

## *BLOCKADE RUNNING*



### *~ FOR PROFIT & PATRIOTISM ~*

Until the Civil War, the South's economy relied upon agricultural products like cotton, tobacco, and sugar that were primarily grown with the labor of enslaved people. When a collection of Southern states decided to break off from the United States and form their own country - the Confederate States of America - the new nation needed to import manufactured military goods to keep the war effort going. To cut off this trade, the U.S. Navy established a blockade of Southern ports.

In response, adventurous seamen and ambitious businessmen began running goods through the blockade on specially designed ships called blockade runners. In this activity, you will learn about the motivations for ship owners who ran the Navy blockade to bring goods into the port of Wilmington and the rest of the South.

### HISTORY

Only a few Southern cities had factories before the Civil War. Instead, Southern states overwhelmingly made money by selling crops grown by enslaved people. These crops would be transported North to factories that would turn raw materials into finished goods. For example, Northern clothing factories turned cotton into shirts and dresses. Northern factories also forged metals into civilian and military goods like silverware and muskets. The United States also imported many manufactured goods from Europe as well.

After the 1860 election of President Abraham Lincoln, eleven Southern states – including North Carolina – decided to break apart the United States and form their own country. Many white Southerners feared that President Lincoln would limit their ability to expand slavery into western territories and make other restrictions on slaveholders. Others felt that the free Northern states and slave-holding Southern states simply had no common interests and should separate. So, they formed a new government called the Confederate States of America which decentralized political power and ensured slaveholders' rights. When Confederate soldiers attacked the U.S. Army post Fort Sumter in Charleston, S.C. on April 12, 1861, the divided nation tore apart into war. President Lincoln cut off trade of manufactured Northern goods to the rebelling Southern states so that Northern weapons would not be used against them. The U.S. military developed a plan to blockade all trade in and out of the Confederacy in hopes of cutting off the South's economy and war supplies. This plan was called the "Anaconda Plan" by U.S. Army General Winfield Scott because the U.S. Navy blockade and the U.S. Army troops would surround the Confederacy and – like an anaconda snake – slowly but surely squeeze the (metaphorical) life out of the rebels and force them to surrender. Without Northern trade and a blockade that limited their trade with Europe, the Confederate States needed to find a way to import vital war goods, and fast.

Blockade running became the solution. The Confederate government, the State of North Carolina, and private businessmen began purchasing ships and parts to make ships from Europe. These ships were called "blockade runners." While the name was not original, the design certainly was. Blockade runners were usually steam ships designed for high speed with

maximum cargo space and a shallow draft which allowed them to sail in shallow waters where the larger Navy ships could not go. The ships would be camouflaged in dark colors so they would be hard to spot at night by U.S. sailors. If they were spotted, blockade runners would attempt to outmaneuver or simply outrun any U.S. Navy ship on blockade patrol - very often successfully. North Carolina and the Confederate government owned some blockade runners but most were owned and operated by private businessmen. Entrepreneurs seized the opportunity to serve the Confederacy and make a risky but hefty profit by smuggling civilian and military goods through the blockade.

To make a profit, blockade runners had to ensure they maximized the amount of cargo they loaded before heading back home to the Confederacy. However, the ship still needed to be light and fast enough to outrun the U.S. Navy blockaders. Higher speeds were achieved by narrowing the hull to cut through the water with reduced resistance. Unfortunately, this design feature reduced the amount of space available in the cargo hold thereby limiting the ship's ability to carry large quantity of goods. In addition, the difference in the weight and size of various goods could affect the efficiency of the ship to maintain a high speed run into a Confederate port. Because of this - and the Confederate government's requirements for necessary military goods - making the best use of space on a blockade runner was critical to ensure the financial success of the operation for the owners and the crews.

Outbound blockade runners hauled cotton, tobacco, and other goods for trade and revenue, while also carrying important mail and correspondence to suppliers and other interested parties in Europe, most often in England. They carried their cargos to neutral ports in Bermuda, the Bahamas, or Nova Scotia. Meanwhile in Europe, purchased supplies were loaded in the bottoms of a neutral country's vessels and headed for those same ports. When both ships arrived in these neutral ports, the cargoes would be transferred to blockade runners, ships of lighter draft and greater speed. From here, the blockade runners would make their way to Wilmington.

