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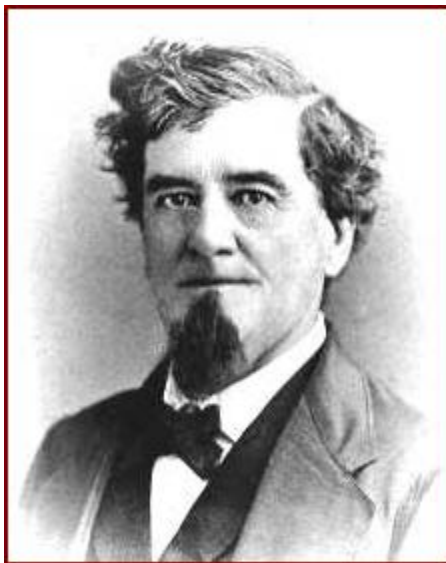
# The Cape Fear Civil War Round Table

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## John Newland Maffitt

By Tim Winstead

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On August 4, 1943, a former resident of the Cape Fear was honored for service to his state and nation. The Liberty Ship *John Newland Maffitt* was christened at the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company. This ship took on the duties of running a blockade as its namesake had done nearly eighty years previous. This essay followed Maffitt's career, his activities in the Cape Fear and the contributions he made to two nations. The essay attempted to answer one question: Did John Newland Maffitt do his duty to the best of his abilities? In a small way, the voyages of the *John Newland Maffitt* represented the final actions of the remarkable man.

On February 22, 1819, John Newland Maffitt was born in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean at longitude 40° W, latitude 50° N. Maffitt's future was on the Atlantic Ocean and it became the stage upon which he played his role as an officer in the United

States and Confederate States Navies. Alexander D. Bache, superintendent of the United States Coast Survey, characterized Maffitt as "not only a through seaman and game to the backbone but a man of superior intellect, a humorist of rare excellence, and one of the most delightful companions." In the ensuing years, Maffitt displayed these characteristics, especially backbone, in the performance of his duties.

Maffitt's father, John Newland Maffitt, Sr., and his mother, Ann Carnic, were Irish immigrants that came to America in 1819 to begin a new life. Maffitt, Sr. was a Methodist minister that loved poetry and words. Ann, an Irish beauty, cared little for poetry but was dedicated to the more practical pursuits of "turning a penny." The life of an itinerant Connecticut preacher was not rewarded with material gains but with spiritual rewards. The Maffitts were not suitable partners and their marriage dissolved under strain caused by the preacher's meager income. In 1824, the younger Maffitt was adopted by his uncle, Dr. William Maffitt, and taken to Fayetteville, North Carolina. Maffitt, Sr. remained in the ministry and became "the Methodist meteor." He developed a magnetic personality and was "finished, flowery, and dazzling, a scintillating genius, a perfect master of rhetoric." Ann took the other children and moved to Galveston, Texas where

she succeeded in building a fashionable hotel. Maffitt reflected attributes of both his parents as he grew into manhood.

Maffitt thrived at his uncle's home, Ellerslie, and always considered himself to be a North Carolinian. He loved life at Ellerslie and fondly said late in his life, "I love every blade of grass in the dear old place." In 1828 at the age of nine, Maffitt travelled alone by stage to White Plains, New York. During this journey, Maffitt showed two primary characteristics that became a part of his nature: love of adventure and the absence of fear. His uncle enrolled Maffitt at a classical boarding school where he was exposed to a rigorous study of literature, grammar, composition, elocution, math, and science. Maffitt applied himself to his studies at the White Plains Academy. His four years at White Plains prepared him for his future occupation. On February 25, 1832, President Andrew Jackson appointed the thirteen-year-old Maffitt as an acting midshipman in the [United States Navy](#).

