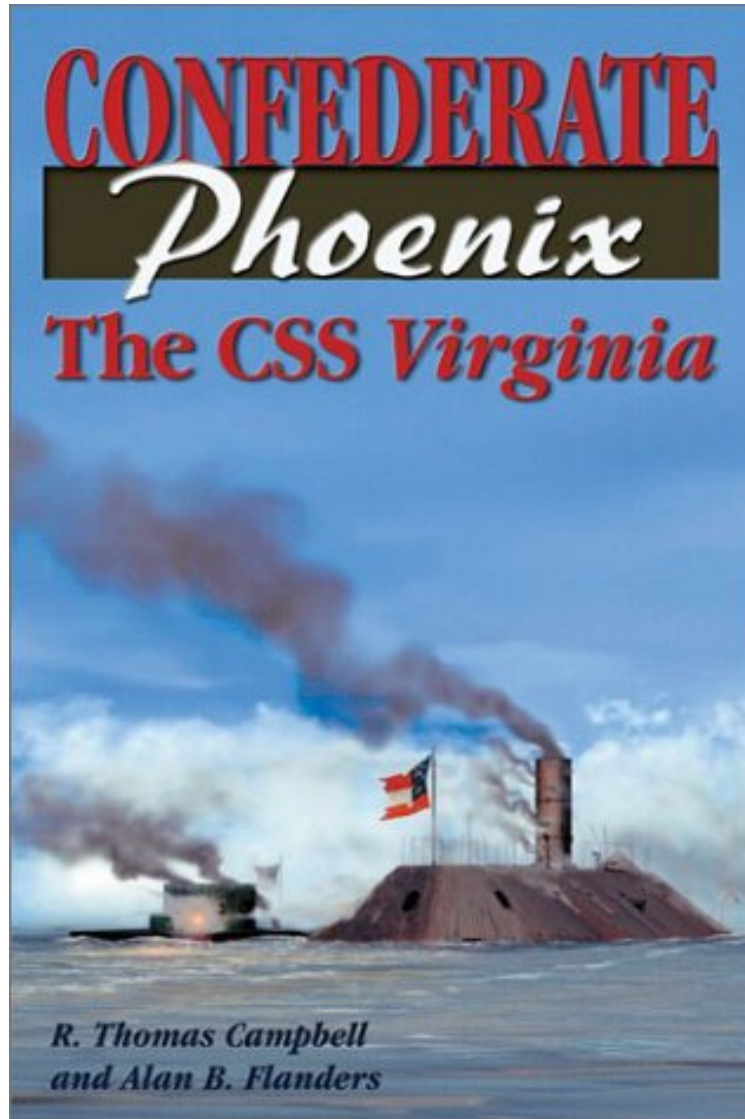


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Confederate Phoenix: The CSS Virginia

R Thomas Campbell, Alan B Flanders
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R Thomas Campbell, Alan B Flanders : Confederate Phoenix: The CSS Virginia before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Confederate Phoenix: The CSS Virginia:

