

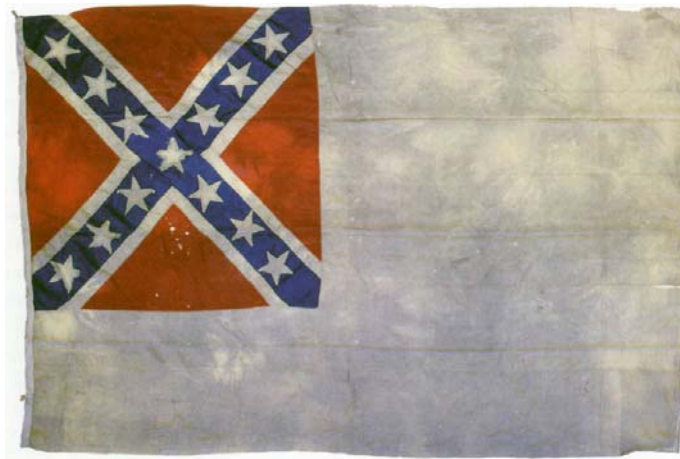


Southern Cross Down Under

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Abstract

The Confederate commerce raider CSS *Shenandoah* visited Melbourne in 1865 for repairs and provisions, the only port-visit on its around-the-world mission: a journey that became famous for the *Shenandoah* being the ship that fired the last shot of the American Civil War. The paper focuses on its Australian visit and the *Shenandoah*'s use of the *Stainless Banner* and the naval use of other Confederate flags. The paper is sourced from extensive contemporary local newspaper articles and illustrations, archives, memoirs and several books. The visit created a considerable impact in Australia that indirectly led to the development of the Victorian colonial navy, which required a navy ensign. The Victorian flag evolved to become the current Australian national flag.



Ensign of CSS *Shenandoah*

Southern Cross Down Under

This lecture is the remarkable tale of a ship's voyage around the world 146 years ago and how its visit to Melbourne influenced the creation of the Australian National Flag.

CSS *Shenandoah* in Australia

On Wednesday 25 January 1865 a steamship thought to be the *Royal Standard* entered Port Phillip Bay¹ and was boarded by a pilot to guide the ship into the port of Melbourne, Victoria. He was astonished to learn that the ship was the war-steamer *Shenandoah*, wearing the colours of the Confederate States of America.² (Figure 1) The Civil War had come “Down Under”, or to quote a contemporary report, here was “a representative to testify the reality of that fierce fratricidal contest which interests us all so much.”³

The *Shenandoah* “strutted into port undisguised—a visible, powerful manifestation of the Confederacy as a Nation—and the whole of Melbourne, it seemed, had turned out to cheer. *Shenandoah* was receiving a hero's welcome. Passed on with our flag flying. Numerous steamers, tugs and sailing craft saluted by dipping their ensigns. ... It is the first time these people have ever seen our flag.”⁴

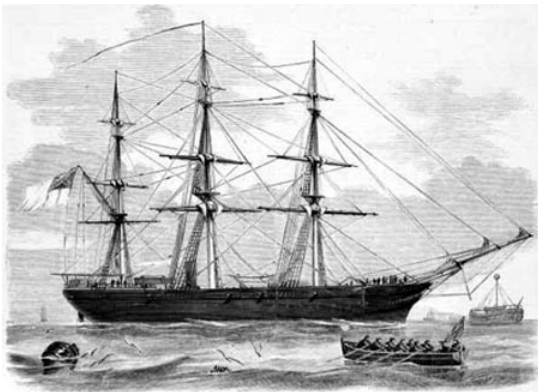


Figure 1

CSS *Shenandoah* at anchor in Port Phillip Bay

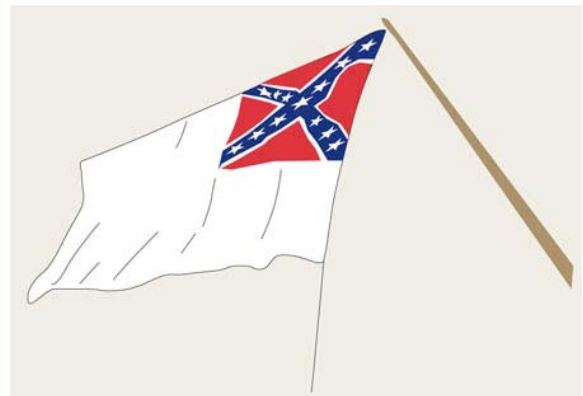


Figure 2

Ensign of CSS *Shenandoah* (detail from Fig 1)

