

island for a later rendezvous with the *Florida* at Rocas Island. At dusk the following day, the *Florida* came upon a barque, which proved to be Brazilian. The following morning, quite early, she crossed the path of the *Oreto*, and after a brief exchange of pleasantries, continued on. The *Florida* stopped a Spanish brig, which was allowed to continue unmolested, and at a quarter to ten that morning the *Florida* overhauled and forced to heave-to an American flagged brig, the *Clarence*. She was en route from Rio to Baltimore with a cargo of coffee. Maffitt transferred three hundred bags to the *Florida*. The *Clarence* was a good ship, and Lt. Read requested Maffitt that he be allowed to requisition her as an armed cruiser. Perhaps because there was something of himself that Maffitt saw in Read, and perhaps because of the plan of campaign that Read put to Maffitt, he acquiesced.

Charles W. Read, nicknamed "Savez" from his habit of using the word, as in "you understand?" to finish a sentence, graduated from the Annapolis Naval Academy in 1860. He served briefly aboard the USS *Powhatan* before offering his services to the South at the outbreak of the war. He was ordered to the CSS *McRae* and saw action with the River Defense Fleet at New Orleans and Island No. 10. When the commander of the *McRae* was wounded on 24 April 1862, Read took command of the ship. He later served as executive officer aboard the CSS *Arkansas*. He was intelligent, experienced, possessed a certain guile, and above all was ready for command. His plan was audacious and worthy of his mentor. The ship was accordingly converted to an armed cruiser and commissioned as the CSS *Clarence*. A howitzer and ammunition were transferred to her from the *Florida*, as well as cutlasses and small arms. Second Engineer E.H. Brown was seconded, as were a crew of twenty men. At six o'clock that evening, Read set his new command on a southwesterly course as ordered. Then when well out of sight, he headed north.¹⁹ His mission

westerly course as ordered. Then when well out of sight, he headed north.¹⁹ His mission as outlined to Maffitt was to run into Hampton Roads, capture a gunboat or steamer in Chesapeake Bay, and generally raise havoc in the very heart of the enemy's operations. In this he would be aided by the *Clarence's* original papers, which had been retained, and her Portland registration, which would get him past the Federal naval blockade.

On 6 June, off the United States coast, he captured his first prize, the *Whistling Wind*, commissioned by the Federal navy to deliver coal to Admiral Farragut's squadron stationed at the mouth of the Mississippi. Read took off her crew, then burned the ship. It was a good start to operations, and gave them all confidence. The next ship they stopped was the *Alfred H. Partridge*, from New York, sailing to Matamoras in Mexico with arms and clothing for, as her captain proclaimed, the Confederate army. It seemed unlikely; but stranger things had happened during the war, and Read gave him the benefit of the doubt. He bonded the ship for \$5,000. The captain eventu-



Lt. Charles "Savez" Read, C.S.N., who in his short career as captain captured or sank fourteen enemy ships.

ally did deliver his cargo to the Confederacy. Read was on surer ground when he captured his next ship. She was the Boston registered barque *Mary Alvina*, with a cargo of provisions for the Federal army, as her manifest proclaimed. Read took what he needed, then torched the unfortunate ship. Among the plunder were some recently published newspapers, where he learned to his dismay that all ships entering Hampton Roads were stopped and searched, and only those with cargoes commissioned for the Federal government were allowed to dock.

His hopes were temporarily dashed, but the plan did not necessarily have to be abandoned. If he could capture a ship with the necessary clearance papers and cargo, then it could go ahead. What was now required was ingenuity, and Read was not short of that. On 12 June, Read spied the ship, six miles ahead, that might bring his plans to fruition. She was too far ahead for his six pound howitzer to make much impression, and given her lines Read knew that she could soon outdistance them. He hoisted the Federal flag upside down. A flag flown upside down was an international signal of distress. Aboard the USS *Tacony*, sailing from South Carolina to Philadelphia, notice was brought to the attention of its captain, William Munday, that the ship sailing astern appeared to be in distress. After some hesitation Munday ordered the *Tacony* to heave-to and await the slower ship. As it drew abreast, a boat was lowered from the ship in distress, and the ten sailors aboard it rowed over to the *Tacony*. They scrambled aboard and from within their jackets they produced revolvers, taking the crew of the *Tacony* completely by surprise. With little choice but to surrender, it was all over in seconds. The *Tacony* had become a prize of the Confederacy. The crew were led down into the hold. The Howitzer aboard the *Clarence*, and the other arms and ammunition, were loaded aboard a cutter for transference to the *Tacony*. As they were doing this, another ship, the schooner *M.A. Schindler*,

ference to the *Tacony*. As they were doing this, another ship, the schooner *M.A. Schindler*, also seeing their flag of distress, came alongside. The same procedure followed, and the *Schindler* too was captured. Her crew were transferred to the *Tacony*, and the *Schindler* was set on fire.

