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# Confederate General: The Life and Wars of Frederick Buchanan

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includes a number of notable figures. One is Captain Michael A. "Hell-Roaring Mike" Healy, a black revenue-cutter captain who became a legend of the Alaskan frontier, memorialized in James Michener's novel *Alaska*. The Coast Guard's most recent icebreaker is named for Healy.

The authors note that "the early cuttermen have never received the credit due them for their efforts as seagoing policemen who served the indigenous people of an isolated region." Readers will come to understand why the USRCS became so admired throughout the new territory, and they will appreciate the effect the service had on the political, economic, and social life of the North Pacific region.

Each chapter could be made into a full-length book. Most notable among its biographies are two of the service's officers, the above-mentioned Healy and Lieutenant John C. Cantwell. Cantwell, in addition to his shipboard duties, explored, mapped, and recorded unknown native settlements. He traveled via small boats where rivers allowed and trudged overland as the first explorer of the remote interior of northwest Alaska.

This book is a must read for students of Alaska history. It is also a uniquely valuable volume for maritime historians, with its coverage of a phase of the history of the

mostly unrecorded U.S. Revenue Cutter Service.

The book contains endnotes referencing rare and widely scattered original sources. The bibliography is extensive, and the book is indexed. *Alaska and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service* is an excellent first choice for researchers and historians on Alaska and U.S. maritime history.

Truman R. Strobridge was an archivist and historian for the federal government for more than thirty years, including work as the Coast Guard's historian and a college teacher in Alaska. He is also the author of two books and nearly a hundred articles.

Dennis L. Noble retired from the Coast Guard as a senior chief marine science technician. He had made six Arctic voyages and two to the Antarctic. Following his retirement, he earned a Ph.D. in U.S. history. Noble is the author of nine books, seven of which are about U.S. Coast Guard history.

TOM BEARD  
Commander, U.S. Navy

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Symonds, Craig L. *Confederate Admiral: The Life and Wars of Franklin Buchanan*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1999. 274pp. \$32.95  
This stirring biography of a crusty old Navy commander and southern hero is the first in seventy years, and it fills a large gap in Civil

War scholarship. A biographer of lives of Patrick Cleburne, General Joseph E. Johnston, and others, Craig Symonds is well qualified. His writing is brisk, and his chapters are brief. He has excellent pacing, a flair for the dramatic, and a sense of humor. Fans of Patrick O'Brian will recognize a number of themes in Franklin Buchanan's early career, while Civil War and naval history specialists will applaud the author's technical expertise and broad nautical knowledge.

Sixty percent of the text covers Buchanan's antebellum life. Son of a prominent Baltimore doctor and grandson of a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Buchanan (pronounced "BUCK-annon") climbed the promotion ladder quickly. He was aided by merit and ambition, as well as social status and family connections, despite violating several of the "Laws of the Navy." He had some unattractive traits, described here in detail, along with merits that counterbalanced them. Adept in Navy politics, almost always short of money to support his expensive tastes and growing family, Buchanan saw his peers (Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, David Glasgow Farragut, Raphael Semmes, and Samuel F. Du Pont), superiors (Oliver Hazard Perry, Matthew C. Perry, and David Porter), and subordinates as either all good or all bad. One subordinate called him as "courageous

as Nelson, and as arbitrary." He could be his own worst enemy, and he was a rigid disciplinarian. Still, he took care of his men. He was energetic, aggressive, and tireless, both in carrying out his assigned duties and in seeking larger responsibilities, whether chasing pirates in the Mediterranean and Caribbean, fighting in Mexico, waging diplomacy in Japan and China, serving on the controversial 1855 retirement board, or becoming the first superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy (where Symonds teaches).

Buchanan married into the far wealthier and more prominent Lloyd family of Maryland's Eastern Shore. That alliance made him even more conservative, ultimately as loyal to slavery and states' rights as he was to the Old Line State. Those factors set his course in 1861, though he tried to retract his resignation when Maryland did not secede. Buchanan became the chief Confederate naval officer under Stephen Mallory, but his rashness had cost him his home, many of his friends—and what he had served and loved so well, his connection to the U.S. Navy.

"Old Buck" commanded in two great naval actions. The first was the destruction of larger and more powerful warships in Hampton Roads with CSS *Virginia*, an attack that killed his own brother. In 1864, at age sixty-three, he led a

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small force at Mobile Bay with the ironclad *Tennessee*. In both engagements he was seriously wounded. He returned after the war to Maryland, where he remained until his death, except for a brief stint in Mobile as an insurance company figurehead.

Symonds does not trim his sails to the prevailing winds of academia or today's Navy. He pulls no punches on Buchanan's pursuit of homosexuals, whether senior petty officers or a seaman caught in the hammock with a ship's boy, or a prominent fellow officer, Thomas ap Catesby Jones (confused in the index with his nephew, Catesby ap Roger Jones). Buchanan lost his postwar job as a college president when he fired half the faculty without consulting the trustees, including one professor for his sexual orientation.

Symonds's knowledge of American slavery does not match his authoritative naval credentials. To credit Buchanan's father with

"antislavery doctrines" as a member of a turn-of-the-century "abolitionist" society implies a stronger position than warranted. He was probably a gradual emancipationist and supporter of African colonization. More serious is Symonds's acceptance at face value of an incident from Frederick Douglass's autobiography, which Douglass later admitted to be a less than truthful rendering of his childhood (as explained in Dickson J. Preston's 1988 biography). Only in this instance does Symonds veer off course. His judgment that Nannie Lloyd became "a Buchanan in name" but her husband a "Lloyd in spirit" is acute. This fascinating and poignant study has its decks cleared for action, like the old salt at its center.

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