The ship's flag was described as a “white ensign with the St. George's cross and stars (that) bespoke her position in the Confederate cause.”⁵ (Figure 2) This was an error on the reporter's part—the cross should have been described as a St. Andrew's cross.⁶ It was also described as a “gay flag at the gaff—a cross of stars in a red square on a white ground”.⁷ Another newspaper stated “the ensign has been universally admired, and the pattern should not be forgotten at future bazaars ... it has thirteen stars, emblazoned white upon blue, transversally in a field of red, the remainder of the flag being white”.⁸

The Argus and other Australian newspapers reported that the Confederate States Steamer *Shenandoah* carried eight guns under the command of Captain James Waddell with a crew of 75 men, and it had arrived from Tristan D'Acuhna having captured and burnt nine large American ships on its journey to Melbourne.⁹ It was described as a “remarkably fine ship” of 1,260 gross tons with engines of 240 horsepower.¹⁰ It had a hoisting propeller that enabled it operate as a full-rigged three-masted sailing ship for speed and a steamer when winds calmed. On arrival at

Hobson's Bay, an officer was immediately despatched to Governor Sir Charles Darling requesting permission to effect necessary repairs, provisioning and coaling. The Victorian government granted permission to stay in port for the time needed for the repairs. The propeller was known to be damaged¹¹ and the engineers determined that the repairs needed to be done in the Williamstown slipway; which would extend its stay.

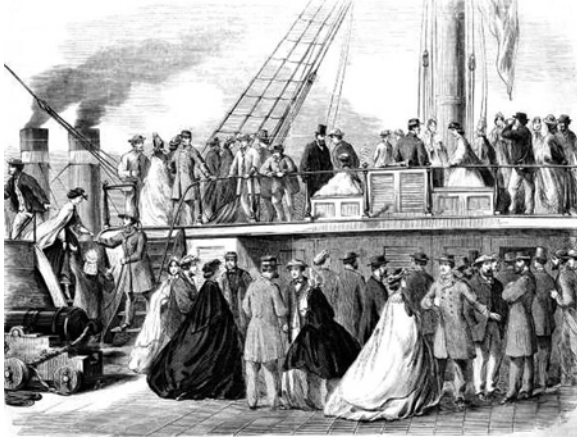


Figure 3
Visitors onboard CSS *Shenandoah*



Figure 4
Ball at Ballarat—Craig's Royal Hotel

The following day the *Shenandoah* was thronged with visitors—over three thousand Melbournians travelled to the port, and many inspected the steamer.¹² (Figure 3) Larger crowds visited over the next few days. Great excitement prevailed in Melbourne, which extended its hospitality to the Confederate ship.¹³ The prestigious Melbourne Club made the officers honorary members and invited them to a public dinner on 31 January. The officers and men went ashore and the uniform of Dixie's Land was visible in most of the public buildings, pubs and places of amusement.¹⁴ Four of the *Shenandoah's* officers travelled to Ballarat by train and attended a dinner and ball held in their honour at the Craig's Royal Hotel on Friday 10 February. (Figure 4) The ballroom was decorated with a large Union Jack and the Confederate Southern Cross was displayed on the wall with what appears to have been the French flag. One local had the Confederate flag flying during the day in company with the British ensign, whilst another had acquired an American Federal flag to mark their presence in a different way.¹⁵

The local sentiment seemed to be summarised by the comment: “we cannot but recognise and fraternise with the brave men who uphold their country's flag at the risk of being hanged from the yard-arm or shot after a short shrift, unrecognised by the Great Powers, and fighting against one of the mightiest in the Universe.”¹⁶

The United States consul protested that the *Shenandoah* was a pirate ship and should be seized, and even if it was regarded as a belligerent warship it should not be

