



# **The CSS Alabama: The History of the Famous Confederate Raider that Sank Off the Coast of France during the Battle of Cherbourg**

*Charles River Editors*

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\*Includes pictures

\*Includes accounts of the Alabama's raids and battles written by its sailors and captain

\*Includes online resources and a bibliography for further reading

\*Includes a table of contents

“God helps those who help themselves.” – The motto of the Alabama

After the first year of the Civil War, the Confederacy was faced with a serious problem. While the South had enjoyed some stunning victories on land, they had been all but cut off from the world at sea. The more industrialized North had realized that in case of an extended war, the best way to defeat the Confederacy was to starve it of supplies. The rebels started the war with no real navy to speak of, and so the federal government quickly set up a blockade of all Southern ports and river mouths. By depriving the South of revenues derived from its main export, cotton, the North seriously injured the Southern economy.

Without European intervention and the ability to build a navy that could rival the Union's, the Confederacy was mostly reduced to token resistance and using fast moving ships that could evade the blockade and import and export goods. Again, that was only partially successful, and today, the blockade runners are better known for their extracurricular activities; most notably, some of the crews also acted as privateers on the high seas, attacking U.S. shipping and taking any loot for themselves. The daring exploits of these commerce raiders caught the imagination of Southern soldiers and civilians and buoyed up morale, even as the war news turned increasingly grim.

Among all the Confederate commerce raiders, by far the most famous was the CSS Alabama. The Alabama attacked American ships and eluded the U.S. Navy around the globe for more than two years, all without ever having docked at a Southern port. The Alabama conducted seven expeditions, raiding commerce in locations as diverse as the Indian Ocean, Pacific Ocean, and Atlantic Ocean, capturing dozens of prizes across tens of thousands of miles of water. In fact, the Alabama would meet its demise as a result of having to head into port in France to refit and repair the ship after so much heavy use.

While the Confederates tried to rely on blockade runners, the Union Navy assigned many ships the task of tracking them down and stopping them. One of these ships, the USS Kearsarge, would face off against the Alabama off the French coast. Unaware the Union ship was partly fitted with the armor of an ironclad, the Confederates decided to attack, and after the Alabama was escorted out of the French harbor by French ships, the Alabama and Kearsarge dueled with each other in full view of hundreds of Frenchmen gathered on the coast. The battle lasted about an hour until the Alabama was headed to the bottom and dozens of its sailors were killed or wounded. Dozens more would be rescued, including some by the Kearsarge, and with that, the most famous Confederate raiding vessel of all was no more. The battle itself was celebrated in a number of artworks, including a few paintings by Edouard Manet, and the end of the Alabama brought relief to Union supporters across America.

By the last year of the war, blockade running had been all but strangled. Several major ports had fallen to the Union, and the rest were tightly blockaded. The blockade runners had also suffered from attrition. By the end of the war more than 1,100 of the ships had been captured and another 355 had been sunk or run aground.

The CSS Alabama: The History of the Famous Confederate Raider that Sank Off the Coast of France during the Battle of Cherbourg looks at one of the Civil War's most famous ships. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the CSS Alabama like never before.

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