

*Dreadnoughts and Super-dreadnoughts* will be useful and interesting, full of fascinating information. Readers more interested in depicting these ships as artists or model builders will enjoy the book's historical accuracy and detail. Far better than some examples of this genre, this book is recommended very highly for all readers.

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**John F. Messer. *A Scottish Blockade Runner in the American Civil War: Joannes Wyllie of the Steamer Ad-Vance*. Dunbeath, Scotland: Whittles Publishing, [www.whittlespublishing.com](http://www.whittlespublishing.com), 2021. xxiv+258 pp., illustrations, maps, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. UK £18.99, US \$24.95, paper; ISBN 978-184995-482-2.**

War devastates belligerents on both sides, but also generates economic opportunities for those who are willing to smuggle goods needed to conduct the war and profit from commodities produced by one side that are in great demand elsewhere. The American Civil War was an example of how this two-way traffic was employed to support the Confederacy. John Messer's book about the life and times of a colourful, largely forgotten, Scottish blockade runner, Captain Joannes Wyllie (aka John Wylie), features several special vessels and important Atlantic Ocean seaports. Its many enthralling encounters and escapes were largely woven from personal journals, ship's logs, and other primary source accounts.

This engaging story is well-documented and, at times, gripping – a unique perspective of Civil War foreign blockade running that has had little historiographic exposure. Wyllie, the son of a Scottish farmer, studied at St. Andrews University and, for several years, was employed as a successful schoolteacher. Wyllie, however, had a love for the sea and left the sedate position of school master to work his way up the merchant mariner ladder, starting with the sailing ship *Hope*. He ascended all the way to sailing master and captain, having served onboard twelve vessels during his career. Among many adventures, Wyllie's most notable one was as a blockade runner during the American Civil War, onboard the physically impressive screw steamer *Ad-Vance*. This was one of a specialized fleet of ships that smuggled munitions and supplies through a constantly moving barrier of enemy picket ships. Formerly listed as *Lord Clyde*, the screw steamer *Ad-Vance* was purchased by the rebel State of North Carolina and rechristened to reflect the name of the state's governor, Zebulon Vance. Its mission was to run much-needed war material from the UK through Bermuda or Nassau and to Cape Fear. Then it was up

the Cape Fear River to the port of Wilmington, North Carolina where the ship endured multiple river quarantines during a rampant yellow fever epidemic. Outbound, *Ad-Vance* also conveyed much needed cotton to the European dry goods market.

After achieving great success for a little over a year, Wyllie and his ship were eventually captured. Inferior quality coal provided by the Confederacy for his steamer did not produce sufficient energy to allow his vessel to obtain the optimum speed needed to evade a picketing craft. The former Scottish vessel was rechristened for service within the US Navy as *Frolic*, the prey turned hunter. Wyllie was detained by the Union forces but managed a clever escape and returned to the UK. He later continued his blockade running, this time on a new vessel, *Deer*. Wyllie and his new ship ran aground off Sullivan's Island at the northern mouth of Charleston Harbour shortly before the end of the war. Wyllie, incarcerated once again but this time as an escapee, faced severe judicial punishment, even as a foreign national. What followed was an almost comical second getaway from the clutches of federal law enforcement agents, employing ingenious disguises, subterfuge, false scents, and unexpected escape routes to leave American waters and regain freedom back in Scotland.

Initially, Wyllie did not receive credit for the success of his blockade running because North Carolina resident Confederate naval officers were in charge or listed as super-cargoes representing the interest of the ship owner. For most of the voyages, the Scottish "foreigner" was listed as sailing master, but he was eventually acknowledged for his role in *Ad-Vance*'s success. Wyllie successfully completed fifteen forays through the blockade, a rate of about one completed trip for every two months of service. This was an impressive record, but compared with others, he was only the tenth most successful blockade runner. Wyllie and fellow blockade runners from other nations were critical elements in the logistical system that carried supplies to the Confederacy to properly equip its forces. The success rate of the various blockade runners was nearly eighty percent, and the profits for the sponsors were substantial. These illicit vessels accounted for the majority of the Confederacy's artillery, small arms, bullets, and powder. Thanks to the blockade running, Confederate forces were never without a means to fight, thus prolonging the war.

After returning to the United Kingdom, Wyllie briefly became involved as an arms transporter in the obscure and bloody Paraguayan War along the River Plate. Shortly thereafter, the veteran mariner retired from the sea to his native Scotland. There, he became a farmer and a local bewhiskered celebrity, who recounted his seaborne adventures to his friends and neighbours. "Looking at the cut of his jib, one could not at the first take him for a sailor. He does not roll as he walks, but is remarkably light in his feet. He is tall and powerfully made, and in the region of the chest, shoulders, and neck there is a wonderful

concentration of force.... [His face] brims with kindness, and twinkles with racy or pawky [cynical] humor. Altogether, the captain is a notable man, and no one can see him for the first time without pausing to inquire who he may be” (204-205).

For over a century, Wyllie’s role and its impact upon the Civil War largely remained undiscovered – until recently. *A Scottish Blockade Runner in the American Civil War* is a scholarly, highly detailed book, consistent with what one might expect from a Scottish museum curator. Perhaps overly detailed with minor characters and sides issues, the work still provides an excellent contribution to the maritime history literature providing primary source data concerning the role and difficulties of foreign blockade runners during the American Civil War.

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**Venner F. Milewski, Jr. *Fighting Ships of the U.S. Navy 1883-2019, Vol. One, Part Two – Aircraft Carriers, Escort Carriers*. Poland; Stratus s.j, [www.mmpbooks.biz](http://www.mmpbooks.biz), 2021. 272 pp., illustrations, tables, glossary, bibliography, index. US \$52.00, hardback; ISBN 978-3-66549-29-6.**

The second part of a new naval book series, this work is a compendium of all 145 escort carriers produced or planned by the United States during the Second World War for both American and Allied use. Similar to the documentation style of Stefan Terzibaschitsch’s 1981 *Escort Carriers and Aviation Support Ships of the U.S. Navy*, the work consists of brief text histories, tabulated information, and photographs. All ten classes of escort carriers are covered sequentially, followed by a table of camouflage patterns and black and white renderings of the camouflage design sheets. A brief bibliography and index are at the end to conclude the work.

The core of the work follows a standardized format. Vessels are presented in numbered order following the listing of their class. Each is given a table listing ship name, hull number, builder, keel laid date, launch date, and commission date. This is followed by a paragraph-sized notation of the ship’s history, detailing key points in terms of approval, original commanding officers, transfer to Britain (if applicable), decommissioning or destruction notes, and the like. Combat service, tours of duty, and assigned air wings, however, are not addressed. Photographs of the vessel follow, and a general table on the class as a whole concludes each section with basic data regarding hull dimensions, armament, crew complement, and engineering specifications. There are images for a few of the hulls showing their construction or conversion processes, with