Prior to the establishment of the Naval Academy in 1845, cadet training involved years of sea apprenticeship followed by a difficult examination. The quality of the classes held on ships was dependent upon the talents of the instructors and mostly the cadets gained experience through on-the-job training. On August 8, 1832, Maffitt was assigned to the [U.S.S. St. Louis](#). For the next two years, Maffitt sailed the waters of the West Indies where he performed the duties of a seaman and also studied the duties of command to which he aspired. Maffitt's next assignment was to the Boston Navy Yard. On September 18, 1834, Maffitt reported to duty during the time of restoration of the [U.S.S. CONSTITUTION](#). Maffitt was impressed by the CONSTITUTION's history and considered it fortunate to have been assigned to its first voyage after a lengthy restoration. On March 16, 1835, the CONSTITUTION sailed for Brest, France to bring the American minister back to the United States. Maffitt and the CONSTITUTION survived two gales and successfully performed their assigned duties. Brest, France was to become a future port of call for Maffitt and another historic ship.

The CONSTITUTION next sailed on a three year cruise (1835-1838) as the flagship of the Mediterranean Squadron. Maffitt took advantage of the CONSTITUTION's numerous ports of calls. He inspected the remains of ancient civilizations and attended balls and parties given by local aristocrats. On June 15, 1837, a memorable visit by the King and Queen of Greece revealed another of Maffitt's talents: his ability to charm the fairer sex. As aide to Commodore Jesse D. Elliott, Maffitt received the duty to escort the royal party from shore. Bedecked in his full dress uniform, Maffitt cut an impressive figure as his features were framed by high collar, gold lace, and cocked hat. Maffitt helped the queen to her seat and gallantly draped his blue cloak around her shoulders as protection from the damp spray from the oars. Commodore Elliott turned out his band on the quarter-deck and ordered that waltzes be played for their guests. Queen Amalie was quite taken with the music. Elliott recounted: *I could read in her eyes, "Do let's waltz."* I reckoned for one of my aides, Midshipman Maffitt, son of Rev. John Newland Maffitt, who was quite adept at the business, presented him to the Queen, stepped aside, and motioned to him to be off. He did so, and in less than thirty minutes at least twenty couples, including the King, were whirling upon the deck to their hearts' content. The dance continued until two o'clock in the morning, when the King proposed being taken on shore. Before leaving the ship, the Queen remarked to Mr. Maffitt that she would give a return ball on shore, at the same time extending an invitation to him.

Elliott refused Maffitt permission to attend the queen's ball because of the hurt that would befall the feelings of the other young officers when they were not invited. This instance was not the last where Maffitt called on his Irish charms. Maffitt recounted his experiences of this Mediterranean voyage when he wrote *Nautilus: Or Cruising Under Canvas* in 1872.

During March, 1838, Maffitt's probationary period as midshipman ended. He was ordered back to the United States and sailed on the *U.S.S. Shark*. During the voyage to Norfolk, Maffitt showed himself to be efficient in his duties. Trouble developed when the crew gained entry to the storeroom and its supply of spirits. Maffitt stopped the difficulties when he went among the drunken crew and secured the ring-leaders. Maffitt showed energy and quickness in quelling insubordination; traits that he used many times during his naval career.

Upon the *Shark's* return to Norfolk, Maffitt received a leave of three months to prepare for his examination. On June 23, 1838, Maffitt appeared before a board of senior officers to answer questions that would determine his future. Many midshipmen had college educations; however, Maffitt's education at sea had prepared him for the difficult questions of the board. On this date, Maffitt was passed as a midshipman in the United States Navy. He was nineteen years old.

Maffitt saw duty aboard the *U.S.S. Vandalia* stationed out of Pensacola, Florida. He attained the acting rank of lieutenant on March 11, 1839 when another officer was blown overboard during a storm. Maffitt learned in his new assignment. He transferred to the *U.S.S. Macedonian* in October, 1839 and again sailed in the Gulf of Mexico. While detached from the *Macedonian* in October, 1840, Maffitt met Mary Florence Murrell from Mobile. On November 17, 1840, they were married in Mobile. This was the first of three marriages and eight children for Maffitt. He changed ships and marriages during the next forty-six years and Maffitt charmed them all.

