

# CIVIL WAR NAVAL SONGS

Period Ballads from the Union and Confederate Navies, and the Home Front



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Louis Dodd (1943–2006), *The USS Jamestown arriving off Queenstown carrying food during the Great Famine.*




# CIVIL WAR NAVAL SONGS

Period Ballads from the Union and Confederate Navies, and the Home Front

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# THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR AFLOAT

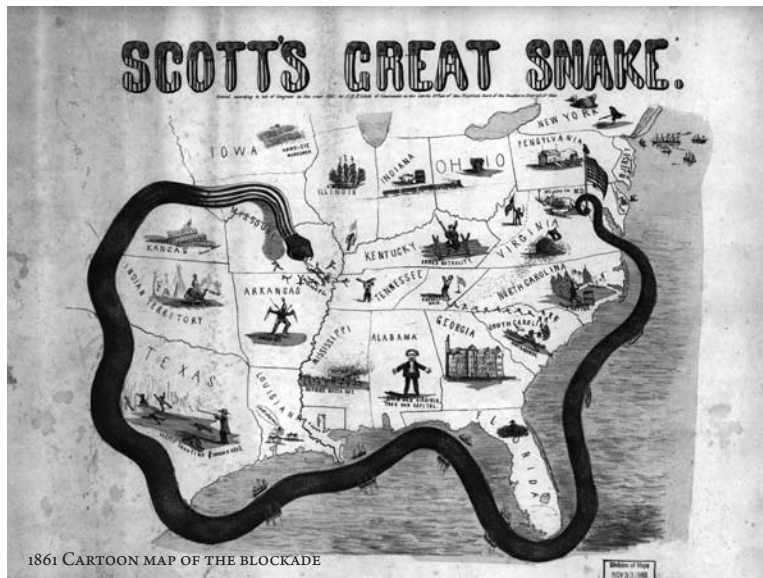
*James Bradford*

The election of Abraham Lincoln led seven states of the Lower South to secede from the Union between December 20, 1860, and February 1, 1861, and to form the Confederate States of America (CSA). When CSA forces fired on Ft. Sumter in the harbor at Charleston, South Carolina, on April 12, 1861, Lincoln called for 75,000 militia volunteers to subdue the rebellion—a reaction that led four states of the Upper South to join the Confederacy. On April 17 Confederate President Jefferson Davis invited applications for letters of marque and reprisal against Union shipping; Lincoln responded by ordering a blockade of CSA ports from South Carolina to Texas on April 19. Eight days later he extended it to include North Carolina and Virginia.

Both sides expected a short war until the First Battle of Bull Run, on July 21, 1861, shattered that illusion. Adopting a defensive strategy, the CSA established a line of defenses, the Northwest Barrier, running from the mouth of the Tennessee River, down that river to Ft. Henry, overland to Ft. Donelson on the Cumberland River, and along that river to the Allegheny Mountains. Northern Virginia would be defended by a mobile army.

Also now anticipating a prolonged conflict, Northern leaders instituted a strategy designed to execute war of attrition against the Confederacy. Designed by General Winfield Scott, veteran of the Mexican-American War and the senior officer in the Union Army,

the Anaconda Plan—named for the snake which kills its prey by crushing it—was never formally adopted, but Lincoln and Northern planners followed its principles for the remainder of the war. The plan called for the execution of three concurrent operations: a naval blockade of the entire Confederate seacoast, subdividing the Confederacy along the Mississippi River, and keeping pressure on Confederate forces by attacking in Virginia. The Union Navy would take the lead in establishing the blockade and play a virtually



co-equal role in splitting the trans-Mississippi states of Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas from the eight states east of the river. The Navy also played an important support role in operations in Virginia, especially in 1862 and 1865.

During the Civil War, the U.S. Navy was headed by Secretary Gideon Welles, an able administrator who was supported by Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox. Together, they directed the expansion of the Navy from 50 warships in 1861 to 671 by 1865. Their task was made easier by the existence of an established naval bureaucracy; functioning navy yards at Portsmouth (New Hampshire), Charlestown (Boston), Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Washington, and Mare Island (California); and by a solid industrial base able to manufacture all the materials needed to construct, fit out, and supply warships. The Confederate Navy, established by the Confederate Congress on February 21, 1861, had none of these attributes. The most valuable advantage it possessed was a solid officer corps, for, during the early days of the war, 322 of the U.S. Navy's 1,322 commissioned officers had resigned to join the Confederacy.

CSA Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory would struggle throughout the Civil War to find the resources to build a navy able to defend Confederate ports and rivers and counter the Union blockade. On April 20, Virginia forces seized the Norfolk Navy Yard virtually intact, though the yard commander, Captain Hiram Paulding, did manage to burn nine of the warships in the yard and tow away the sloop *Cumberland*. The Confederates also raised the screw frigate *Merrimack*, which had burned to the waterline. The yard's dry dock, ordnance and machine workshops, and store of cannon were particularly valuable captures. Without them, Mallory may have found it impossible to construct the "iron-armored ship" authorized by the Confederate Congress in May. That same month, Secretary Mallory dispatched Commander James D. Bulloch to England with orders to purchase warships, a move that ultimately resulted in procurement of the raiders *Alabama*, *Florida*, and *Shenandoah*.

On June 27, 1861, the Blockade Strategy Board was formed to plan Union naval operations against the coast of the Confederacy. Navy Captain Samuel F. DuPont chaired the body, which included Superintendent of the Coast Survey Alexander Dallas Bache, Major John G. Barnard of the Army Corps of Engineers, and Navy Commander Charles Henry Davis, who served as its secretary. The board issued a series of reports and recommendations that laid the basis for the Union blockade of the South. It selected targets to be attacked and bases to be established, set priorities, and developed the tactics to be employed, such as the sinking of old hulks filled with stones to close passes through coastal islands which could not be patrolled. In July the board suggested dividing the coast of the Confederacy into four theaters—the North and South Atlantic and the East and West Gulf—and establishing squadrons to operate in each.

The U.S. Navy began immediately to attack recommended targets. Expeditions captured Hatteras Inlet on North Carolina's Outer Banks, August 28–29; Ship Island off Biloxi, Mississippi, September 16–17; and Port Royal, South Carolina, November 7. Thus by the end of 1861 the Union Navy possessed key bases for blockading the major ports of the South.