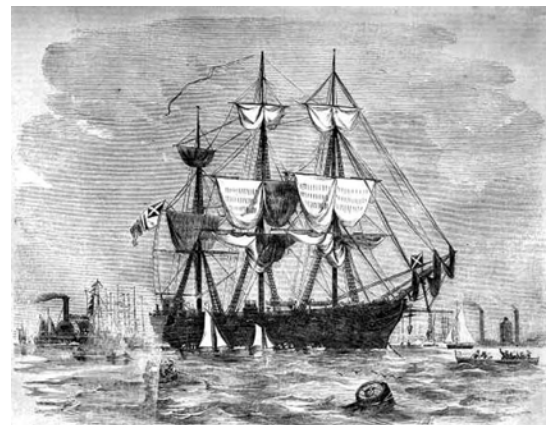


Figure 5
CSS *Shenandoah* in Port Phillip Bay

allowed to stay in a neutral port for longer than 48 hours.¹⁷ (Figure 5) On the Thursday, all the American vessels in the bay were reported to “have taken the alarm; usually profuse in their display of bunting, they did not yesterday allow the stars and stripes to flutter in the breeze at all, and one of their number hoisted a curious banner, said to be the Ionian flag.”¹⁸ (Figure 7) However, by Friday the American vessels had recovered and one brazenly came close to the rebel ship, flying the stars and stripes to display hostility to its presence.¹⁹ Every American house in Melbourne was said to display the American flag²⁰, though “Yankee gallantry is not expected to go further”.²¹ (Figure 6)



Figure 6
American federal flag (35 stars)



Figure 7
United States of the Ionian Islands

Confederate Raider

About a week earlier, there was a brief report from an English newspaper about 36 sailors who had returned to Liverpool after the Confederate flag had been hoisted on the British merchant ship *Sea King*, which was renamed the *Shenandoah*, a Confederate Cruiser.²² The *Sea King* had sailed from London on 7 October 1864, flying the British red ensign and with a stated cargo of coal bound for Bombay.²³ (Figure 8)

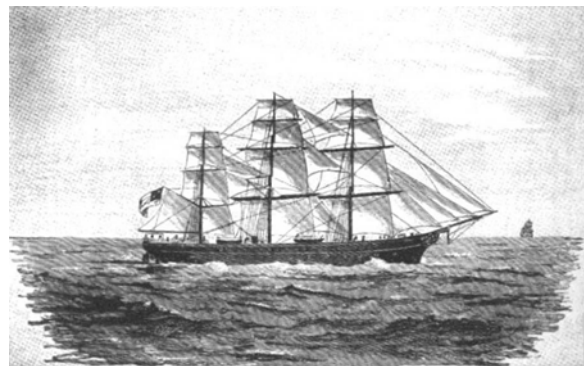


Figure 8
Sea King becomes *CSS Shenandoah*

Another British flagged steamer *Laurel* departed two days later, secretly carrying 23 officers and 12 men, most of whom were the remnants of the crew of the *CSS Alabama*, which in June had been sunk off the coast of France.²⁴ (Figure 9) The two ships rendezvoused in the Madeira Islands and the crew and armaments were transferred from the *Laurel* to the *Sea King*. On 19 October 1864, the ship was renamed the *Shenandoah* and commissioned into the Confederate Navy. (Figure 10)



Figure 9
Sinking of CSS *Alabama*

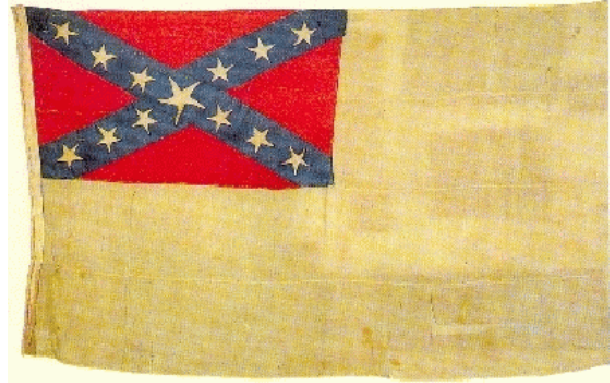


Figure 10
Ensign of CSS *Alabama*

Captain Waddell described the start of the voyage: “the little adventurer entered upon her new career throwing out to the breeze the flag of the South, and demanded a place upon that vast ocean of water without fear or favour. That flag unfolded itself gracefully to the freshening breeze, and declared the majesty of the country it represented amid the cheers of a handful of brave-hearted men”.²⁵