On April 20, 1842, Maffitt began service that would eventually bring him to the Wilmington area. The U.S. Coast Survey was attached to the Treasury Department; however, it was considered a normal but short tour of duty from the regular navy. Maffitt's mathematical skills made him an ideal officer for this exacting work. He performed the sounding and triangulation tasks so successfully that Alexander D. Bache, superintendent of the Coast Survey, blocked Maffitt's attempt to gain transfer to the fighting navy during the War with Mexico. This was a major turn in Maffitt's career. Bache explained: "I have upon my own responsibility, and from grounds of public duty, interfered to prevent his detachment from the Coast Survey His qualifications for this work are so peculiar, that I should not have felt justified in doing otherwise."



On February 8, 1848, Maffitt was appointed chief of a hydrographic party and to the command of his first ship, the Coast Survey schooner *U.S.S. Gallatin*. Maffitt excelled as a surveying officer as he mapped the Atlantic coast. Coast Survey reports revealed that Maffitt was involved in surveys of: Nantucket shoals, Boston harbor, New Bedford, Cape Hatteras, Cape Fear, Beaufort harbor, St. Mary's River, Charleston harbor, Georgetown, Edisto harbor, the James River, and

the Gulf Stream. His efforts greatly benefited commercial maritime and navy interests. Maffitt used the knowledge gained by his work to great advantage in the coming years.

During the ten year period from 1848 to 1858, Maffitt and his hydrographic crew worked and lived at Smithville, Charleston, Georgetown, Savannah, James River and Washington City. Maffitt commanded the *U.S.S. Gallatin*, the *U.S.S. Crawford*, and the *U.S.S. Legare*. His service in the Coast Survey was demanding but rewarding. Maffitt was recognized for his contributions to maritime commerce by the Charleston Chamber of Commerce. The chamber president, George A. Trenholm, held a public appreciation dinner to honor Maffitt. Trenholm was to enter into Maffitt's life again in 1862. Professional praise also came to Maffitt when Superintendent Bache reported that the work of Maffitt exceeded that of any other member of the Coast Survey. Maffitt's years with the Coast Survey were not viewed so fairly by the Navy Department. Scientific duty was not viewed as an equal to man-of-war duty in the navy. On September 14, 1855, a Naval Efficiency Board placed Maffitt on indefinite furlough list that could result in his forced retirement from the navy. As Maffitt was to do in future years, he would fight against heavy odds. When a Court of Inquiry met in Washington on July 6, 1857, Maffitt mounted his own defense. Maffitt called upon a long list of testimony from fellow officers. These officers and Maffitt presented Maffitt's long service on a ship by ship basis that impressively showed him "professionally, physically, morally, and mentally fit for naval service." On January 29, 1858, he was officially restored to rank and grade. Maffitt's years on the Coast Survey had almost ended his naval career; however, the period provided him with knowledge and experience that would stand him well in the coming years.

Maffitt next commanded the *U.S.S. Dolphin*. The mission of the *Dolphin* was protection of American commerce and suppression of slave trade on the Cuban station. Maffitt gained national attention when in August 1858; he captured the clipper ship, *Echo*, and a cargo of three hundred African slaves. The press had a field day when the *Echo* and the blacks reached Charleston and were turned over to the U.S. Marshal. Northerners feared the Southerners would use the incident to reestablish slave trade. These fears proved groundless as Maffitt's efforts created great interest in the navy to intercept slave ships. On June 11, 1859, Maffitt assumed command of the larger screw steamer, *U.S.S. Crusader*. His assignment was again the suppression of slave trade. The *Crusader* intercepted the bark *Bogata* and its cargo of between four and five hundred blacks. Maffitt remained on duty at the Cuban station until November 7, 1860. His service during this period was reported by the *Wilmington Daily Journal* on September 25, 1863: "for those who maintain that the civil war in America is founded upon the slave question, that (Maffitt) should be the very man who has distinguished himself actively against the slave trade."

