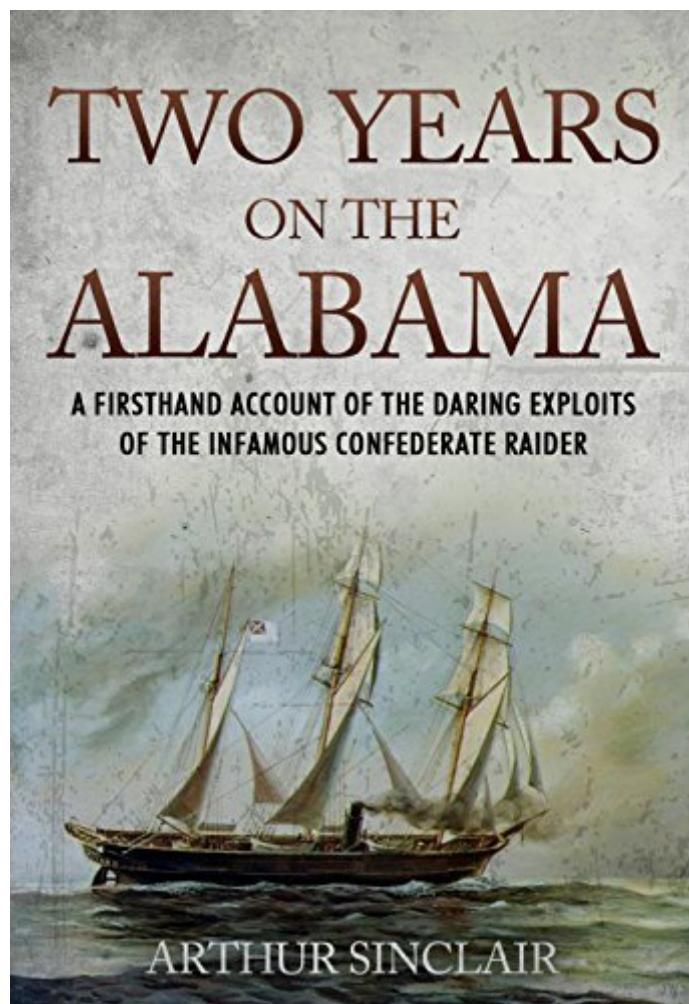


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# Two Years On The Alabama



## Synopsis

From July 1862 until June 1864 the C.S.S. Alabama was the terror of the Atlantic Ocean. Built in secrecy in Liverpool, England, through the arrangement of Confederate agent Commander James Bulloch, it was built for the fledgling Confederate States Navy which was sorely in need of ships. Under the command of Raphael Semmes it would spend the next two years terrorising and attacking Union shipping to help the Confederacy break the stranglehold which it found itself in. Through these two years it completed seven highly successful expeditionary raids, and it had been at sea for 534 days out of 657, never visiting a single Confederate port. They boarded nearly 450 vessels, captured or burned 65 Union merchant ships, and took more than 2,000 prisoners without a single loss of life from either prisoners or their own crew. Fifth Lieutenant Arthur Sinclair, who served under Semmes on the Alabama for the entirety of its existence, documents a fascinating first-person account of life on board this Confederate raider. As they crisscrossed over the oceans Sinclair notes the ships they attacked, prisoners they took and various places they visited, from Brazil to South Africa. Powered by both sail and steam, the Alabama was one of the quickest ships of its era, reaching speeds of over 13 knots. But in the quest for speed there had been sacrifices, notably the lack of heavy armor-cladding and larger guns, which were to prove fatal during the Battle of Cherbourg in 1864 against the U.S.S. Kearsage. *Two Years on the Alabama* is an excellent account of naval operations of the confederacy during the American Civil War. It provides brilliant details into the revolutionary changes that were occurring in late-nineteenth century maritime developments. After the Alabama was sunk Sinclair was rescued by the English yacht Deerhound and taken to Southampton. He later served as an officer of the inactive cruiser CSS Rappahannock at Calais, France. Following the Civil War, he primarily lived in Baltimore, Maryland, where he was a merchant. In 1896 he published *Two Years on the Alabama*. Arthur Sinclair died in Baltimore in November 1925.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

TWO YEARS ON THE ALABAMA is a contemporary account of the voyages and sailors of the CSS ALABAMA. It was written by Lt. Arthur Sinclair, the fifth officer of the ship. It provides a comprehensive account of the ships encountered and prizes taken by this vessel in the service of the Confederate States. I liked very much the personal details of the lives of the individual officers and men who crewed her. There are over 30 illustrations showing portraits of many of these men and this helped to put a human face on this account. It showed Captain Semmes to be a brilliant naval officer and not at all the pirate the northern press often portrayed him to be. He was an expert in international maritime law and followed it to the letter. On two occasions he released ships taken as prizes when he determined that they had been apprehended just inside the 3 mile limit. There was an excellent account of the battle with Kearsarge and the Alabama's sinking. I was pleasantly surprised to find there was no attempt to rewrite history or refight battles or take the apologist's role by Sinclair. Just simple, factual accounting. I highly recommend this book to the historian with an interest in Civil War naval operations.

Arthur Sinclair was a junior LT on the Alabama, and his memoirs is fascinating reading in that they provide many details of daily life aboard the raider, as well as a Junior Officer's prospective on her captures and battle with the Kearsarge. Sinclair is a good author and the narrative is exciting and interesting. I do recommend the memoirs themselves. That said, this version is NOT very good. There are many typos and odd paragraph breaks. Worst of all, there are at least three places where several pages of narrative are missing. In one case, in mid sentence it shifts from a recounting of the capture of the Ariel to one of fishing. The three I am sure of involve the Ariel capture, the accidental death of an officer in South Africa, and a capture in Far Eastern waters. There may be

another one during the aftermath of the Kearsarge engagement, though I am not sure since a great deal of information is in the appendix. These omissions and the asking price make this version a problematic buy. This is especially annoying since Semmes' much longer Memoirs of Service Afloat (an excellent if long read!) is available for free and has no such issues. Mr. Kell's Recollections of a naval officer is available for only two dollars, though I have not read it. My rating would be 5 for the book itself and 2 for this version. Buy for convenience sake if desired, but it would probably be best to get a used print copy. I wish I had.

The thing that amazed me the most about TWO YEARS ON THE ALABAMA was that I was unable to put it down. Each chapter gave me a curiosity and eagerness to find out what would happen next, even though I was acquainted with the general facts of the Alabama's depredations. Although Sinclair wrote this book some time after the Civil War the writing style shows no signs of being outdated and therefore the book is very easy to read. On the whole, it read almost like some adventure novel, like Jules Verne's 20,000 leagues under the sea. It is an absolute must for everyone interested in Civil War naval matters, and I think a lot non-Civil War enthusiasts will enjoy it as well.

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