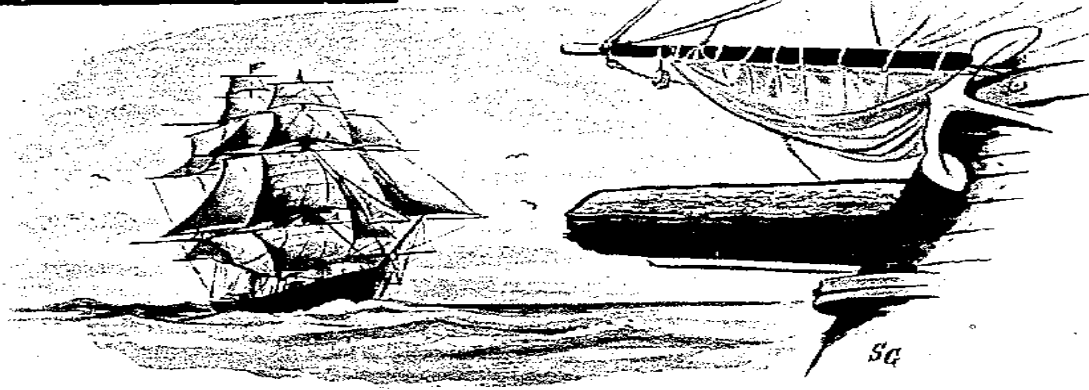


## DEEP in DIXIE



### Iron Hearts and Wooden Guns

It was when he took command of the captured Yankee sailing ship *Clarence* that the young Rebel, Charles W. Read of Yazoo county, Miss., began to evolve his audacious plan to raid a Northern seaport.

A lieutenant in the Confederate navy, the 23-year-old Read had been serving on the raider *CSS Florida* when she captured the *Clarence* in 1863. Transferring to the Union vessel with 22 men, he set out on his wild mission early in June of that year.

Flying the Stars and Stripes, the *Clarence* would ease up to an unsuspecting Federal merchant ship. Then the Yankee flag would come down and the Stars and Bars of the Confederacy would go up. Simultaneously the portholes would pop open and a row of black barrels would jut out.

And that would be that. The Northerner would promptly surrender. One Union skipper, a man named Teague from the *Kate Stewart*, climbed aboard the *Clarence* as a prisoner of war.

Taking a closer look at the line of cannon, he exclaimed, "Why, they're wood!"

"So they are," Read said dryly.

He had had his men build a set of phony guns. They looked real enough to enable the *Clarence* to knock off 21 Yankee merchant ships in 20 days, giving the people of New England their worst scare since the War of 1812.

A total of 38 Federal warships chased the wily Southerner. But, switching vessels twice, Read was able to bluff his way through the Union fleet.

On June 26 Read, now on the captured *Archer*, rescued two lost lobster fishermen from their boat in the North Atlantic. The two were taken aboard the *Archer* and fed. Then Read told them they were prisoners of war. The lobstermen thought he was pulling their leg.

Then Read saw his chance. It was a joke, he told the fishermen, and asked them to pilot the *Archer* into Portland, Me., past the guns of mighty Fort Preble.

slipped into the harbor, guided by the naive fishermen. The Rebel plan: to capture the brand-new revenue cutter *Caleb Cushing*, fire as much shipping as possible, then scoot.

Just after 1:30 a. m. on June 27, Read, pistol in hand, boarded the cutter at the head of his small band. Within minutes the Rebels had captured the enemy crew and were sailing out of the harbor. A rapid change in the tide prevented their burning the other ships. This proved to be unfortunate.

When they discovered the *Cushing* was gone, the enraged Yankees turned out in mad pursuit. Cramming every ship in the harbor with soldiers from the fort, National Guardsmen and civilian volunteers, the Northerners took off after their stolen cutter. Early that afternoon they caught up with the quarry. The Confederates were hopelessly outnumbered.

"We have our choice," Read called out to his men. "Fight or surrender. Which shall it be?"

"Fight!" the crew roared.

"Go to your stations!" Read ordered.

For an hour, the battle raged. When the Rebels ran out of cannonballs, they loaded their guns with nails, coins, metal scraps. They even fired a round Dutch cheese, which splattered on the deck of the Federal *Chesapeake*, causing the Yankees to protest that the Confederates were using Chinese stink pots.

But then there was nothing left to shoot. Read released the prisoners and, after setting fire to the cutter, gave the command, "Abandon ship!"

The Rebels were fished out of the water and threatened with hanging for piracy, but they were eventually exchanged. Returning to Louisiana, Read fought on, commanding the last Louisiana gunboat in the war.

—Submitted by Edward Cunningham,  
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As darkness fell, the Archer quietly