During the same period, the U.S. began to establish a riverine force in the West. Existing vessels were purchased or leased for military use, and on August 7 James B. Eads of St. Louis was awarded a contract to construct seven shallow-draft ironclad gunboats. A month later Union forces began their assault on the Confederate's Northwest Barrier when gunboats *Tyler*, commanded by Commander John Rodgers, and *Lexington*, commanded by Commander Roger Stembel, supported General Ulysses S. Grant's troops in capturing Paducah and Smithland, Kentucky, at the mouths of the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers. The following year naval forces commanded by Flag Officer Andrew Foote hammered Ft. Henry into submission (February 4–6) and supported Grant's attack on Ft. Donelson (February 14) and his stand at Shiloh (April 6).

Meanwhile other naval units began operations aimed at seizing control of the Mississippi. First, they supported capture of Island No. 10 in the north, which capitulated on April 7. From the south they attacked New Orleans, which fell to warships commanded by Flag Officer David G. Farragut on April 25. The loss of New Orleans, the largest city and port in the Confederacy, was a major economic blow to the Southern cause. A second setback came when five of the Eads-built ironclad gunboats commanded by Captain Charles H. Davis, and two rams commanded by Army Colonel Charles Ellet Jr., destroyed the Confederate River Defense Force at Memphis and captured the city on June 6.

That same spring witnessed the first battle between ironclad warships when the CSS *Virginia*, constructed on the raised hull of the *Merrimack*, met the USS *Monitor* in the Battle of Hampton Roads on March 9. Neither was a clear victor. The *Virginia* was forced to cease attacks on Union

blockading warships and withdraw up the James River, but positioned there it prevented General George McClellan's army from advancing on Richmond via that route.

By the beginning of 1862 the Union Navy had added nearly 80 steamers and 60 sailing ships to the number of vessels stationed off Southern ports, and naval personnel grew from 9,000 to 23,000 (including 1,200 officers and 21,000 enlisted men)—numbers





that increased further to over 671 warships (including 65 ironclads) and 60,000 officers and men. To so expand a service requiring the technical expertise of the Navy was no mean task. The Navy drew officers from the merchant marine, using a board to screen volunteers. Thus those officers commissioned for wartime service were experienced mariners who could soon learn naval discipline and be trained in operations and tactics by more senior officers from the prewar navy. Enlisted sailors were initially recruited in the traditional manner, mainly in port cities, then placed aboard receiving ships. There those with no maritime experience received a modicum of training before being assigned to a ship where their training continued, as they progressed from landsman (raw recruit) to able seaman and some to petty officer. The first departure from this system came on the Western waters, where the number of experienced rivermen interested in serving in the Navy was soon exhausted. By late 1862, Flag Officer David Dixon Porter had begun to enlist blacks, who, he reported to Assistant Secretary of the Navy Gustavus Fox, were “better than the white people here.” Porter estimated that he had “shipped about four hundred able bodied contrabands [freed slaves] and owing to the shortness of my crews, have to work them at my guns.” Blacks who escaped slavery by fleeing to naval vessels serving on the blockade or to bases established to support the blockade, such as Port Royal, often joined the service. The approximately 18,000 African Americans who served in the Union Navy during the war comprised about 15 percent of the total enlisted force. They served on virtually every oceangoing ship and river vessel, as well as in the majority of shore stations.

By early 1862 the Navy had enough ships, personnel, and other resources to expand what was becoming a system of blockade support bases. Expeditions were launched that captured Roanoke Island (February 7) and New Bern (March 13), North Carolina, and Galveston, Texas (October 9), so that by year’s end, the Union blockade, less than effective previously, was beginning to take its toll on the Confederacy. Shortages of virtually everything were driving prices skyward, making the people on the home front feel the effects of war.

Life on the blockade could be boring for sailors while their ships stood anchored off Confederate ports or patrolled further out to sea, often without sighting another vessel for days on end. Living conditions on board were far from pleasant and were particularly disagreeable on the new ironclads: the lack of ventilation made the heat stifling below decks, the light was so dim that it made eating difficult and reading impossible, and the vessels pitched and rolled even in relatively calm seas enough to make the saltiest seadog ill. Food was of low quality throughout the service, hours were long, and discipline harsh.

Despite these drawbacks, blockade service was attractive to many young men because it was safer than serving in the army and held the prospect of earning prize money for the capture of blockade runners. During the war approximately \$25 million in prize money was awarded to naval officers and enlisted men serving on the blockade.

To counter the blockade the Confederacy sent to sea several commerce raiders, including the *Georgia*, *Chickamauga*, and *Shenandoah*, in an attempt to force Lincoln to withdraw warships from the blockade and send them in pursuit of the raiders. The most successful of the early raiders, the CSS *Sumter*, ran the Union blockade of the Mississippi River at the end of June 1861 and over the next seven months captured or destroyed 18 U.S. merchant ships before being cornered in the harbor at Gibraltar by three Union warships. In April 1862 its commander, Raphael Semmes, abandoned the *Sumter* and traveled to England, where he took command of the CSS *Alabama*, then under construction near Liverpool. In August the screw sloop-of-war sailed to the Azores and took on guns, ammunition, and coal.

Under Semmes's command the *Alabama* set off on a 21-month, 75,000-mile voyage of destruction that made it the most successful commerce raider in history. Cruising near the Azores it destroyed 10 U.S. whaling ships; then it crossed the Atlantic to Newfoundland, where it sank another 11. Moving to the Gulf of Mexico in January 1863, it sank the USS *Hatteras* off Galveston, Texas—the only time a Confederate warship sank a U.S. warship on the high seas—then headed for the Cape of Good Hope. En route the *Alabama*

captured the bark *Conrad* and converted it into a commerce raider. Following an Indian Ocean cruise, the *Alabama* limped into Cherbourg, France, for repairs. She was cornered there by the USS *Kearsarge*, one of a dozen U.S. ships pursuing her. On June 19 the two met in battle seven miles off the French coast. The *Alabama*'s powder was weakened by age and dampness, and any of her shot that struck the *Kearsarge* did little damage because Captain John Winslow had ordered chains draped over the sides of his ship to serve as armor. After an hour's battle the *Alabama* began to sink. Before its destruction, the *Alabama* had captured 69 U.S. merchant ships worth \$6.5 million and caused hundreds of others to change their registry to avoid seizure.