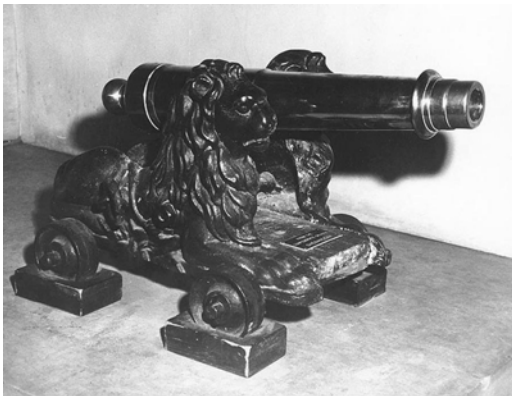


Figure 11
CSS Shenandoah armed off Madeira

Armaments were installed in calm waters mid-ocean (Figure 11) and then the *CSS Shenandoah* began its mission in the South Atlantic. On 29 October a barque was sighted. (Figure 13) *Shenandoah* initially hoisted English colours (Figure 12) and the barque replied with the Yankee flag. Confederate colours were then hoisted, a twelve pound cartridge was fired across the bows and the barque *Alins* was hove-to, the ships papers and cargo examined.²⁶ (Figure 14) The ship was declared a prize of war and “the flag which is now the emblem of tyranny hauled down”.²⁷ The crew and stores were transferred and the captured ship then scuttled. (Figure 15) Nine American vessels

were captured and all but one sunk.²⁸ In each case, the *Shenandoah* would initially display neutral colours, English or French, and her men sometimes wore blue shirts to disguise their Confederate grey attire.²⁹



Figure 12
False colours: Red Duster



Figure 13
A British vessel approaches?



Figure 14
Looting a prize

The subterfuge of an armed vessel showing false colours was legal under the laws of war, provided that the attacking ship did not fire live rounds before hoisting its authentic flag.³⁰

One ship arrived in Adelaide about the same time, and the Captain told the tale of his encounter with the *Shenandoah* on the high seas on 17 January. The *Nimrod* was American-built, but had been sold to a British owner and it was flying the red ensign. Again the rebel ship raised a British ensign as it approached *Nimrod*, which repaid the compliment by displaying its British national colours, upon which the steamer hauled down the ensign and hoisted the Confederate flag. A quarter-boat with an armed crew rowed across and the ship's papers were inspected and the ship's master was politely requested to accompany the officers to the presence of Captain Waddell. He swore an oath that the vessel was British and he was returned to his ship with every courtesy.³¹



Figure 15
Burning a prize

It was normal for ships in the 19th century not to fly a flag at sea, but only in port and when in sight of other ships at sea. However, to celebrate New Year's Day 1865, the *Shenandoah* "hoisted the Confederate flag and kept it up all day to welcome the New Year."³²

The Confederate Flag

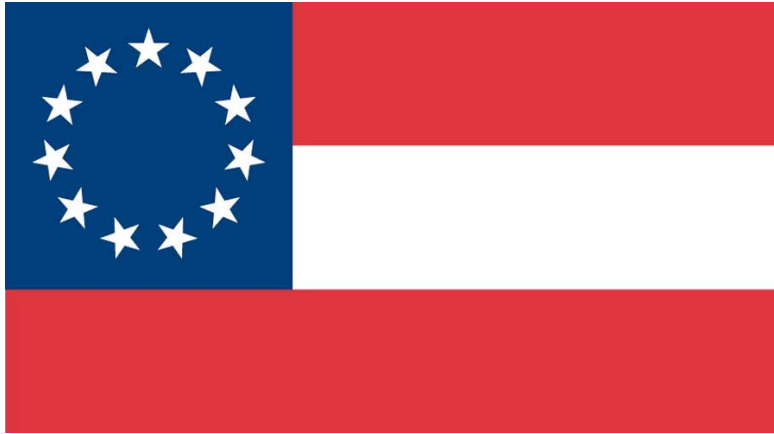


Figure 16
Stars and Bars, 4 March 1861 (initially with 7 stars)

adoption of a flag consisting of three red and white stripes with a blue canton containing white stars for each of the states—initially seven growing to eleven.³³ The flag was widely known as the “Stars and Bars”. (Figure 16) The national flag was used as the ensign of the Confederate Navy, including the early Confederate raider CSS *Nashville* whilst the canton was used as the naval jack. (Figure 21)