Inbound blockade runners usually brought badly needed supplies and mail to the Confederacy, and most of the guns and other ordnance for Confederate military. Oftentimes vessels departing from various ports in Bermuda ran to Wilmington and Charleston from where most of the supplies were then shipped by rail to Augusta, the main depot for the Western armies, or to Richmond, the main eastern depot. Along with these vital supplies, the blockade runners brought foreign crews, who poured money into the local economy through bars, taverns, hotels, shops, and merchants. Because of the great bulk and weight involved with shipping cannons, arms and gunpowder, owners of the small blockading vessels instead preferred to ship luxury and other smaller items of less weight into Confederate ports. This began to compromise the purpose of the blockade runners' original mission, supplying the Confederate Army.

The port of Wilmington soon took on an international flavor not seen before the war. It was one of the most important points of entry for supplies for the entire Confederate States. According to the 1860 census, Wilmington, NC was the largest city in North Carolina, the 100<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States, and the 13<sup>th</sup> in size in the Confederate States. As the main port for the State of North Carolina -- located 30 miles upstream from the mouth of the Cape Fear River with the Atlantic Ocean -- Wilmington was among the Confederacy's most important cities. After the fall of Norfolk, Virginia (May 1862) and the siege of Charleston, South Carolina (July 1863), Wilmington's importance increased as it became the main Confederate port on the Atlantic Ocean. At the port, foreign goods, such as munitions, clothing and foodstuffs, were transferred to railroad cars and sent from the city throughout the Confederacy. Along the Atlantic seashore, Wilmington's defenses were so sturdy that they were only surpassed by the fortifications in Charleston, South Carolina. Wilmington resisted Federal occupation for a long time, mainly due to the Cape Fear River defenses anchored by Fort Fisher, a massive fortification protecting the New Inlet entrance to the port of Wilmington.

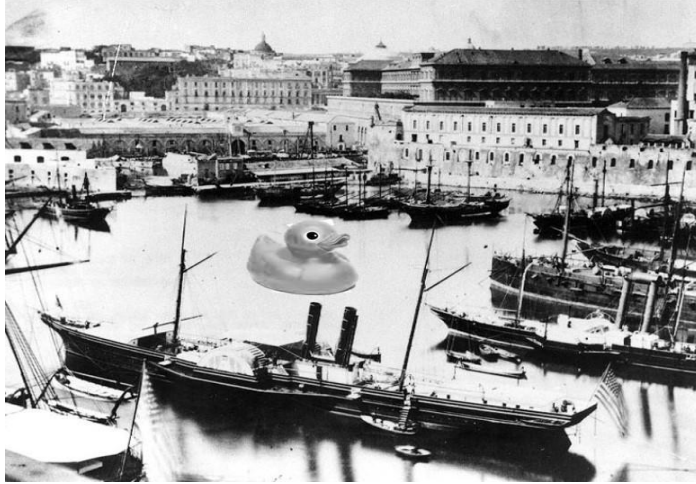
By 1863, the Federal navy had established the organizational squadrons to more effectively enforce the coastal blockade at the various Southern ports. They also set up roving

patrols just outside British territorial waters in the Caribbean, most notably in the Bahamas, to intersect blockade runners. In addition, Federal attacks along the Confederate coast made running the blockade more difficult. The Union made several attempts to stop the ships coming and going; but it proved to be a futile effort, as the blockade runners were built for speed. But the captains and crews on blockade patrol became more seasoned and grew wiser to the various tactics employed by blockade runners. With dwindling supplies entering the port, the Confederate Government enacted regulations in February 1864 to limit the importation of luxury items. Often evaded, the regulations required a blockade runner's cargo to contain at more than 50% military goods.

At sea, Federal attacks were also being made along the Bermuda coast, where Union man-of-war ships often seized neutral vessels and their cargoes. Eventually, to close the last safe port available to the blockade runners, the largest Union fleet ever to assemble in the Atlantic attacked Fort Fisher on December 23, 1864. While the fleet of 125 men-of-war and transports were blockading the harbor, an incoming blockade runner passed through the fleet and took refuge upriver. The last blockade runner to make its way into Wilmington's port was the SS *Wild Rover*, on January 5, 1865. The fort was attacked a second time on January 13, and after a two-day siege it was captured on January 15 by the Union Army and Navy. Several blockade runners, docked upriver, managed to escape during the battle. Prior to the capture of the fort, Rear Admiral Porter, in command of the eastern flotilla, wrote to the war department, "Blockade running seems almost as brisk as ever, the new class of blockade runners are very fast and sometimes come in and play around our vessels, they are built entirely for speed."