Another Merseyside shipyard built a second commerce raider for the Confederacy in 1862. British crewmen sailed the *Florida* to Nassau and turned it over to Commander John N. Maffitt, CSN, who ran her through the blockade at Mobile. Four months later Maffitt again put to sea and began destroying U.S. merchant ships, including the *Jacob Bell*, a clipper ship bound from Swatow, China, to New York. Carrying a cargo of tea, cassia, and camphor valued at \$1.5 million, it was the most valuable prize ever taken by a Confederate raider. In all, the *Florida* took 37 prizes before entering port at Bahia, Brazil, on October 4, 1864; there the USS *Wachusett* violated international law by seizing the ship in neutral waters. It towed the *Florida* to the Chesapeake Bay, where she was destroyed by a mysterious fire.

Tactically successful, these raiders seriously damaged U.S. commerce, though they failed to achieve their strategic goal of significantly weakening the Union blockade that was strangling the South. Neither did the Confederate Navy's attempt to employ new technology succeed on a strategic level. Mines, then called torpedoes, were the most successful of the new weapons. Hundreds were planted in the approaches to port cities and were effective until they began to leak—as was the case at Mobile Bay, where then—Rear Admiral David Farragut passed through a minefield exclaiming, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!" Other Union vessels were not as lucky. The USS *Cairo* became the first

of 58 ships sunk by Confederate mines. Several blockading vessels, including the monitor *Pataspco*, struck mines and sank, but the Union possessed enough ships to quickly replace them. The steam torpedo boat CSS *David*, armed with a spar torpedo, damaged the Federal ironclad *New Ironsides* off Charleston in October 1863 but was unable to sink it or drive it off station. The following spring the *David* attacked the Federal gunboat *Memphis* and the frigate *Wabash* but again inflicted little damage. Charleston was also the site of the first sinking of a warship by a submarine when the *H. L. Hunley* drove a spar torpedo into the USS *Housatonic*, sending the blockader to the bottom. Unfortunately for the South, the *Hunley* itself floundered before making it back to port. Thus, while harbingers of naval weapons of the future, the torpedoes had a relatively minor impact on the blockade, which by 1865 was clearly achieving its goals.

The Confederate blockade runners that were the most successful were light, steam-powered vessels of shallow draft. The majority burned smokeless anthracite coal and dashed into Confederate ports from neutral bases in Bermuda, the Bahamas, and Cuba. Except for those of the Ordnance Board, most blockade runners carried high-value cargoes, rather than the heavy weapons and metals so needed by the Confederacy—nor did many carry Southern exports, thereby depriving the South of much-needed gold and silver.

Successful blockade runners made fortunes transporting small arms, medicines, and such luxury goods as coffee, silks, and wines, though some Confederate citizens viewed them contemptuously as profiteers. Though by 1865 the blockade was much more effective, it was never impervious—the last successful blockade runner, the *Lark*, made the run from Galveston to Havana in May of 1865, the last month of the conflict. During four years of war a total of 1,449 vessels were captured and 351 others destroyed by the Union Navy. Most of these were coastal traders—210 true blockade runners were captured and 85 destroyed. Perhaps the greatest impact of the blockade was on coastal communication, compounding the woes of the transportation-poor South and adding to the hardships endured by Confederate civilians.

During 1863 Union forces finished taking control of the Mississippi River. David Farragut, who had recently become the U.S. Navy's first rear admiral, led ships upriver from New Orleans to attack Port Hudson, while riverine vessels commanded by David Dixon Porter pressed southward in support of General U. S. Grant's campaign against Vicksburg, the last Confederate strong point on the river. Ships from Porter's flotilla launched expeditions into the Yazoo River and Steele's Bayou, then transported Grant's army across the Mississippi so it could bypass Confederate defenses on the east bank of the river north of Vicksburg, and back across the river so it could approach the city from the south and east. The fall of Vicksburg on July 4, 1863, was the turning point of the war in the West. These triumphs were balanced by the failure of a major attack on Charleston, South Carolina, however, by a flotilla of monitor-type iron warships in April.

In 1864 Union naval forces narrowly averted defeat in the Red River Campaign but were much more successful in the less dramatic but vital job of opening a supply route up the James River to support the operations of Grant's army around Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia. Real progress was also made at sea, where U.S. forces captured Tampa, Florida, in May and the forts guarding Mobile Bay in August. In that engagement Farragut led a dozen vessels through the minefield off Ft. Morgan and into the harbor. Although he lacked the troops needed to occupy the city of Mobile, his control of the bay closed the last important Confederate port open to blockade runners on the Gulf of Mexico.



**David Glasgow Farragut.**

By the end of the year the United States had assembled the largest amphibious expedition in its history. Fifty-five warships and 45 auxiliaries and transports under the command of Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter transported General Benjamin Butler's 15,000-man army to the coast of North Carolina for an attack of the port of Wilmington. On Christmas Eve, Porter's ships opened a massive bombardment on Ft. Fisher 20 miles below Wilmington at the mouth of the Cape Fear River, driving the Confederate defenders into bombproof shelters. The next day Butler sent 3,000 of his men ashore but re-embarked them when it became clear that the naval bombardment had had little effect on Confederate defenses. Three weeks later, on January 15, Porter renewed the bombardment, this time knocking 72 of Ft. Fisher's 75 guns out of service. Porter then landed 2,262 seamen and marines, who launched a diversionary attack along the beach while 4,000 army troops attacked the western end of Confederate defenses. After six hours of desperate fighting, the Confederates surrendered the fort. Six weeks later Union forces advanced up the river and occupied the city of Wilmington, closing the last Confederate port open to blockade runners.