On the battlefield the similarity of the “Stars and Bars” to the US flag led to confusion, and in September 1861, after the First Battle of Manassas, General P. G. T. Beauregard created a prototype for a distinctive battle flag for the Army of the Potomac.³⁴ (Figure 17) The exact form of the battle flag varied as it was introduced to other Confederate armies, and it became known as the “Southern Cross”. The battle flag used by the Army of the Tennessee from March 1864 has become the form that is today associated with the Confederacy.

As the Civil War continued and became bloodier, the similarity of the national flag to the hated flag of the North resulted in the Congress on 1 May 1863 adopting a new national flag that incorporated the Southern Cross as the canton of a white flag. This represented the “purity of the Cause”—a “Stainless Banner”.³⁵ (Figure 18)

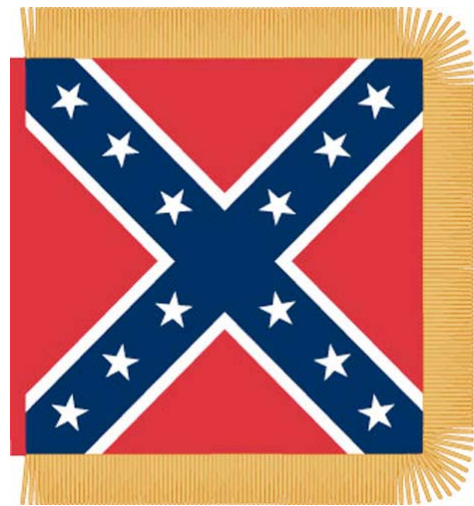


Figure 17
General Beauregard’s Battle Flag
for the Army of the Potomac
September 1861

It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully recount the development of the flags of the Confederacy, but it is appropriate to give just a brief overview. About a month after the Congress of the secessionist states adopted the interim constitution of the Confederate States of America, a flag was adopted. Hundreds of designs were submitted to a

Congressional Committee and a sentimental attachment to the “old flag” resulted in the

One of the first uses was to drape the coffin of General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson—and this flag today is preserved in the Museum of the Confederacy. (Figure 19)

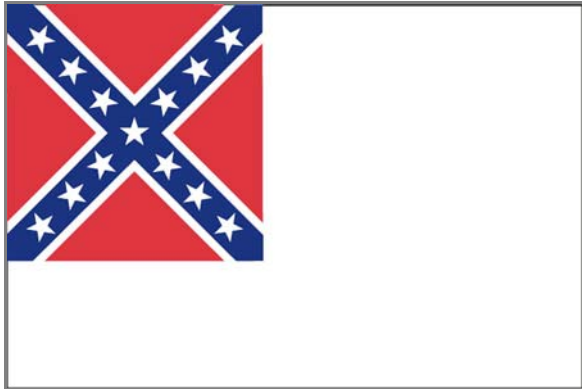


Figure 18
Second National Flag—Stainless Banner
1 May 1863

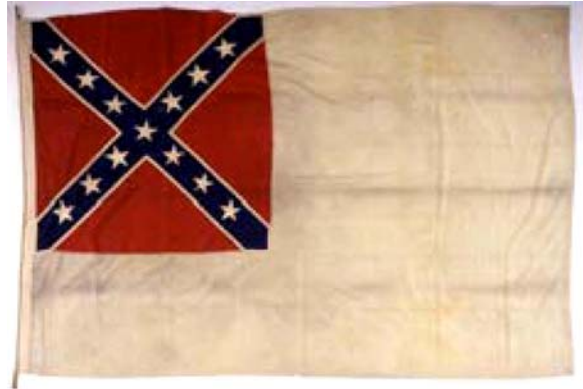


Figure 19
Flag on Gen. “Stonewall” Jackson’s coffin
12 May 1863

The new national flag became the naval ensign, and a famous example is the flag associated with the captain of the raider CSS *Alabama*, Admiral Raphael Semmes.³⁶ (Fig. 20)