Abraham Lincoln was elected in November, 1860. The navy and the entire nation were beset with a period of great drama. Maffitt remained true to his duties as he commanded the *Crusader* to protect the United States property along the southern coast. In Mobile during early January, 1861, Maffitt defiantly proclaimed that any hostile attempts by local citizens to seize the *Crusader* would be met with force. The *Crusader* was ordered to Key West; however, Isaac Toucey, Secretary of the Navy, was concerned that Maffitt, as southern officer, would not continue with his duties. Maffitt arrived in Key West on January 11, 1861, the day after Florida seceded, and he assisted in securing federal property. Maffitt assisted Captain Montgomery C. Meigs in arming Fort Jefferson at Dry Tortugas. He provided sailors from the *Crusader* to help garrison both Fort Jefferson and Fort Taylor (Key West). Maffitt's actions secured these forts and established the terminus for the future Federal blockade of Florida and the Gulf coast.

In spite of Maffitt's actions in defending the Federal forts, Secretary Toucey viewed Maffitt with increased suspicion. Maffitt and the *Crusader* were ordered to New York. In a strange twist, Maffitt sailed to Havana to secure funds through the U.S. Consulate to supply for the voyage. Havana was a pro-Southern city and funding was not obtained; however, Maffitt advanced his personal funds to pay for his final voyage as a Federal officer. On March 1, 1861, he arrived in New York where he relinquished command of the *Crusader*. Maffitt travelled to his home in Washington City where he attempted to settle the ship's accounts. Federal auditors refused to settle the advance. The Fort Sumter events of April 12, 1861 roused many Southerners to make the decision to join their states. Maffitt submitted his resignation to the **United States Navy** on April 28, 1861. He slipped out of Washington with his destination as Montgomery, Alabama. Maffitt made the emotional decision to leave his thirty year career with the **United States Navy** and embark on a new adventure. Maffitt was also in a difficult personal position because he owned substantial property in Washington that he was unable to ship south or to sell. Maffitt committed his life and property to a new nation but his mother's financial resolve remained evident in the son.

Former United States Navy lieutenant Maffitt made his way to Montgomery where he offered his services to the **Confederate States Navy**. The situation in Montgomery revealed to Maffitt that the leaders had little interest in a Confederate Navy. Jefferson Davis believed that Southern independence would be gained without a war. Maffitt interviewed with President Davis and heard that it was unnecessary for the South to spend funds for a navy. Maffitt reported that: "The government instantly seemed to be at sea, without rudder, compass, or charts by which to steer upon a bewildering ocean of absolute necessity." Stephen R. Mallory, Secretary of the Navy, greeted Maffitt with even less enthusiasm. Mallory had been the chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Naval Affairs and was the chief supporter of the Naval Efficiency Board that had attempted to dismiss Maffitt from the navy in 1855. Mallory failed to offer Maffitt a position in the **Confederate Navy**; hence, Maffitt began packing to take his services to Europe. Cooler heads prevailed and President Davis sent a delegation, including Robert Toombs, with the request that Maffitt remain in the Confederacy. Effective May 8, 1861, Davis signed Maffitt's appointment as a Lieutenant in the **Confederate Navy**. Maffitt's initial contact with the Confederate leaders led him to comment: "The greatest mistake of the South was neglecting her Navy."

Maffitt initially saw service with Captain Josiah Tattnail as commander of the *C.S.S. Savannah*. His first action was against the Federal fleet that had steamed south to secure a base of operations at Port Royal, South Carolina. Maffitt rashly took the two gunned *Savannah* against the combined two hundred and fifteen guns of Captain Samuel F. Du Pont's fleet. The *Savannah* was damaged by Federal fire and Maffitt was forced to beach the ship to make repairs. Tattnail had gone ashore to consult with Confederate Army commanders and had instructed Maffitt to stay at anchor. Maffitt related that he had heard that the enemy be allowed to make no sounding that would aid their landing at Port Royal. This disagreement resulted in Maffitt's suspension from command of the *Savannah*. After harsh words, Maffitt "expressed his regards" and Tattnail recanted the suspension. Maffitt's first Confederate command ended with his transfer as naval aide to General Robert E. Lee. Maffitt's actions reflected the characteristics that he was to show many times during the war: plenty of backbone, love of adventure, and the absence of fear.