Individual heroism and daring, and effective leadership characterized the Civil War as fought on rivers and at sea by both sides, but in the end overwhelming U.S. resources, including shipyards, engine and ironworks, merchant shipping, and manpower laid the basis for U.S. victory at sea, just as the North's resources brought victory on land. The Union Navy could simply send more ships to sea and build and operate riverine vessels in numbers the Confederate States of America could not match. The Confederate States Navy was able to counter with less than a third the number of ships deployed by the United States Navy and never had more than thirty commerce raiders at sea at a time.

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# NAVAL SONGS OF THE CIVIL WAR ERA

*Dan Milner*

The majority of maritime songs from the Civil War period are about a handful of topics that captivated public attention during the four-year-long conflict: commerce raiders built to damage the economy of the mercantile-industrial North; ships that maintained or defied the Federal blockade of Southern harbors; massive naval assaults on strategic points; close-quarters duels meted out by heavily armed vessels; and the separation of loved ones. Firsthand observers who lived to tell the tales of battle and sing the praises of those who fought wrote many songs during the War Between the States. Others were penned by paid songwriters who may only have read newspaper reports of battles; their songs were performed in musical theaters and at recruiting drives, sold by hawkers on street corners, and sent by mail to rural hamlets that typically received news—even alarming news—at a slower pace. Composers who sought to bring refined civility to the drawing rooms of middle- and upper-class America wrote more sophisticated pieces intended to be sung to the harmonious accompaniment of the pianoforte. The songs on this recording are representative of the historical themes, musical paradigms, and artistic expressions of the Civil War period. Selected from Union, Confederate, and British sources, they are performed here with verve and sensitivity by a cadre of acclaimed singers and musicians.

## 1. THE FIGHT OF THE HATTERAS AND ALABAMA

Jeff Davis, vocals and banjos

Late in the day on January 11, 1863, the commerce raider *Alabama* arrived off Galveston and found the port blockaded by six Union warships. One of these, the side-wheel paddle steamer USS *Hatteras*, was dispatched to investigate the interloper. The Confederate ship's commander, Raphael Semmes, drew his pursuer down the coast but came about after nightfall. When challenged, he at first identified his vessel as a British ship but later, at point-blank range, proclaimed her as the CSS *Alabama* and quickly poured a broadside into his adversary. The engagement lasted just 13 minutes and marked the only sinking of a Federal Navy ship at sea by a vessel of the Confederate Navy. The *Alabama* carried an international crew including many English sailors, some Germans and Irish, and even a few Northerners. This song and the following quote are taken from Frank Moore's *The Civil War in Song and Story* (1865, 91): "The *Alabama* had the usual quota of wits and fun-makers among her crew. An Irish fiddler on board is the life of the forecabin. When the men are off-duty he sets them dancing to his lighter strains, or, dividing them into Northerners and Southerners, like a true Irishman, he gets up a sham fight to the spirit-stirring strains of a march, in which the Northerners are, of course, invariably beaten. Another sailor, Frank Townsend, is no mean poet, as will be seen from the verses which here follow. He had sung the exploits of their beloved ship to his messmates in rude and vigorous strains." Townsend's words are here set to a tune variant of "Brennan on the Moor."



Raphael Semmes.



## 2. THE JAMESTOWN HOMEWARD BOUND

David Coffin, vocals and concertina; Gabriel Donohue, piano

The USS *Jamestown* was a sloop-of-war built at the Norfolk Navy Yard and commissioned on December 12, 1844. From 1845 to 1850, she searched the coast of West Africa for slavers, brought emergency food aid to famine-stricken Ireland, and cruised the Mediterranean Sea in support of American interests. This homeward-bound forecastle song dates from her Mediterranean voyage and was, no doubt, sung shipboard during 1861 and 1862, when the *Jamestown's* crew of 168 officers and men endured long passages of inactivity peppered with moments of intense action while serving with the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Later reassigned to the Pacific, the *Jamestown* spent the remainder of the war protecting Union merchant craft and Yankee whalers from Confederate raiders. “The *Jamestown* Homeward Bound” appears in Joanna C. Colcord’s *Songs of American Sailormen* (1938, 132), where it is described as “a favorite song of the old navy.” Miss Colcord’s source was a mariner named Joseph McGinnis.

## 3. FARRAGUT’S BALL

Dan Milner, vocals; Gabriel Donohue, piano

The dark humor of this ballad recounts the Battle of Mobile Bay, which closed the Confederacy’s last major port on the Gulf of Mexico. The encounter is best known for the words “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!” reputedly shouted by Rear Admiral David Farragut. During the Civil War, *torpedo* was understood to mean a non-motorized, stationary maritime mine. On the morning of August 5, 1864, a fleet of 19 Union warships prepared to run a choke point between Ft. Mason and a minefield in lower Mobile Bay. Unmentioned in this ballad is that the lead vessel, the monitor USS *Tecumseh*, struck a torpedo mine and sank at once, killing 93 men. Fortunately for the Northerners, the remainder of the flotilla passed through safely. Once inside the upper bay, they were met

by a smaller Confederate Navy fleet under Admiral Franklin Buchanan—one that included a large, well-armored, and very powerful ironclad, the CSS *Tennessee*. After dispensing with Buchanan's three wooden gunboats, the Union fleet was preparing to anchor for the night when the *Tennessee* began its advance. Farragut's ships rammed the *Tennessee* four times but inflicted only self-damage. The staunch ironclad was finally disabled only by prolonged point-blank fire from a bevy of Union craft.

In a carryover from the antebellum Northern merchant fleet, the wartime U.S. Navy was racially integrated. African American John H. Lawson was awarded the Medal of Honor for heroism displayed during the Battle of Mobile Bay.



David Glasgow Farragut.

"Farragut's Ball" is a parody of a popular Irish comedic song, "Lanigan's Ball," the story of a social occasion gone awry; its currency is indicative of the heavy Irish influence on American popular music during the period. The lyric appears on a broadside printed by Henry De Marsan of New York City with attribution to "J.E.V. U.S. Steamer *Richmond*."

