Book Review: John Taylor Wood, Sea Ghost of the Confederacy, by Royce G. Shingleton

Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society

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This is for all buffs of the Civil War, naval affairs or swashbuckling sea tales. Wood's Civil War history is affectionately portrayed by Shingleton, who has used primary sources very well, such as the Wood family diaries and scrapbooks.

Wood was a northerner by birth, and his father, a career Union Navy man, remained in Union service through the Civil War. Wood was drawn to the Southern side before the war by the marriage of one of his aunts to Jefferson Davis. After the death of this aunt, Davis' first wife, he married Varina Howell, whom Wood referred to as Aunt Varina. Through Davis, Wood was able during the Civil War to secure assignments he wanted, in between serving on Davis' staff with the rank of Colonel of Cavalry.

Wood's assignments included a position on the C.S.S. Virginia, when she fought the epic battle with the Monitor; leading a number of raids on Federal vessels blockading the North Carolina coast, and serving as captain of the raider C.S.S. Tallahasee.

With the collapse of the Confederacy, Wood attempted to flee the Confederacy with Davis. After they were captured, Wood escaped and made a fantastic voyage South along the east coast of Florida. Commandering a small boat Wood, along with several others, including John Breckinridge, made it safely across the Florida straits to Cuba. Wood eventually settled in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he became a successful businessman and enjoyed flying the Confederate flag over his establishment.

Editor