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powered 40-gun frigate of 3,500 tons. It was launched from the Boston Navy Yard at Charles Town, Massachusetts in June, 1855, and although in its best days it never exceeded seven knots, it was for several years the pride of the U.S. Navy. Immediately after its completion, the USS Merrimack served with the West Indian Squadron for a year before being decommissioned for engine repairs in 1857. In September, 1857, she returned to service as the flagship of the U.S. Pacific Squadron and remained with that station until it was again decommissioned for an extensive equipment overhaul at Norfolk Gosport Navy Yard, Virginia in February, 1860. It fell into Confederate hands when the Norfolk Gosport Navy Yard was captured from the Union at the outset of The War Between The States. During the morning of 20 April 1861, the commander of the navy yard, Commodore C.S. McCauley, ordered his forces to spike the navy yard's guns and scuttle the ships rather than allow them to be captured. Three hours later, Captain Charles Wilkes arrived to evacuate the beleaguered Union force, but he didn't perceive the immediate danger; Wilkes instead tried to save the doomed vessels. But failing to salvage them, he ordered the ships completely destroyed to prevent their use by the Confederacy. Union troops fired the seven ships present, including the Merrimack. Forty days later, a salvage company raised the USS Merrimack and towed it into dry dock. Confederate Secretary of the Navy Stephen R. Mallory convinced the Confederate Congress to appropriate the \$172,523.00 needed to convert the 275-foot burned-out hull into an ironclad; Lt. John M. Brooke prepared the drawings and calculations necessary of the transformation. By mid-July, 1861, carpenters had stripped the charred timbers above the berth deck (three feet above the ship's unladen waterline). Workers laid a new gun deck from bow to stern. By the end of July, 1861, carpenters prepared to attach the casemated, or bombproof, iron exterior. Procuring iron for the USS Merrimack soon became the greatest obstacle. The Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia was the only plant in the South capable of supplying the necessary metal for the project, yet the company wasn't initially prepared to roll iron for plating. It took weeks to transform its operations, train its workers, and create tools to produce the required material. Additionally, the iron itself had to be found to create the two-inch thick, eight-inch wide plating. Ultimately, more than 300 tons of scrap iron was gathered from the ruins of the Norfolk Gosport Navy Yard, scavenged from captured Union railroad lines, and purchased from Confederate railroad companies whose tracks were too close to the front to operate. At the start of 1862, the ship's stern remained unarmored. By mid-January, 1862, machinists, blacksmiths, and bolt drivers agreed to work until 8:00 PM seven days a week until they had finished the project. The ship was completely armored by 27 January 1862 and three weeks later, on 17 February 1862, the re-christened CSS Virginia slid out of dry dock into the Elizabeth River. With a hull measuring almost 263 feet from bow to stern, the rebuilt CSS Virginia had a 178-foot, 3-inch iron casemated base atop its hull sloping upward at a 36-degree angle. The casemated sides, 24 feet from waterline to top, consisted of an outer shell of two 2-inch layers of iron plate fastened horizontally by metal bolts to a 2-foot thick solid pine and 4-inch thick oak backing. The ship had four gun ports on each side of the casemate and three 7-inch rifle ports at each end. The main deck, also covered with iron plating, stretched 29 feet 6 inches in front of the casemate and 55 feet to the rear. Just below the waterline on the bow, the ship had a 1,500-pound cast iron ram. On 8 March 1862, the CSS Virginia confronted the Union blockading force in Chesapeake Bay. The ironclad sank two Union frigates, drove three steam frigates aground, and exchanged fire with several small armed steamers and shore batteries. The following day, the CSS Virginia fought its duel against the USS Monitor, the Union ironclad. Beginning at about 8:45 AM, the two ships began circling one another while trying to gain an advantageous position. The two ironclads battled furiously at close range for the next four hours, but they did minimal damage to each other. Neither vessel could claim a victory. Because Union forces had gained control over Norfolk and the Norfolk Gosport Navy Yard, the Confederacy destroyed the CSS Virginia on the morning of 12 May 1862 to prevent it from being captured. The following chapters appear in the book: Chapter 1-The USS Merrimack Chapter 2-Flames Over Norfolk Chapter 3-A Navy Is Born Chapter 4-Decisions and Resources Chapter 5-Up from the Ashes Chapter 6-Final Preparations Chapter 7-Iron vs. Wood Chapter 8-Iron vs. Iron Chapter 9-Destruction Chapter 10-Reflection Well written and researched as well as illustrated with both photographs and period drawings, CONFEDERATE PHOENIX: THE CSS VIRGINIA was written for a broad audience of readers-from Civil War scholars and history buffs, to professional museum modelers and amateur builders, as well as those seeking new facts about the still controversial warship. Lt. Colonel Robert A. Lynn, Florida Guard Orlando, Florida

In March of 1862, the CSS Virginia of the Confederate States Navy destroyed two of the most formidable warships in the U.S. Navy. Suddenly, with this event, every wooden warship in every navy in the world became totally obsolete. Conceived in the fertile minds of such men as John L. Porter, Stephen R. Mallory, and John M. Brooke, and constructed from the sunken and charred remains of the USS Merrimack, the Virginia in one afternoon changed the course of naval warfare forever. Described here in detail are: the mechanical difficulties uncovered during the Merrimack's early world cruises; the desperation and panic that led to her commitment to the flames along with the Gosport Navy Yard; the mad scramble by the Confederates to resurrect her as an ironclad warship; the heart-stopping two-day Battle of Hampton Roads where she destroyed two Union warships, damaged a third, and fought the equally innovative USS Monitor to a draw. Within two months, surrounded by an advancing enemy and unable to escape, she was scuttled by her own crew. Utilizing previously unpublished sources, the authors have pieced together a fascinating

and unparalleled account of her design, construction, commitment to battle, and final destruction.

About the Author R. Thomas Campbell has been studying and writing about the Confederate experience in the War Between the States for many years. He has published in *Confederate Veteran*, the magazine of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, of which he is a member, and also in the regional publications of that organization. Mr. Campbell is a graduate of the Wharton School of Business and Finance at the University of Pennsylvania and holds a bachelor of science degree from Villanova University. He is currently preparing additional studies of the activities of the Confederate Navy. A Portsmouth, Virginia, native, Alan B. Flanders holds a PhD. in naval history and is a Fellow and member of the Senior Commons Room at St. Edmund Hall, Oxford University and holds a masters of arts in English from Hollins College. For the past 20 years, Flanders has written a weekly column, "Olde Towne Journal," and has also been published by *Naval Institute Proceedings*, *American Heritage*, *American History Illustrated*, and *Civil War Times*. He has written five other books on naval history.