#### **4. THE FLORIDA'S CRUISE**

Jeff Davis, vocals and fiddle

The construction of the CSS *Florida*, the South's first foreign-built commerce raider, was complicated by the neutral stance of the United Kingdom. Shortly after his arrival in England in June 1861, Confederate Navy agent James Bulloch settled on a plan to circumvent British neutrality and law: construct commerce destroyers in the U.K. but

fit their armaments elsewhere. The *Florida* was built in the Liverpool yard of William C. Miller & Sons with engines supplied by Fawcett & Preston. Code-named *Oreto* to conceal her intended use, she was closely based on a Royal Navy gunboat design. In May 1862, a British captain sailed the vessel to Nassau and delivered her into the hands of CSN Lieutenant John N. Maffitt. Yellow fever broke out while Maffitt was training his men, but the ship was commissioned on August 17, though neither she nor her crew was ready for action. In September, they ran the gauntlet into Mobile, sustaining moderate damage. This song begins early on the morning of January 16, 1863, as the *Florida* finds her way back out through the Union blockade and eludes her pursuers.

The commerce raider patrolled the Caribbean, the east coasts of North and South America, and the Azores. She took 37 prizes, including 24 under Maffitt. The *Florida* was seized at Bahia in violation of Brazil's neutrality in October 1864.

This ballad appears in *The Civil War in Song and Story*, where it is attributed to "a foretopman of the CSS *Florida*" (Moore 1865, 188), and is set here to the tune of "Solicitude" from the 1854 edition of William Walker's *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion*.

## **5. THE OLD VIRGINIA LOWLANDS, LOW**

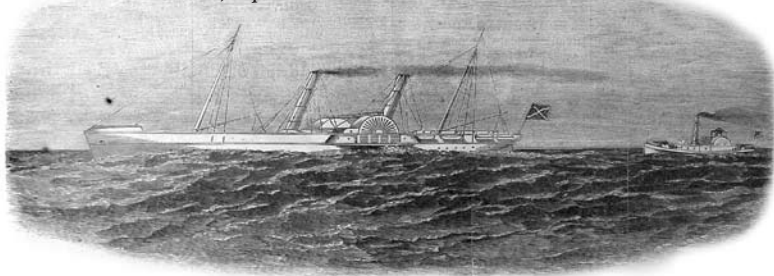
David Coffin, vocals and concertina

On April 20, 1861, the U.S. Navy evacuated the Norfolk Navy Yard, burning and scuttling numerous ships on its departure, including the propeller-driven steam frigate *Merrimack* (frequently misspelled as *Merrimac*). The hull was raised after the State of Virginia commandeered the yard. Subsequently, the Confederacy decided to reuse the *Merrimack* as the platform for an ironclad to be named CSS *Virginia*. News quickly reached the North, where work commenced on three ironclads, including the USS *Monitor*. Built at the Continental Iron Works in Greenpoint (now a part of New York City), the *Monitor* was commissioned on February 25, 1862, and departed for Hampton Roads under tow

on March 6. The *Monitor* was still underway when the *Virginia* (still called *Merrimack* by Northerners) emerged from the Elizabeth River and headed straight towards the Union ships blockading the James River. The *Virginia* first fired, then fatally rammed the USS *Cumberland*, but the ram would not disgorge and the sinking weight of the *Cumberland* threatened to carry the *Virginia* down with it. Once the ram finally broke off, the ironclad raked the USS *Congress* with fire, forcing her to surrender. She last engaged with the USS *Minnesota* before withdrawing at nightfall. The *Monitor* arrived at 9 p.m. that evening and fired her first shot at the *Virginia* the following morning at 8:45. This first-ever battle between two ironclad warships resulted in a stalemate. But it was a clear sign of things to come, and later that year the U.S. Department of the Navy requested funding for 21 more ironclads.

This ballad was published by Henry De Marsan of New York, specifying the tune “Pompey Smith,” also associated with the Scots whaling ballad, “The Bonnie Ship the *Diamond*” and other maritime songs.

**The Blockade Runner, *Hope*.**



## 6. THE BLOCKADE RUNNER

Dan Milner, vocals; Bob Conroy, banjo; Arthur Garnett, Anglo concertina; Harry Lowrey, English concertina

In the early months of the war before the Federal blockade was fully deployed, as many as nine in ten blockade runners successfully evaded seizure by U.S. Navy craft; but from 1862 onwards, when interception increased, fast, low-draft steamers became *de rigueur*. Inbound cargoes typically consisted of high-value consumer goods, arms and other strategic products that could not be manufactured in the Confederacy. Cotton bound for British mills was carried on the return voyage, while mail and government dispatches traveled in both directions. Many blockade runners were built in shipyards along Scotland's River Clyde, and this ballad was printed nearby at The Poet's Box in Glasgow. Civil War-era broadsides almost never contained musical notation and, as was the case here, did not always indicate intended tunes. Dan Milner wrote the melody. "The Blockade Runner" was recorded live in the old Lancashire cotton mill town of Blackburn.

## 7. THE BOLD PRIVATEER

Jeff Davis, vocals, dulcimers, and banjos

This short ballad was well known in Britain and America through the broadside press, and has been collected from tradition in Canada, England, Ireland, and the United States. It was also in the repertoire of the famous Christy's Minstrels, who sang to packed houses on both sides of the Atlantic in the mid-19th century. Jeff Davis's rendition derives from one found in *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore* (1957), collected from C. K. "Tink" Tillett at Wanchese, Roanoke Island, in the early 1920s. The South's commerce raiders were actually official Confederate States Navy ships, but the appellation of *privateer* held a certain bucko allure.



## **8. A YANKEE MAN-OF-WAR**

Dan Milner, Deirdre Murtha, and Bonnie Milner, vocals

The use of a broken token (a torn handkerchief in this case) by parted lovers as a means of remembrance and recognition is a common ballad motif. Returning soldiers and sailors sometimes appeared in disguise to test their sweethearts' constancy. This jingoistic piece originated during the First Opium War (1839–1842), when it was printed on song sheets in London and other cities of the United Kingdom, typically under the titles of “Lovely Susan” or “The British Man-of-War.” Traditional singers readily adopted it, and versions appear in virtually all important British folk song collections. Mariners and migrants carried the narrative to North America. Gale Huntington came across it in the logs of the

New Bedford whaling ships *Cortes* (1847) and *Catalpa* (1856), and it was also found during the 20th century in rural Maine, Newfoundland, Ontario, and Quebec. “The British Man-of-War” evidently diffused quickly to the United States because a derivative American broadside was on sale in Philadelphia during the Mexican-American War (1846–1848). The text sung here is a collation of two New York broadsides: “A Yankee Man-of-War,” published by Charles Magnus; and “A Yankee Man of War, No. 2,” attributed to M. Hogan and published by Henry De Marsan. The melody is from Hampshire, England, collected by George Gardiner from George Blake in 1906.

