

**NEVER CAUGHT; PERSONAL ADVENTURES  
CONNECTED WITH TWELVE SUCCESSFUL TRIPS  
IN BLOCKADE-RUNNING DURING THE  
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, 1863-1864; THE  
MAGAZINE OF HISTORY WITH NOTES AND  
QUERIES; EXTRA NUMBER, NO. 3, PP. 143 - 205**

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Never caught; personal adventures connected with twelve successful trips in blockade-running during the American Civil War, 1863-1864; The magazine of history with notes and queries; extra number, No. 3, pp. 143 - 205 by Captan Roberts

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# **CAPTAN ROBERTS**

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COMPRISING

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TRIPS IN BLOCKADE-RUNNING DURING  
THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, 1863-64 - - *Captain Roberts*

WILLIAM ABBATT

141 EAST 25TH STREET,

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NEW YORK

1908

# NEVER CAUGHT

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SUCCESSFUL TRIPS IN BLOCKADE-RUNNING  
DURING THE AMERICAN  
CIVIL WAR, 1863-64

BY  
CAPTAIN ROBERTS

LONDON  
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UNIVERSITY OF  
CALIFORNIA

## PREFACE

HAVING been asked by many friends to give a brief account of my adventures in blockade-running during the late American Civil War, I have determined to do so, not from any confidence in my powers of description, but because I am in hopes that the entire novelty of the subject will tend to give interest to this little book; in addition to which I am desirous of giving publicity to a statement in which I have the strongest belief, namely, that in these days blockades can never be efficient so long as heavy forts guard the entrances to the harbors blockaded, from which the vessels blockading are obliged to keep at a respectful distance. And perhaps my feeble efforts to demonstrate this will lead some wiser head than mine to suggest a new method of closing an enemy's fort. American naval officers, who know from experience how strong are my grounds for this conviction, can testify to the harassing, wearying work they went through while trying to blockade the Southern ports, and to their disgust at constantly seeing vessels which had escaped their untiring vigilance during the night, lying at daybreak safely under the Confederate batteries. For although, in the case of the American war, blockading was exceedingly severe work, what would it have been had the Southerners been possessed of the means that are usually in the hands of a belligerent power—viz: those of harassing the blockading fleets by every description of annoyance, in the shape of fire-ships, torpedoes, etc.

It is true that efforts were made to harass the blockading vessels off Charleston, but the want of the proper resources rendered them, except in one or two instances, nearly harmless; and at Wilmington nothing was ever attempted. An iron-clad was indeed once brought down the river, in which it was proposed to make a dash at some of the blockading vessels; but she stuck on the bar and was never used against the enemy.



My concluding remark shall be, the all-importance of our possessing vessels of war of great speed and heavily armed, similar to those which are at this moment receiving far more attention at the hands of the American Government than either iron-clads or Monitors.

This subject is again referred to at page 58 as a practical suggestion worthy of the best attention.

A. ROBERTS.

# NEVER CAUGHT

## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST START

SO much has been said and written on the law and theory of blockade-running, that a few remarks on its practice as relating to its enforcement and its infringement, may perhaps prove interesting. Laws that were in vogue before the wonderful progress that steam has made can scarcely be considered applicable now, or if applicable, cannot be efficiently put into force, as will be shown by the following brief narrative, in which I have endeavored to point out the great difficulties that exist in blockading an enemy's port.

During the late Civil War in America, the executive government undertook the blockade of more than three thousand miles of coast; and though nothing could exceed the energy and activity of the naval officers so employed, the results were very unsatisfactory, inasmuch as it was not till absolute possession was taken of the forts at the entrance of the great harbors—such as Charleston, Mobile and Wilmington—that blockade-running was stopped. Four out of six of the fast little craft fitted out, some in England, some in New York, succeeded in evading the vigilance of the cruisers; and it is undeniable that the war was prolonged for many months, if not years, by the warlike stores, clothing, provisions, etc., introduced into the Southern States by this method.

I trust that our American friends will not be too severe in their censures on those engaged in blockade-running, for—I say it with the greatest respect for and admiration of American enterprise—had they been lookers-on instead of principals in the sad drama that was enacted, they would have been the very men to take

the lead. For if ever a cool head, strong nerve and determination of character were required, it was while running or endeavoring to run, through the American blockade of the coast of the Southern States.

It must be borne in mind that the excitement of fighting, which some men (inexplicable I confess, to me) really love, did not exist. One was always either running away, or being deliberately pitched into by the broadsides of the American cruisers, the slightest resistance to which would have constituted piracy; whereas capture without resistance merely involved confiscation of vessel and cargo.

The vessel I had charge of, which I had brought out from England, was one of the finest double-screw steamers that had been built by D—n; of 400 tons burden, 250 horse-power, 180 feet long and 22 feet beam; undeniably a good craft in all respects, lying in St. George's Harbor, Bermuda. Our crew consisted of a captain, three officers, three engineers and twenty-eight men, including firemen—that is, ten seamen and eighteen firemen. They were all Englishmen, and as they received very high wages, we managed to have picked men; in fact the men-of-war on the West India station found it a difficult matter to prevent their crews from desertion, so great was the temptation offered by the blockade-runners.

I will begin by explaining how we prepared the vessel for her work. This was done by reducing her spars to a light pair of lower masts, without any yards across them, the only break in their sharp outline being a small crow's nest on the foremast, to be used as a lookout place. The hull, which showed about eight feet above water, was painted a dull gray color, to render her as nearly as possible invisible in the night. The boats were lowered square with the gunnels. Coal of a nature that never smoked (anthracite) was taken on board; the funnel being what is called "telescope," lowered close down to the deck. In order that no noise might be made, steam was blown off, in case of a sudden stop, under water. In fact every *ruse* was resorted to, to enable the vessel to evade the