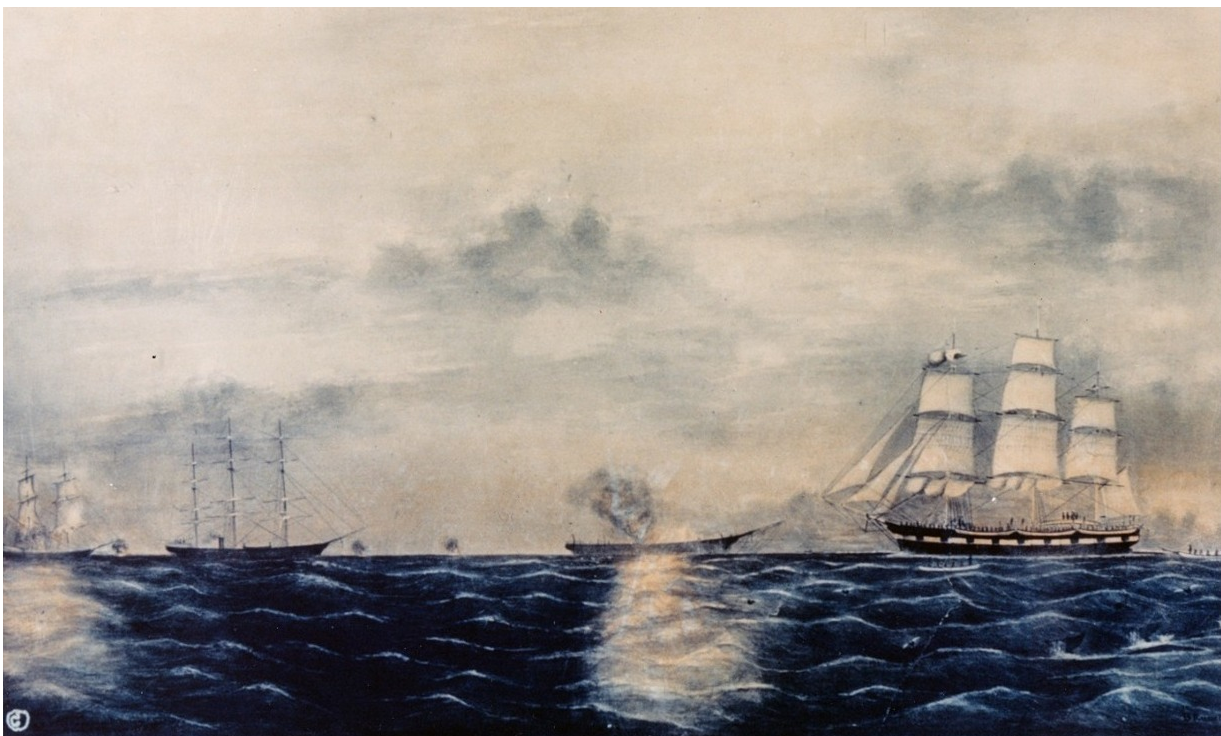




CSS *Shenandoah*: Last Flag Down

By Len Ellison – December 10, 2019



CSS *Shenandoah* Destroying Whale Ships in 1865, lithograph by B. Russell | Photo courtesy of U.S. Naval Historical Center

Although the last battle of the American Civil War took place in Texas, at the Palmito Ranch on May 12–13, 1865, the last Confederate surrender occurred six months later in Liverpool, England, on November 6, 1865. It happened like this.

During 1864–1865, the Confederate warship CSS *Shenandoah* captured, sank, or bonded 37 Union merchant vessels with a value of \$1.4 million, mostly Union whaling ships. Capt. James Waddell was unaware of the Confederate surrender and continued to sink Union merchant ships off the coast of Alaska. Then, on August 2, 1865, he met the Liverpool ship *Barrocouta* sailing out of San Francisco harbor, whose captain told him the Confederacy had surrendered. Waddell immediately sailed the *Shenandoah* via Cape Horn to Liverpool to surrender, because he knew that both he and his officers would face a Union court and be tried as pirates if they returned to the United States, as terms of surrender did not extend amnesty to sailors above the rank of lieutenant.

Shenandoah met the pilot charged with guiding her up the river at the mouth of the estuary at Mersey Bar. The pilot, however, would not sail without the ship's flag of her country being flown—and so the Confederate flag was furled. She sailed upriver, flag flying high, with crowds watching on from the riverbanks. She moored alongside the HMS *Donegal*, a British warship, a crew from that vessel was placed onboard her, and Captain Waddell surrendered to Captain Paynter of HMS *Donegal*. The Confederate flag was lowered and became known as the “Last Flag Down.”

Wendell presented a letter to Captain Paynter and addressed to the British Prime Minister surrendering *Shenandoah* to the British Navy—the last surrender of the American Civil War.

After the surrender of *Shenandoah*, it was reported on November 9, 1865, that the British government had decided that the whole of the ship's officers and crew were to be paroled and free to go ashore, as long as they were not British, which would have broken the neutrality laws between the U.S. and Britain (and they would be arrested). All the crew said that they were from the Confederate State of America, even the sailors with a strong Liverpool accent who had joined the ship at the beginning.

Thomas Haines Dudley, United States Consul in Liverpool, had the responsibility of disposing of *Shenandoah*, along with three other Confederate ships that the British had handed over to the U.S. (the *Rappahannock*, *Sumter*, and *Tallahassee*). After a failed attempt in January to sail *Shenandoah* back to the U.S., she was sold at auction in Liverpool in April 1866.

Waddell did not return to the United States until 1875, when he became captain of the commercial steamer *City of San Francisco*. He later oversaw the State of Maryland's oyster regulation force. James Iredell Waddell died at Annapolis, Maryland, on March 15, 1886.

The story does not end there, as a number of articles from the CSS *Shenandoah* remain on display across America today, reminding us of this tidbit of history.



A *Shenandoah* sailor's knife at the U.S. Naval Academy Museum in Annapolis



Shenandoah's signal gun, at the U.S. Naval Academy Museum in Annapolis



Captain Waddell's telescope, at the American Civil War Museum in Richmond



Captain Waddell's sword, at the American Civil War Museum in Richmond



Shenandoah's flag, at the American Civil War Museum in Richmond

All museum photos courtesy of Len Ellison



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