## 9. THE SAILOR'S GRAVE

David Coffin, vocals and concertina

The following account is excerpted from *The Civil War in Song and Story* (Moore 1865, 193): “A melancholy incident occurred upon the steamship *Fannie*, while being chased by a Yankee man-of-war.... Preparations had to be completed for his burial, which took place amid all the excitement of the chase. A burial at sea is a ceremony at all times full of solemnity, but it is when coupled with such events as this that war assumes its most repulsive aspect. In that frail little steamer, quivering with her efforts to escape the relentless fate bearing down on her with frowning guns, and the ferocity of a tiger, while every living heart on board was throbbing with anxiety for safety, they were suddenly called upon to render the last and most solemn rites known to our existence. No time then to stop in mid-ocean, while words that consigned ‘dust to dust, ashes to ashes,’ went up in presence of the grim destroyer, but still dashing onward through the waves—a short and hurried service, a heavy splash, and a body sank to its eternal resting-place in the broad ocean’s bosom, while all that was dear to it in life sped from it on its way like the arrow from the bow.” “The Sailor’s Grave” appeared on a broadside printed in New York by Henry De Marsan sometime between 1861 and 1864. Singer David Coffin composed this fitting melody.

## 10. THE **BROOKLYN**, SLOOP-OF-WAR

Dan Milner, vocals; Jeff Davis, banjo and fiddles

The political geography of New Orleans—the largest city in the Confederacy and situated near the mouth of the massive Mississippi River system—dictated that it would be an important early objective of the Union Naval Planning Board. On April 18, 1862, a fleet of 17 warships, six gunboats, and 19 mortar boats under Flag Officer David G. Farragut assembled in the lower reaches of the Mississippi poised to strike upriver. This ballad, adapted from a 20-verse composition, “The Capture of New Orleans” by William Densmore of the USS *Brooklyn*, gives a good account of the action, which proved decisive when a passage was forged through obstructions laid in the river by Confederate forces, allowing the Federal fleet to reach Fts. Jackson and St. Philip and battle its way on through to the Crescent City. Union forces finally occupied an unwelcoming New Orleans on May 1.



THE UNITED STATES SLOOP OF WAR "BROOKLYN."

In 1860, Brooklyn (yet to be incorporated into New York) was the third largest city in the United States; New Orleans was sixth, Charleston was 22nd, and Richmond 25th.

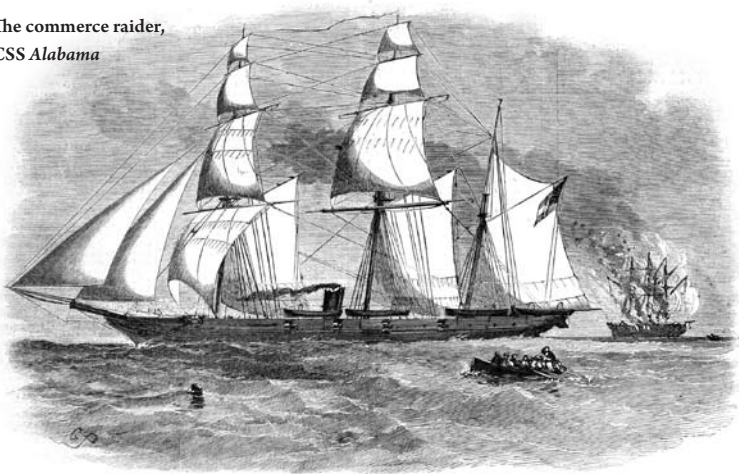


## II. THE ALABAMA

Jeff Davis, vocals; Mark Manuel, piano; Deirdre Murtha, Dan Milner, chorus

With few exceptions—notably Gettysburg—the Confederacy's land war strategy relied on steadfast defense of its home ground; but, at sea, its commerce raiders ranged the world in an effort to disrupt U.S. commercial shipping, proclaim the independence of the Confederate States, and draw Union Navy ships off blockade duty. The *Alabama* never once sailed into a Southern port, but visions of the ship afloat thousands of miles from its spiritual homeland must have struck a resounding chord in many drawing rooms within

The commerce raider,  
*CSS Alabama*



the Confederacy. This parlor song was written by E. King with music by F. W. Rosier, and was published in 1864 by Geo. Dunn & Company, Richmond.

## 12. THE FATE OF THE PIRATE ALABAMA

David Coffin, vocals and concertina

“The Fate of the Pirate *Alabama*” was composed by R. B. Nicol to the traditional tune of “The Heights of Alma” and published on a broadside in Washington, D.C., in 1864. Captain John A. Winslow of the *Kearsarge* was fooled when Semmes and 41 of his officers and crew were snatched from beneath his nose by the British pleasure yacht *Deerhound*. His report to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles reads, “Toward the close of the action between the *Alabama* [and *Kearsarge*] ... all available sail was made on the former for the purpose of again reaching Cherbourg. When the object was apparent, the *Kearsarge* was steered across the bow of the *Alabama* for a raking fire, but before reaching this point the *Alabama* struck [her colors] .... An English yacht, the *Deerhound*, had approached near the *Kearsarge* at this time, when I hailed and begged the commander to run down to



the *Alabama* ... and assist in picking up the men.... [He] steamed toward the *Alabama*, but the latter sank almost immediately.... It was reported to me that the *Deerhound* was moving off. I could not believe that the commander of that vessel could be guilty of so disgraceful an act as taking our prisoners [away].... I am sorry to say that I was mistaken; the *Deerhound* made off with Captain Semmes and others” (Moore 1866, 221). Meanwhile, Captain Evan Jones of the *Deerhound* described the scene on board his yacht: “Mr. Kell, the first officer of the *Alabama*, was rescued with Semmes; and Semmes probably owed his life to him, as he unquestionably did his liberty. It was Kell who suggested that Semmes should lie flat in the bottom of the boat, to prevent his recognition by the party in the *Kearsarge’s* launch, which was close by us, and who donned himself one of our crew hats, with the word ‘*Deerhound*’ on it” (Sinclair 1895, 279).

