

Stephen Chapin Kinnaman

# Merrimack

*The Biography of a Steam Frigate*

SERIES IN AMERICAN HISTORY

## Summary

Merrimack is the biography of a warship, the U.S. Steam Frigate Merrimack. Her name has long been linked to the first duel of ironclads, an epic Civil War battle fought at Hampton Roads between the Monitor and Merrimack. But over time the myth of the Merrimack—actually the C.S.S. Virginia—displaced the memory of a magnificent antebellum U.S. Navy warship. The steam frigate Merrimack lost her identity. Nearly forgotten is the story of the original Merrimack, the namesake of a class of six powerful war steamers. When built she was the largest vessel in the U.S. Navy, the nation's first screw-propelled frigate and the earliest major warship to be armed entirely with shell-firing guns. Her first commission took her on a tour of the principal naval stations of Europe. During her second commission, she served as flagship of the Navy's Pacific Squadron, cruising the shores of Chile, Peru, Panama, Hawaii, Mexico and Nicaragua. Through the copious use of Merrimack's deck logs, official correspondence, contemporary newspapers and journals, and original construction plans, the author's research illuminates the mechanical issues and human interactions that indelibly shaped Merrimack's brief career. The author provides an unparalleled glimpse into the day-to-day events that defined the life of an active antebellum warship. But Merrimack offers more than just a summary of the ship's operational life. The author, a professional naval architect and marine engineer, dissects the origins of her design and compares the Merrimack class steam frigates to contemporary U.S. and British warships. He also

examines the controversy surrounding her troubled engines, documenting their performance using archived drawings and steam log data. In summary, Merrimack embraces the many threads of a bygone era—history, biography, geography and technology—and has woven them together in telling of the story of the U.S. Steam Frigate Merrimack.

## About the author

**Stephen Chapin Kinnaman**, the son of a former U.S. Navy officer, grew up in upstate New York and northern New Jersey. He graduated from the University of Michigan with a B.Sc. in naval architecture and marine engineering and pursued post-graduate research at Cambridge University's Department of Engineering. He is a professional naval architect and has used his understanding of complex technical issues to expose the many problems that plagued Merrimack's steam machinery. His experience on the water managing marine operations has allowed him to craft a lively, hands-on account of Merrimack's two commissions. During his long career in the offshore oil and gas industry, the author published nearly a dozen technical articles in various trade journals and industry forums. More recently he published two works of naval history, *Captain Bulloch: The Life of James Dunwoody Bulloch, Naval Agent of the Confederacy* and *The Most Perfect Cruiser: How James Dunwoody Bulloch Constructed and Equipped the Confederate States Steamer Alabama*. Stephen Chapin Kinnaman also has to his credit numerous public speaking engagements at historical societies, Civil War roundtables and the prestigious McMullen Naval History Symposia held at the U.S. Naval Academy. The author and his wife currently reside in Chappell Hill, Texas.

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