After a temporary service with Lee working on defense positions, Maffitt's Coast Survey knowledge of the southeastern coastline made his presence required elsewhere. As the Federal blockade was becoming more effective during 1862, enterprising individuals determined to

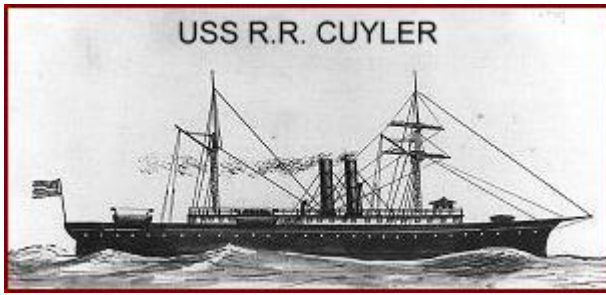
increase to flow of supplies into the Confederacy. George A. Trenholm, the former president of the Charleston Chamber of Commerce, was the president of the Fraser, Trenholm and Company. This company was the largest shipping concern in Charleston and it also had operations in Liverpool, England. Trenholm suggested to Secretary of War, Benjamin P. Judah, that Maffitt be placed in charge of Confederate blockade running in Nassau. Trenholm had recognized the need to transfer supplies from large ships at Nassau and Bermuda onto smaller, shallow draft vessels that could slip through the blockade and into Southerner ports. Trenholm did not wait for action from Benjamin but determined to move forward with his plan. Both for commercial profits and patriotic reasons, Trenholm offered to use the *Cecile* and the *Kate* to transship supplies from Nassau to Mosquito Inlet at New Smyrna, Florida.

On January 7, 1862, Maffitt was ordered to the command of the blockade runner *Cecile*. This was the beginning of the career for which John Newland Maffitt was ideally suited. The *Cecile* was a passenger ship that had steamed the waters between Charleston and Fernandina. The 360-ton side-wheeler was loaded with 300 bales of cotton and departed Charleston on February 20, 1862 for Nassau. Maffitt oversaw the transshipment of Enfield rifles and other supplies to the *Cecile* and the *Kate*. Maffitt departed for Mosquito Inlet on March 2, 1862. The *Kate* followed after a two or three day interval. The vessels off-loaded their supplies and within days returned to Nassau. The Federal capture of Jacksonville closed down the New Smyrna operations; however, this voyage completed Maffitt's first run as a blockade runner. By spring, 1862, Wilmington and Charleston were the only east coast ports opened to the runners. Maffitt made several runs between Nassau and Wilmington as commander of the *Cecile*. While the voyage to Mosquito Inlet had been uneventful, Wilmington presented a test of skill where Maffitt required nerves of steel.

As the *Cecile* approached New Inlet, Maffitt's path was blocked by two vessels and *Cecile* was ordered to come to a stop or be fired upon. The Federal ships fired flares that illuminated the darkness and exposed the shadowy form of the *Cecile*. Maffitt responded to the stern order with an "Aye, Aye, sir!" His voice was clear and controlled. When the Federals announced that Maffitt should prepare to receive their boats, Maffitt shouted into the speaking tube to his engineer, "Full speed ahead! Open your throttle wide! Give her all you've got. We're running for it!" The *Cecile* surged forward and slipped between the Federal ships as explosions rocked the night. The Federal shots were high and only the riggings were damaged. Maffitt later wrote in his journal, "We paused not recklessly, but at a rate of sixteen knots absolutely flew out of unhealthy company, who discourteously followed us with exploding shells" The *Cecile* had crossed the bar and entered the friendly waters of the Cape Fear River. The blue light from Fort Fisher's Mound Battery welcomed them into the **Confederacy**.

