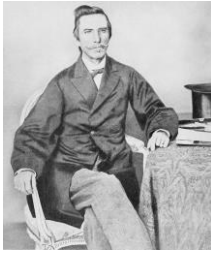


Raphael Semmes, Confederate Raider



Born in Charles County, Maryland on September 27, 1809, he attended the Charlotte Hall Military Academy in Charlotte Hall, Maryland. Upon graduation, Raphael Semmes remained true to Maryland's maritime tradition, pursuing a naval career like so many other Marylanders in Confederate Naval service - Admiral Franklin Buchanan, Commodore George Nichols Hollins, and Joseph Ridgaway of the CSS Hunley.

Entering the US Navy as a midshipman on April 1, 1826, he continued to study law and was admitted to the Maryland bar in 1834. Rising to the rank of Commander, his assignments included surveying the waters of the Mississippi Sound, commanding the USS Somers during the Mexican War, accompanying the landing force at Veracruz, and serving as an Inspector of Provisions at the Pensacola Naval Yard.

Upon learning of the South's secession, he resigned his Commission in the US Navy and was commissioned a Commander in the Confederate States Navy. He suggested to Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen Mallory that to be effective, the Navy's focus should be on attacking the North's commercial vessels. Provided with a 500-ton retrofitted steamer commissioned the CSS Sumter, Semmes and his crew captured or destroyed eighteen enemy vessels in less than one year, keeping his promise to Mallory that he would "do the enemy's commerce the greatest injury in the shortest time.

Subsequently, Semmes was given command of the CSS Alabama, a screw sloop of war purpose built to aid Semme's raiding activities. He and his crew established an impressive record, conducting seven expeditionary raids from the Eastern Atlantic to Java and destroying 65 Northern merchant ships or whalers within a twenty-two-month period. The economic loss to the North was \$6,000,000, equivalent to approximately \$114,000,000 in today's dollars.

Regretfully, the Alabama encountered the heavily armored steam sloop USS Kearsarge off the coast of Cherbourg, France on June 19, 1864. The Kearsarge enjoyed several advantages over the Alabama in terms of speed, heavier guns, and fresh munitions. During the course of the engagement, both ships received direct hits, but the Kearsarge prevailed, and the Alabama crew had to abandon the sinking ship.

Upon his return to the Confederate States, Raphael Semmes was appointed a Rear Admiral and assigned command of the James River Squadron. In the closing days of the war, he served briefly as a Brigadier General, leading a naval force on land as an infantry unit and surrendering with General Joseph Johnston on April 26, 1865

Following the war, Semmes resumed his practice of law and served for a time as a professor of Philosophy and Literature at Louisiana State Seminary. A prolific writer, he published "Memoirs of Service Afloat during the War Between the States in 1877. Admiral Semmes passed away on August 30, 1867 at sixty-seven years of age, and was interred at the Catholic Cemetery in Mobile, Alabama