### 13. THE MONITOR & MERRIMAC

Dan Milner, vocals and drum; Gabriel Donohue, piano; Kate Bowerman, clarinet and piccolo; Melissa Gardiner, trombone; Bonnie Milner, Deirdre Murtha, and Don Stiffe, chorus

Swedish-born inventor John Ericsson designed the radically different ironclad USS *Monitor*, a ship of relatively low draft that topped out only 18 inches above the waterline and sported a revolving turret that housed two 11-inch guns firing 180-pound solid shot. The *Monitor’s* captain, Lieutenant John L. Worden, was blinded during the Battle of Hampton Roads and passed command to Lieutenant Samuel D. Greene, who continued the battle on his own initiative and achieved a stalemate. The *Yorktown* and



John L. Worden

*Jamestown* (called “the other” in this song) were civilian side-wheel steamers seized by the State of Virginia in April 1861 and later conveyed to the Confederate Navy for use as the gunboats CSS *Patrick Henry* and CSS *Thomas Jefferson*. Both saw action in support of the CSS *Virginia* on March 8 and 9, 1862.

These words, written by Charles A. Clark, were printed on a song sheet in New York by Henry De Marsan. No tune was cited, so Dan Milner composed this melody. Comic singers, who delivered pieces such as this, were the royalty of pre-vaudeville variety theater. Tony Pastor, an Italian American born in Greenwich Village and the king of music halls in the North during the Civil War, sang a similar song about the *Monitor* and *Merrimack*.

Dan Milner  
Department of American and Canadian Studies  
University of Birmingham

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## THE SINGERS

**Dan Milner** comes from a long line of Irish traditional singers. He is a cultural geographer and historian, a folk song collector and researcher, a writer for *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore* and other publications, a former National Park Ranger at Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, and an instructor in New York University's freshman honors program. *Irish Pirate Ballads*, Dan's first Smithsonian Folkways CD, was nominated for two 2010 Independent Music Awards (Best Album and Best Song – World Traditional). His other recordings, including *Irish Ballads & Songs of the Sea*, and his book of folk songs, *The Bonnie Bunch of Roses*, are considered classics. [www.myspace.com/geomusicology](http://www.myspace.com/geomusicology).

Bookings: [geomusicology@yahoo.com](mailto:geomusicology@yahoo.com)

**David Coffin** is perhaps best known as Master of Ceremonies of the Boston *Revels* solstice celebrations, his rich baritone having graced over fifty such productions. As Education Director of the Boston Early Music Festival, he regularly demonstrates his virtuoso ability on period instruments including the bombard, cornamuse, and recorder. Even more audiences have experienced David's connectivity and quick wit during his tour-de-force school programs. A descendent of Tristram Coffin, who settled on Nantucket in 1642, and son of Yale chaplain William Sloane Coffin and a grandson of famous classical pianist Artur Schnabel, David has made four acclaimed recordings, including his latest, *Last Trip Home*. [www.davidcoffin.com](http://www.davidcoffin.com)

**Jeff Davis** is one of the nation's foremost interpreters of American folk music. He became "hooked" on the tradition after first hearing "Tom Dooley" and meeting folk song collector Frank Warner, who visited Jeff's school and sang songs that he and his wife, Anne, had found on their travels through rural America. Jeff soon took up old-time banjo and fiddle. While at Duke University, he became a regular at the fiddlers' conventions at Galax, Virginia, and later toured with Jeff Warner in the Smithsonian's National Associates Program. Today, he is busy with educational projects and concerts in the U.S. and abroad. Jeff's recent CD, *Some Fabulous Yonder*, has received many accolades. [www.jeffdavis.com](http://www.jeffdavis.com)

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## GUEST MUSICIANS AND SINGERS

**Gabriel Donohue** toured for three years as a guest musician with The Chieftains. A gifted multi-instrumentalist and singer, he has performed at the White House, recorded with the Boston Pops, and played with dance phenomenon Michael Flatley. **Bonnie Milner** and **Deirdre Murtha** are members of The Johnson Girls, acknowledged as the world's finest and foremost all-woman maritime song group. Both work in education and the arts in the Greater New York area. **Kate Bowerman** teaches music at a Brooklyn, New York, magnet school. She is also a member of The Washington Square Harp & Shamrock Orchestra. **Mark Manuel** is a music instructor in Worcester, Massachusetts. Formerly on the faculty of Franklin Pierce College, his interests range from classical and jazz piano to bluegrass banjo. **Melissa Gardiner** is a graduate of The Juilliard School of Music and an up-and-coming jazz musician in New York City. **Bob Conroy** is a solo singer, and a member of the string band, Stout, and The New York Packet maritime song ensemble. Singer-songwriter **Don Stiffe**, raised in County Galway, Ireland, is a frequent visitor to the United States.

**Arthur Garnett** and **Harry Lowrey** are founding members of Stormalong John of Liverpool, England's renowned sea music group.

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# CREDITS

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## ABOUT SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