After voyages and escapes aboard the *Cecile*, Maffitt travelled to Richmond and conferred with the new Secretary of War, George W. Randolph. On April 11, 1862, Randolph ordered Maffitt to Nassau to assume duties that authorized him to control all vessels bound for the Confederacy. Maffitt departed for Nassau in command of the Confederate runner *Nassau*. Upon arrival in Nassau, Maffitt was greeted by John Low of the **Confederate Navy**. Low brought a proposition from Commodore James Bulloch, Confederate naval agent in England. Bulloch offered Maffitt command of the *Oreto* which Low had sailed from Liverpool. The *Oreto* was the first commercial destroyer that Bulloch had succeeded in securing from English shipyards. Bulloch evaded United States protests, the British Foreign Enlistment Act, and spies hired by the U.S. Consul that tried to prevent the transition to Confederate raider. The intrigue that surrounded the construction of the ship was remarkable. The fate that awaited Maffitt as commander of the *Oreto* was equally

as daring. The *Oreto* became the C.S.S. *Florida* and its decks became the stage upon which Maffitt played his most famous role as a Confederate naval officer.



Mallory instructed Maffitt to assume command on June 7, 1862, when the *Bahama* arrived in Nassau sans Mallory's choice, James North. After an exhaustive effort to secure release of the *Oreto* from the British government's Foreign Enlistment Act seizure and to evade the U.S.S. *R.R. Cuyler*, Maffitt slipped out of the harbor and rendezvoused with his supply ship, *Prince Albert*. On August 9, the *Oreto* and the *Prince Albert* anchored off Green Key

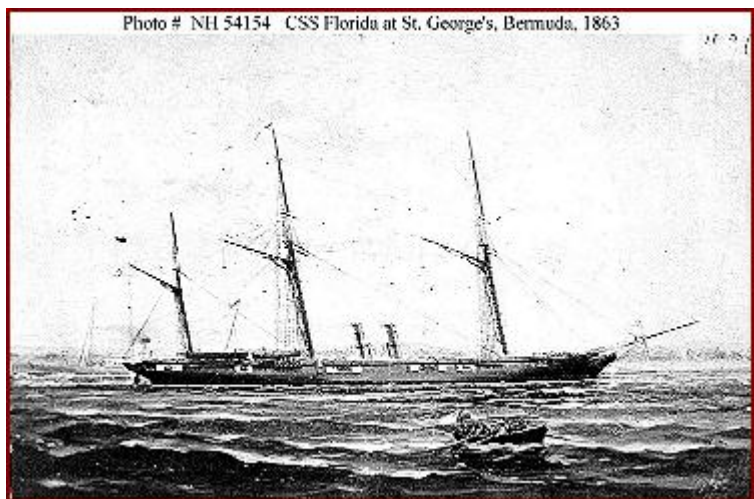
ninety miles south of Nassau. With a crew deficient of officers and sailors, Maffitt transferred two seven-inch pivots, six six-inch side guns, munitions and supplies to the *Oreto*. The hard labor required of all officers and men lasted a week. One crewman died during the efforts. Maffitt had uneasiness over the yellow appearance of the seaman as he was buried on Green Key. An earlier outbreak of yellow fever in Nassau would have consequence for the *Oreto*.

On August 17, 1862, Maffitt steamed out the key and cleared the Bahamas. He called the men on deck, hauled down the British flag, and raised the Stars and Bars. Maffitt re-christened the vessel as C.S.S. *Florida*, in honor of Secretary Mallory's home state. Mallory's orders for the *Florida* were read to the crew: "You will cruise at discretion, the department being unwilling to circumscribe your movements in this regard by specific instructions You are to do the enemy's commerce the greatest injury in the shortest time." Maffitt began the process of ensuring that *Florida* became an efficient cruiser. In the haste to secure supplies for the *Prince Albert*, essential artillery sights, rammers, and sponges were forgotten. The cruiser was defenseless. Yellow fever appeared among the crew. With his already reduced crew, Maffitt set course for Cuba and medical assistance. Maffitt acted as ship doctor and tended the crew.

The *Florida* reached Cardenas, Cuba on August 19. Maffitt sent an officer ashore to alert the Cuban authorities to their plight and to contact Confederate agent, Charles J. Helms. Maffitt requested that Helms obtain additional crew and a physician.

On the 22nd, Maffitt was seized by violent chills and he slipped into unconsciousness. He regained consciousness on the 29th and heard a doctor say that Maffitt would be dead by noon. Maffitt informed the doctor that "I have too much to do, and cannot afford to die." From that time forward, Maffitt improved in his condition. On August 31, the *Florida* left Cardenas for the protection of the Spanish guns at Havana.