As with the first national flag, the canton of the Stainless Banner was used as the naval jack, though in the proportions of 2:3 rather than square. (Figure 23) There was also a masthead pennant, which comprised eleven stars on a blue panel between two red panels with the remainder of the pennant white. (Figure 24)



Figure 20
Admiral Raphael Semmes’ flag



Figure 21
First Navy Jack, 4 March 1861



Figure 22
First Navy Pennant, 4 March 1861



Figure 23
Second Navy Jack, 1 May 1863

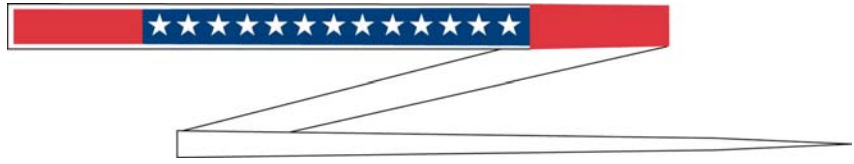


Figure 24
Second Navy Pennant, 1 May 1863

Two of the flags used by the *Shenandoah* have survived. A twelve-foot ensign is in the collection of the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia. (Figure 25) The other is a four-foot storm flag that is in the collection of the Charleston Confederate Museum, and NAVA members may recall seeing this flag during NAVA 43. (Figure 26)

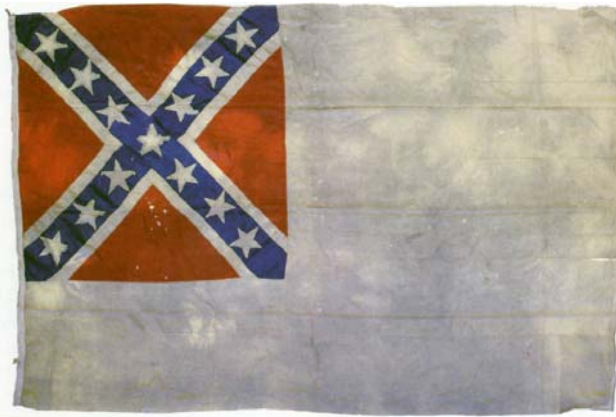


Figure 25
Shenandoah flag at Museum of the Confederacy

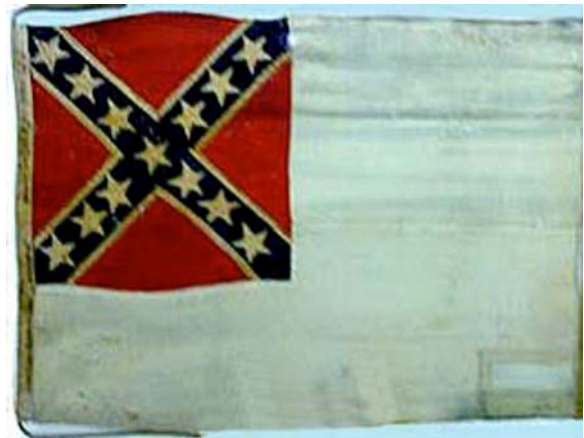


Figure 26
Shenandoah flag at the Confederate Museum

The predominantly white flag also caused problems on the battlefield and on 4 March 1865, only weeks before the war's end, a third national flag was adopted. (Figure 27) Whilst officially this also became the naval ensign, in practice it was not used at sea.