Into this abundance of riches came yet another ship, the *Kate Stewart*. She had seen the distress flag and the burning *Schindler* and came to offer her help. Read, with his howitzer and arms bobbing on a cutter between the *Clarence* and the *Tacony*, his crew dispersed on both ships and the cutter, had nothing but bluff remaining. Aboard the *Clarence* he ordered his "Quaker" guns (fashioned en route), to be run out, and ordered the *Kate Stewart* to surrender. From a distance they looked convincingly real. Captain George Teague, former master of the *Tacony*, thought so, and begged Read not to open fire. The *Kate Stewart's* captain surrendered. With the *Tacony* secured, the *Schindler* ablaze, the *Clarence* abandoned, complete with 8000 bags of coffee beans, Read boarded the *Kate Stewart*. She had twenty female passengers. Read's dilemma was that he now had more prisoners than crew — including twenty women. He abandoned the idea of torching the *Kate Stewart*, and instead transferred all his other prisoners to her, permitting her to resume her journey. As she sailed away, the *Clarence* was then set ablaze, and with the smell of roasting coffee wafting on the breeze, Read sailed away in a better ship than he had started with.

Read sailed north. The next morning he stopped the brig *Arabella* and boarded her. Inspecting her manifest he discovered that her cargo belonged to a neutral. Accordingly he spared the ship, but bonded it to the tune of \$30,000. While all this was going on, the *Kate Stewart* arrived at New Jersey, and Captain Teague, former master of the *Tacony*, reported to the authorities what had happened. He also told them of an overheard piece

of conversation: a large Confederate fleet was on its way to bombard the eastern coast of the United States. This was but a story, a ploy, deliberately planted by Read to cause anxiety to the Federal authorities. In Washington naval secretary Gideon Welles was ordered to take whatever measures were required. He issued instructions that all available ships were to proceed to sea at once to hunt down the *Clarence*. He was unaware that Read had transferred to the *Tacony*. Within a matter of days thirty-eight armed Federal ships were scouring the Atlantic seaboard for a ship that no longer existed. Private ships were seconded, and, armed with two howitzers each and manned by a naval crew, they were sent out in pursuit of the pirate. Twice the *Tacony* was stopped by Federal warships, and each time Read claimed to have seen their quarry. He gave bogus directions, sending the Federals off on a wild-goose chase. Read again went on the offensive. On 15 June, some three hundred miles off the Delaware River, he captured and burned the United States registered brig *Umpire*. He stopped the *Isaac Webb*, an immigrant ship with seven hundred and fifty passengers. The numbers were too great. He bonded her for \$40,000 and permitted her to go on her way. As he was doing this, a fishing schooner, the *Macomber*, came up to investigate. Read took her crew onboard, then set fire to her.

The following day the clipper *Byzantium* was hunted down and forced to heave-to, under the threat of being bombarded. Her hold was full of coal. Read was tempted to take her and her cargo as a prize, for fuelling the *Florida* and the *Oreto*; but realizing that she would slow them down, and undoubtedly attract attention, Read had her burned. Her crew were placed as prisoners in his hold, Read sailed on. Later that day the *God-speed*, bound for New York, crossed their path, and she too was put to the torch. On 22 June three fishing schooners were burned. A fourth was bonded, and Read's numerous prisoners were transferred to her. The next day two more New England fishing schooners

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His twentieth victim was the ninety ton mackerel schooner *Archer*. She was a good ship, and with adaptation might make a good fighting ship. Read had the howitzer transferred to her and whatever other provisions he could manage. The howitzer was now out of ammunition; any further captures would have to be by bluff or stealth. The *Tacony* was set on fire.

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