Unable to recruit a crew, Maffitt determined to steam to the Southern port of Mobile. The longer the *Florida* delayed in Cuba, the more numerous the Federal warships.



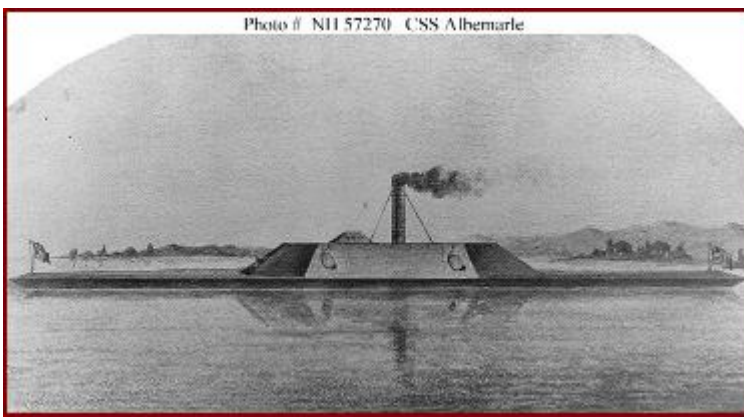
On September 4, Maffitt defied all odds by making a daylight run into Mobile Bay past three Federal warships. The *Florida* was severely damaged but Maffitt's gamble got the ship and its weakened crew into a safe port. Maffitt noted "1400 shrapnell shot in our hull, and our masts were pitted like a case of smallpox. We were torn to pieces." The *Florida* would be quarantined until September 30th; however, Maffitt and the crew did receive assistance from Admiral Franklin Buchanan in their efforts to restore the ship. The bravery of the crew and especially its commander would attract additional officers and sailors. During the repairs, Mallory tried to replace Maffitt as commander of the *Florida*. Admiral Buchanan intervened directly with President Davis to save Maffitt's command. Davis counter-manned Mallory's order: "Maffitt brought her in gallantly and he will take her out."

The *Florida* remained in Mobile for four months. During this time, Maffitt saw to repairs to the ship, replaced ineffective officers, and enlisted and trained a new crew. On January 11, 1863, Maffitt steamed the *Florida* out Mobile Bay, anchored off Fort Morgan, and waited for bad weather to cover his escape. The Federal fleet consisted of three ships in September had grown to thirteen in January. Maffitt waited for a violent storm and on the evening of January 15 the worsened conditions of a norther erupted to limit visibility. Maffitt waited until 2:00 a.m. and headed for the bar. The *Florida* buffed its way past several Federal ships. Only the fast U.S.S. *R.R.Cuyler* realized the ship among them was not another Federal warship. The *Cuyler* picked up the chase and closed the range on the *Florida*. Maffitt used the approaching darkness to elude the *Cuyler* and gain the open seas.

From January 15 until August 23, 1863, the *Florida* waged commercial war on the Union's high seas commerce. Maffitt exhibited daring and skill during the *Florida's* first voyage. The *Florida*, ranged the ocean from Mobile, north to the New York coast, south to Brazil, and east to Brest, France. Maffitt and his resourceful crew captured twenty-three ships with an estimated value in excess of \$3,727,000. By the time the *Florida* put into Brest for needed repairs, Maffitt's health was broken and he was replaced by Commander Joseph N. Barney.

With his health improved by the end of 1863, Maffitt conferred with Bulloch in England. The South was no longer allowed to purchase warships from English yards; however, swift blockade runners were available for purchase. These Clyde-built steamers were needed to run the tightening blockade around Wilmington. State governments, companies, and individuals purchased these fast ships to reap the rewards on the white gold (cotton) trade. The Confederacy needed men like Maffitt with the daring and skills needed to supply the provisions to continue the struggle. On June 5, 1864, Maffitt made his return to Wilmington in command of the blockade runner *Lilian*. This was the first time Maffitt was on Southern soil since he left Mobile in January, 1863. As ordered on improvement in his health, Maffitt reported to the Navy Department in Richmond.