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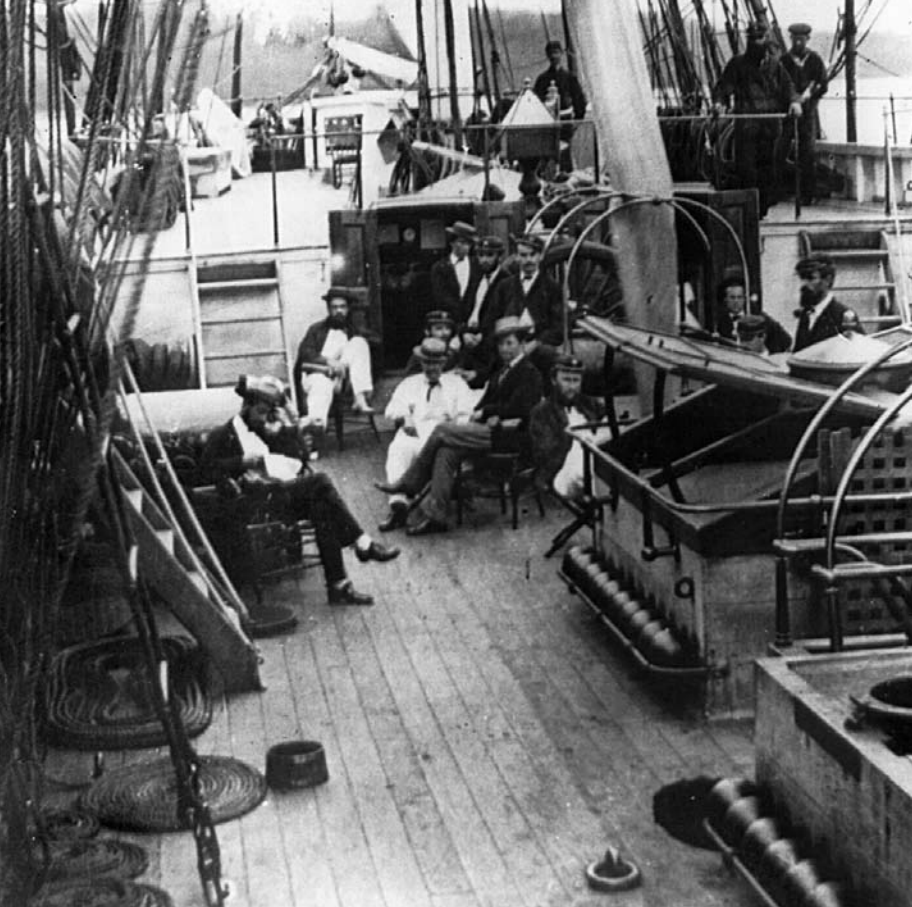
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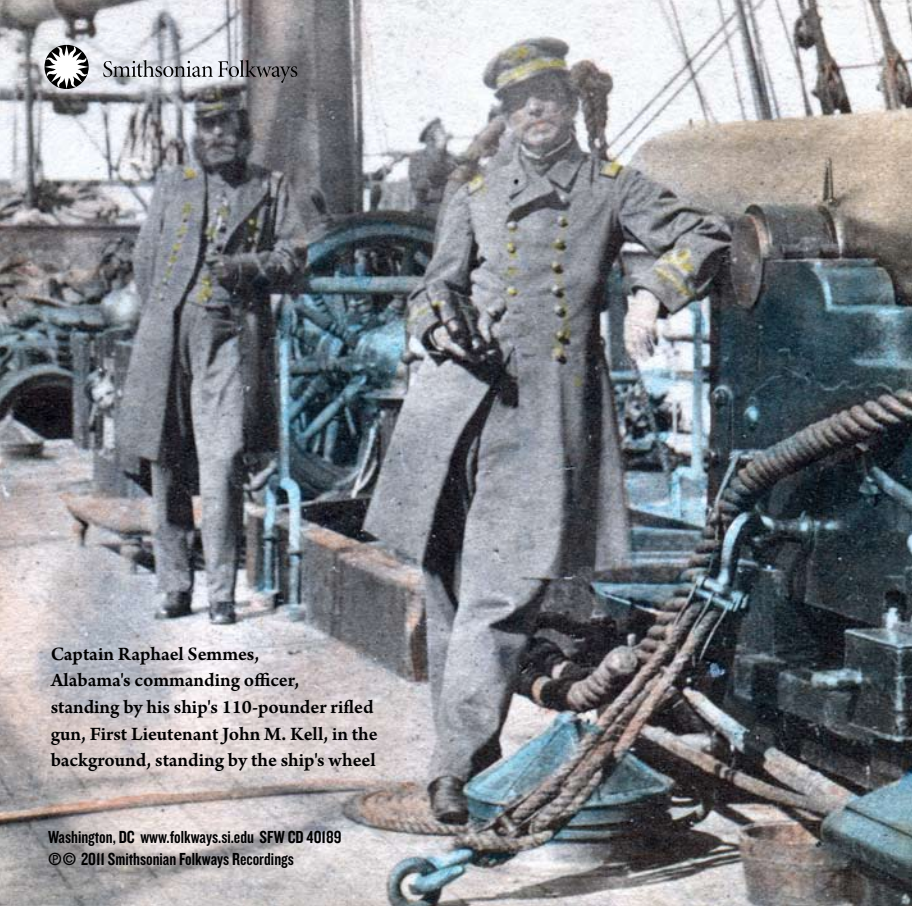
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Smithsonian Folkways



Captain Raphael Semmes,  
Alabama's commanding officer,  
standing by his ship's 110-pounder rifled  
gun, First Lieutenant John M. Kell, in the  
background, standing by the ship's wheel

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# SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

# CIVIL WAR NAVAL SONGS

Dan Milner, David Coffin, Jeff Davis

These thirteen authentic maritime songs from the era of the American Civil War (1861–65) intone the story of war on the water. They were sounds of the cramped quarters of Union and Confederate fighting ships as well as merchant craft that sailed in constant peril, of bustling taverns and variety theaters where sailors and citizens alike recharged their patriotic spirit, and of the parlors of homes where loved ones waited in fear and longing. Drawn from Northern, Southern, and British sources, they are performed by an all-star crew of singers and musicians. 52 Minutes, 36-Page booklet, extensive notes and historic images.



The encounter between the USS *Monitor* (foreground) and CSS *Virginia* (rear)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. The Fight of the <i>Hatteras</i> and <i>Alabama</i> 3:06 | 7. The Bold Privateer 3:43                     |
| 2. The <i>Jamestown</i> Homeward Bound 3:44                 | 8. A Yankee Man-of-War 3:25                    |
| 3. Farragut's Ball 4:12                                     | 9. The Sailor's Grave 3:20                     |
| 4. The <i>Florida's</i> Cruise 5:37                         | 10. The <i>Brooklyn</i> , Sloop-of-War 4:34    |
| 5. The Old Virginia Lowlands, Low 4:37                      | 11. The <i>Alabama</i> 4:33                    |
| 6. The Blockade Runner 3:41                                 | 12. The Fate of the Pirate <i>Alabama</i> 2:42 |
|   | 13. The <i>Monitor</i> & <i>Merrimac</i> 4:54  |



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