thus, the total price tag for the city of New Bedford for this one

day was over $370,000, more value than the *Alabama* destroyed in its entire cruise.[92] This was

the final legacy of the feared Confederate steamer, as Waddell soon decided it was most

propitious to return to England, fearing that the war was over. The *Shenandoah's* days of

commerce raiding were over.

From the Confederate perspective, this cruise was a complete success, but from the

Union side, it was a complete disaster. In total, the *Shenandoah* captured thirty-eight ships,

destroyed thirty-four of them, and bonded the other four. Of these thirty-eight, twenty-five were

whaleships, and of this number, twenty-one were from New Bedford. The cruiser destroyed well

over 1.1 million dollars worth of value, and $752,692 of this was in burned New Bedford

whalers. In addition, $123,000 worth of bonded New Bedford vessels brought their total

destruction inflicted upon the city's industry to $875,692.[93] This was a stifling blow to the

industry. Just the actions of the *Shenandoah* diminished New Bedford's whaling fleet by nearly

one quarter of the total vessels. This left many in New Bedford disheartened and lost. The

Republican Standard bemoaned the navy's failure to protect the industry, complaining, "It seems

that there has been gross negligence on the part of the government, in leaving so important of a

branch of national industry and so much property without adequate protection."[94] Undoubtedly,

most of the city's inhabitants shared these sentiments, condemning the federal government for its

inaction. But no matter how much they accused the government of negligence, it was too late.

The disaster very few saw coming was complete, and the industry never recovered its former

glory. In this, the Confederates succeeded. This did not end the war in their favor, but it did

destroy the gold mine of their mortal enemies.

However, this was nothing new for New Bedford's whaling industry. Following the American Revolution and the War of 1812, the industry had been on the breaking point. With the fleet almost completely dissolved, the industry rebuilt itself and grew larger than ever before. In fact, it was after the War of 1812, that the industry began its massive surge to its climax in the 1850s. Many merchants thought this would be no different. However, time proved this assumption to be false. The industry never rebuilt after this decline. As historian Eric Dolan remarked, "The dissolution of the American whaling industry would be further accelerated… [and] that would soon render the Yankee whaleship a historical relic."[95]

In all, the CSS *Sumter, Alabama*, and *Shenandoah* captured thirty New Bedford whaling vessels, costing the merchants of that city approximately $1,093,692.[96] In modern dollars this equates to well over 15 million dollars. This massive economic blow happened at the wrong time. Perhaps, if the American Civil War happened a decade earlier, the industry might have been able to rebuild, but happening when it did, the war only accelerated the perfect storm of forces which ultimately destroyed the industry. Other factors which created this perfect storm included the discovery of petroleum by Pennsylvania farmers in 1859. This cheaper alternative to whale oil made the capturing of the great leviathan less lucrative. The Industrial Revolution also changed American society so much that by the mid-nineteenth century, the whaling industry seemed less appealing to investors in comparison to textile mills. Another factor was that New World whaling merchants failed to adapt to the modernizing of the industry, and thus stood little chance against the modernized fleets of Great Britain and Norway. Finally, the Arctic disasters of the 1870s destroyed over two dozen more New Bedford whalers and damaged the industry even further.[97]

The War Between the States did not lead to the immediate destruction of the industry. It was not until the early 1920s when the last square-rigged whaling vessel left New Bedford, and this was well over a half a century after the war. However, this was one of the first of many events which combined to create the perfect storm which destroyed the industry. The war reduced the fleet down to nearly half its former size and diverted much needed capital away from the industry. Insurance rates soared cutting down on profit margins. As the industry became less lucrative the economy deflated even more. As a result, whaling never recovered and was well on its way to extinction. Thus, when Captain Young of the *Favorite* made his stand against the *Shenandoah* on that June afternoon in 1865, his stand held symbolic meaning. As defiant as the merchants were in resisting the ultimate end, they could not win their fight. Time proved to be against them, and just like Young, ultimately New Bedford's industry was forced to surrender to the overwhelming power of fate.

Notes

[1] "The Man who Defied Waddell the Pirate," *Whalemen's Shipping List*, September 26, 1865.

[2] Christine Arato and Patrick Eleey, *Safely Moored at Last: Cultural Landscape Report for New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park* (Boston: Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, 1998), 2.

[3] Arato and Eleey, *Safely Moored at Last*, 7.

[4] Arato and Eleey, *Safely Moored at Last*, 7.

[5] Troy Harmon, *Power Distorted Plantation Relationships; Leaving Them Empty,* (Gettysburg: Gettysburg National Military Park, 2016), Lecture.

[6] Lee Blake, *New Bedford's Underground Railroad*, (New Bedford: New Bedford Civil War Round Table, 2014), Lecture.

[7] Kathryn Grover, *Fugitive's Gibraltar*, (Amherst: UMASS Press, 2001), 55.

[8] James McPherson, *War on the Waters: The Union and Confederate Navies, 1861-1865*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 20.

[9] McPherson, *War on the Waters*, 21.

[10] James Russel Soley, *The Blockade and the Cruisers, The Navy in the Civil War*, Volume 1, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881-1883), Reprint (Weider History Group, 2009), 26.

[11] McPherson, *War on the Waters*, 25.

[12] W. Craig Gaines, *Encyclopedia of Civil War Shipwrecks*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 35.

[13] Gaines, *Encyclopedia of Civil War Shipwrecks*, 128.

[14] *Whalemen's Shipping Lists*, 4/23/1861.

[15] *Whalemen's Shipping Lists*, 4/23/1861.

[16] United States Government, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, Series 1, Volume 1: The Operations of the Cruisers, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894), republished, (Ithaca: Cornell University Library), 818.

[17] Soley, *The Blockade and the Cruisers*, 170.

[18] United States Government, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, V.1, 818.

[19] *Whalemen's Shipping List*, 4/30/1861.

[20] *Whalemen's Shipping List*, 5/28/1861.

[21] Earl F. Mulderink III, *New Bedford's Civil War*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 139.

[22] Raphael Semmes, *Service Afloat, or The Remarkable Career of the Confederate Cruiser Sumter and Alabama during the War Between the States,* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington Co., 1887), 105.

[23] Eric Jay Dolin, *Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 316.

[24] Semmes, *Service Afloat,* 275.

[25] United States Government, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, V.1, 744.

[26] *Whalemen's Shipping List*, 8/1861.

[27] Semmes, *Service Afloat,* 421.

[28] Dolin, *Leviathan*, 317.

[29] Semmes, *Service Afloat*, 421.

[30] Semmes, *Service Afloat*, 421-2.

[31] Semmes, *Service Afloat*, 424.

[32] United States Government, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies,* V.1, 780.

[33] Semmes, *Service Afloat*, 431-2.

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