During the Civil War, Historians estimate that an estimated 2,500–2,800 attempts were made to run the blockade. It is estimated that 80% of the blockade runner's attempts to run the blockade succeeded. Some blockade runners made many successful runs, while many others were either captured or destroyed on their first attempt. During the last two years of the war, the only vessels that continued to get through the blockade were those ships specifically designed for speed.





THE BLOCKADE RUNNER *RUBBER DUCKY* IN BERMUDA

THE SITUATION: It is March 1864. You are the captain of the *Rubber Ducky*. Your ship is new and very fast. You have a well-trained crew and can carry a **maximum of 27 tons** of cargo. You are in the Port of Bermuda loading supplies for a return trip to Wilmington. As you load the cargo, you know according to Confederate law **50%** of your cargo must be **military goods**. Can you make it back to Wilmington and make a large profit?

YOUR MISSION:

1. Make two trips to pick up cargo in Bermuda.
2. Half of your cargo is to be military supplies.
3. You cannot transport the same items more than once.
4. Using the Captain's Information Sheet, make the most money possible.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

- The Cargo
  - Each 1" box is one ton of cargo.
  - There are civilian, military, and mixed goods. They are marked with a letter and number (B1, M5, C2, etc). Color does not matter.
    - "C" boxes - Civilian goods with high profit margin
    - "M" boxes - Military goods with negative profit margin
    - "B" boxes - could be used by both civilians and military. Some profit.
  - "B" boxes and "M" boxes both count towards your required 50% military goods.
  - Each "X" box designates required empty cargo space. You must put all 5 X boxes in the cargo hold so your ship doesn't sink.
    - You may leave extra empty space if you wish.
- The Cargo Hold
  - You have two cargo hold decks.
  - All cargo must fit within the box.
  - Remember you cannot transport the same materials twice.

## Captain's Information Sheet on Prices of Goods in 1864

### CIVILIAN

Number/Letter	Item	Price (\$)		Points
C1	Wheat	\$180.00	1 crate	2
C2	Flour	\$250.00	1 barrel	3
C3	Corn	\$450.00	1 crate	5
C4	Bacon	\$71.00	1 crate	2
C5	Salt	\$200.00	1 barrel	4
C6	Sugar	\$800.00	1 crate	5
C7	Coffee	\$140.05	1 crate	3

### MILITARY

Number/Letter	Item	Price (\$)		Points
M1	Enfield Rifles	\$200.00	1 case	-2
M2	Bayonets	\$125.00	1 case	-1
M3	Leather Gear	\$250.00	1 case	-1
M4	Heavy Artillery	\$10,000.00	1 piece	-5
M5	Field Artillery	\$900.00	1 piece	-5
M6	Musket Ammunition	\$500.00	1 case	-3
M7	Artillery Ammunition	\$1500.00	1 case	-3

### BOTH

Number/Letter	Item	Price (\$)		Points
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B1	Wool Fabric	\$750.00	1 crate	3
B2	Wool Socks	\$170.00	1 case	4
B3	Candles	\$700.00	1 case	3
B4	Leather	\$105.00	1 crate	4
B5	Flannel Fabric	\$1000.00	1 crate	5
B6	Beeswax	\$125.00	1 case	2
B7	Leather Boots	\$250.00	1 crate	5

**Teacher Tips:**

- Each shape as a whole counts as one civilian, military, or both cargo item. In other words, students do not need to ensure that fifty percent of all *squares* are military or both; only the shape as a whole.
  - For example, I can fit shapes C3, M6, and B1 on one cargo deck. There are three total shapes on the deck. One military goods, one is civilian, and one counts for both. Therefore, I have 2/3 (66%) of my cargo as military goods or “both” goods. I satisfy the 50% military cargo rule because my “both” shape counts towards military goods.
    - I do not need to count and track how many squares are in each shape C3, M6, and B1.
- Students must leave at least 5 blank spaces in their cargo holds. This challenges students to place shapes in a more limited space. It also reflects the historical need to be conscious of how much a cargo hold weighs.
  - The shape print out includes 5 squares with an X so students can place the empty spaces in the cargo hold to help keep track of this requirement.
  - Students will frequently have to leave a 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> space open as well.
- Students may compete in groups to see who can earn the most points for their cargo hold.
  - Teachers may designate certain goods, particularly civilian or “both” goods, are currently unavailable for trade to make the game more difficult. Confederates frequently ran into supply issues as the war progressed.











