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## Royce G. Shingleton Rising Naval Historian

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Russell W. Ramsey

**L**OW INTENSITY CONFLICT, in its naval mode, has become the forte of Royce G. Shingleton, a naval historian now teaching at Darton College in Albany, Georgia. In his writings, the enemy is usually the U.S. Army or Navy; his favorite subjects are junior officers and skippers of a maritime force which existed only four years, the Confederate Navy. Contemporary students of the art of war will be surprised to see riverine tactics, joint operations, logistics, civil-military relations, undercover operations, innovative gadgetry, and battlefield intelligence all systematically treated in Royce G. Shingleton's page-snapping accounts of the "Gray Ghost" navy.

Shingleton's mode is biographical. His 1971 doctoral thesis at Florida State University was on "Rural Life in the Old South," based upon memoirs of British travelers. Next, he started research on his biography of Richard Peters, an Atlanta Reconstruction-era politician. During his investigation Shingleton discovered that Peters, and many a wealthy Southerner, had invested profitably in blockade running during the Civil War. With that discovery, Shingleton's writing had found its genre.

*Richard Peters: Champion of the New South* (Mercer University Press) finally emerged in 1985, but by then several of Shingleton's naval history pieces were already in print. "Stages, Steamers, and Stations in the Antebellum South" presents the economic linkage between "cotton boxes" (crude rafts carrying fifty to a hundred bales), river steamers, and the early railroads of the Jacksonian era in the south.<sup>1</sup> "The Cruise of the CSS *Tallahassee*" told of a combat saga of southern river ports, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean.<sup>2</sup>

Shingleton survived kidding about resurrecting Rhett Butler from *Gone With the Wind* in his article on the *Atlanta*.<sup>3</sup> He was already well along by that time on his most ambitious work, the biography of Confederate Navy hero John Taylor Wood. This man was officially the naval staff aide to Confederate

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president Jefferson Davis; in reality, he waged a campaign of low intensity conflict against Union army and navy forces along the York and Rappahannock Rivers that tied up significant theater resources. Shingleton brought out first an article on Wood<sup>4</sup> and then in 1979 a book-length biography, *John Taylor Wood: Sea Ghost of the Confederacy* (University of Georgia Press). This volume was reprinted in 1982 as a National Historical Book Club Selection.

Shingleton next produced a series on a southern river town for the 1986 Albany (Georgia) *Herald* sesquicentennial issue. He demonstrated the determinative role of the Flint River in Albany's founding and revealed the town's significance as a food supply center for the Confederate Navy. He took readers slightly west to the Chickasawhatchie River to lay bare a much ballyhooed local militia victory over Indians that was actually an inexcusable massacre.

Shingleton has now returned to the work he does best, naval biography. His current project (well advanced at this writing) is a book-length biography of John Newland Maffitt, captain of the CSS *Florida* and several blockade runners. Maffitt, barred from serving his adopted country with the fall of the Confederacy, went on to command the British charter steamer *Widgeon*, employed by the Brazilian government to haul troops on the unforgiving Parana River during the War of the Triple Alliance, 1865-1870. Shingleton has agreed with the University of South Carolina Press to produce *The Life of Maffitt* for its Maritime History Series.

Meanwhile, Shingleton's articles keep appearing. "Raider's Stinging Blow" recounts John Taylor Wood's naval guerrilla warfare campaign of July and August 1863 in and around Chesapeake Bay.<sup>5</sup> The August 1990 issue of *Civil War* magazine published Shingleton's story of Wood's raid on Union-held New Bern, in eastern North Carolina. Shingleton is a native of that area, born and reared on a tributary of the Neuse River, which flows to the New Bern estuary—where Woods's daring raid constituted one of the most arduous cutting-out expeditions in naval history.

*Civil War Times* carried in December 1989 a photographic essay on Mike Usina, another of Shingleton's Confederate naval officer discoveries. The author has now completed a full length article on that blockade runner, titled "Mike Usina: Confederate Sea Fox." Shingleton also writes occasional book reviews. The magazine *Atlanta History: A Journal of Georgia and the South* included in summer 1989 his reviews of Stephen R. Wise's *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running during the Civil War* and Maxine Turner's *Navy Gray: A Story of the Confederate Navy on the Chattahoochie and Apalachicola Rivers*. He has many other historical articles in print, on such topics as runaway slaves, Confederate army biographies, lesser-known battles of the Civil War, nineteenth century agriculture, and municipal government.

Royce G. Shingleton's hallmarks are precision, deceptively easy prose, flowing narrative, and—vital for the military reader—linkage between resources,

## 164 Naval War College Review

decisions, and events. He has won several awards for writing excellence, and is listed in *Who's Who in the South* and in *Contemporary Authors*.

The institution where he teaches, Darton College, took its name from a medieval Anglo-Saxon term meaning "town by the river" to symbolize Albany's proximity to the Flint River. This writer is reminded after reading Shingleton's work of a certain other writer, Thucydides, who attended Plato's Academy hard by the banks of the Ilissus in a long ago and far away place called Athens. The comparison is not strained.

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### Notes

1. "Stages, Steamers, and Stations in the Antebellum South," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Summer 1972.
2. "The Cruise of the CSS Tallahassee," *Civil War Times Illustrated*, May 1976.
3. "The Atlanta: A Civil War Blockade Runner," *Atlanta Historical Bulletin*, Fall 1976.
4. "Swashbuckler in Gray: The Confederate Service of John Taylor Wood," *United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine*, October 1978.
5. "Raider's Stinging Blow," *Military History*, April 1990.

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