The Confederate ironclad *Albemarle* aided in the Confederate recapture of Plymouth, North Carolina. Commander James W. Cooke declined in health during the campaign and he requested to be relieved from the *Albemarle*. On June 9, 1864, Maffitt was ordered to Plymouth to assume command. Maffitt reported for duty on June 25th and word of his presence





quickly reached the Brigadier General Innis N. Palmer, Federal commander in New Bern. Palmer wrote: “Captain Maffitt now commands the ram *Albemarle*, and we all know that he is not the man to sit down at Plymouth. He was ordered there to do something and if he gets a fleet of these iron rams before we receive any iron vessels we must expect disaster.” Mallory had sent Maffitt to Plymouth with orders to attack the enemy’s ships in the Albemarle Sound. During this period of repairs to the *Albemarle*, a political battle ensued between Cooke and Army commanders in the area and Mallory over uses of the *Albemarle* in protecting the gains so far made by the ram. Maffitt was always an aggressive fighter that backed down from few occasions to wage battle. He organized a raid to capture and burn the Federal mail boat *Fawn*. The raid was successful but when the raiders returned the Plymouth on September 9; they learned that Maffitt had been relieved from the *Albemarle*. Maffitt received orders to take command of the blockade runner *Owl*. Politics won out over aggressive action.

Maffitt’s final command was one of the fast vessels that were built in British shipyards under Bullock’s supervision. The *Owl* arrived in Wilmington on September 19, 1864. The 771-ton side-wheeler was 230 feet long and was capable of 16 knots. The ship had a cargo capacity of 800 bales of cotton. The cargo space on the Owl was assigned entirely to government needs. Mallory again gave Maffitt specific orders that included specific instruction not to surrender his ship. On December 21, 1864, Maffitt escaped the blockade loaded with 800 bales of cotton. Maffitt arrived in St. George’s on December 27th. Maffitt received word that the Butler attack on Fort Fisher failed; hence, he started the return voyage. On January 16, 1865, the *Owl* crossed the bar at Old Inlet about 8:00 p.m. Maffitt anchored off Fort Caswell. Confederates rowed out to the *Owl* and reported that Fort Fisher was in Federal hands. The war not yet over for Maffitt for it was still his duty to get his cargo to the Confederacy. Maffitt attempted to enter Charleston but was unsuccessful. Maffitt made the last blockade runner delivery of the war when he succeeded in getting into the port at Galveston. He delivered his cargo, ran the blockade, and made Havana by May 9, 1865. The war was now over; Maffitt heeded Mallory’s advice and saved his ship. On July 14, 1865, the *Owl* anchored in Liverpool. Maffitt attended his duty and paid his remaining sailors for their services. The career of a Confederate blockade runner ended in the Mersey River.

Maffitt never recovered from the financial losses that resulted from his property seizure by the United States Government. He lived for a while in England and worked in the British merchant marine. He returned to the United States in 1867 and made his way to his family in **Wilmington**. He was involved in some naval activities but mostly lived on his small farm outside of Wilmington. Business and personal losses mounted for Maffitt. The years of dangerous and stressful living took its toll of his health. In 1885, President Grover Cleveland failed to approve Maffitt’s nomination to the Custom House in Wilmington. Maffitt’s health further declined. On May 15, 1886, Maffitt “slipped the mortal cable.”



“Whether sailor or not, for a moment avast!  
Poor Jack’s mizzen topsail is hove to the mast;  
He’s now all a wreck, nor will sail shoot ahead;  
His cruise is done up; he’ll no more heave the lead.

**John Newland Maffitt** did his duty. He lived up to an ideal of his former commander, R.E. Lee: “Duty then is the sublimest word in the English language. You should do your duty in all things. You can never do more, you should never wish to do less.”

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***Tim Winstead*** was a native of Wilson County, NC who attended NCSU. Retired from BellSouth as Engineering Manager in 2006, Tim returned to school to earn a degree in History. A resident of the Cape Fear region since 1974 and a Civil War buff, the paper on Maffitt fulfilled an interest in this remarkable area resident.

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