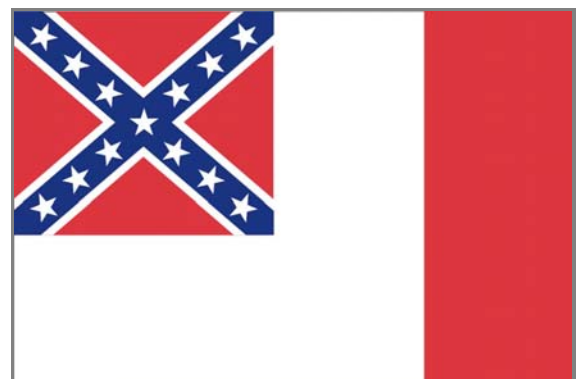


Figure 27
Third National Flag, 4 March 1865

The *Shenandoah* Incident

Whilst there was general interest and a degree of sympathy to the Confederate cause, there was also recognition of the need for the Australian colonials to respect the neutrality rules. There was also some unease about the role of a commerce raider in attacking unarmed merchant ships. One press comment made the analogy to the position of a bushranger—“armed to the teeth, they can take their own time and place and surprise the traveller” and questioned whether admiration was merited.³⁷ The newspaper went on to say “mercurial people will doubtless be found who will hail the Confederate flag as symbolising a fierce ill-will against a great people with whom our relations are still friendly, and whose enmity would be the greatest disaster which could befall us”. Another newspaper was more blunt: “We cannot regard the *Shenandoah* as other than a marauding craft and her officers and crew than as a gang of respectable pirates”.³⁸ The concern was clear—exports to California and imports of American goods and the ships carrying gold might be impacted by attacks on shipping in Australian waters. Progressively, the local newspapers divided—*The Argus* was a vocal supporter whilst *The Herald* and *The Age* were critical of the government for permitting the ship to stay.

A major difficulty for the *Shenandoah* had been the lack of sufficient crew to man such a large ship.³⁹ A number of locals expressed an interest in joining the crew, which was reportedly offering £6 per month, £8 sign-on bounty plus prize-money.⁴⁰ However the government made it clear that no violation of British neutrality should take place and recruiting local seamen would contravene the *Foreign Enlistment Act*. The problem was exacerbated by about 12 desertions from the ship, encouraged by Federal sympathisers. A number of the visitors to the ship volunteered their services, but they were all declined, at least publicly.

On 15 February, the day when the repairs finished, (Figure 28) the patent slip in which *Shenandoah* lay was seized by police, men from the Royal Artillery were deployed at the Williamstown battery (Figure 29) and a gun-raft with two 68-pound cannon and water police surrounded the dock.

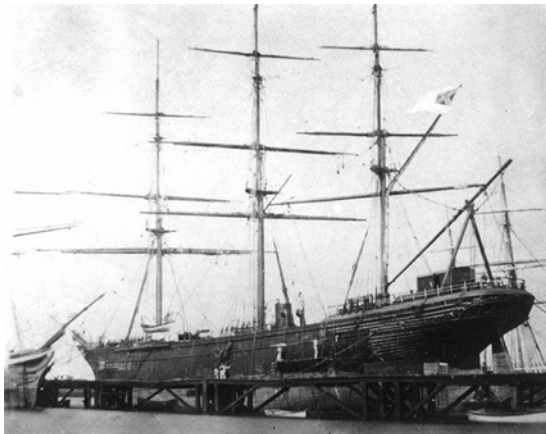


Figure 28
Shenandoah in dry dock



Figure 29
Royal Artillery shore battery deployed

The police had a warrant to search the ship for suspected recruits and refused to allow the vessel to be re-floated. A stand-off resulted as Captain Waddell claimed the police had no right to

search a foreign vessel of war, and he pledged his honour that no local enlistments had occurred, stating “it was as much as his commission was worth to permit his flag to be disgraced by the ship’s being opened to search by the civil authorities.” The confrontation ended when four seamen left the ship and were arrested, including “Charlie”, who was one of the alleged illegal enlistments, based on information supplied by a deserter to the United States consul.⁴¹ The ship was allowed to be launched the following day and the newspapers started to refer to “The Shenandoah Affair”. The government’s actions were generally condemned by the local press for their lack of respect and breach of the rules of hospitality in a neutral port.

On Saturday 18 February 1865, *Shenandoah* fired a salute and left port, clearing the heads at noon. In Melbourne immediately there were claims that a number of visitors to the ship on Friday night were not seen leaving the ship before it departed and that seamen had been transferred to the ship outside the 3-mile limit. The next day, onboard, a large number of men “seemingly materialised out of thin air.”⁴² A total of 42 men had stowed away in order to join the crew, and the memoirs of the officers claimed that they had been unaware of their presence—but greatly welcomed them, as they allowed the *Shenandoah* to be fully crewed for the first time in its voyage.

The *Shenandoah* at War

There was also considerable speculation about the risks of attack upon several American vessels that were due in port.⁴³ They need not have feared. *Shenandoah* had been operating under secret orders to avoid Federal naval patrols near Cape Town and to re-supply in Melbourne, from where it would travel north to attack the New Bedford whaling fleet operating in the northern Pacific.⁴⁴ (Figure 30) Its journey north was long and generally uneventful.

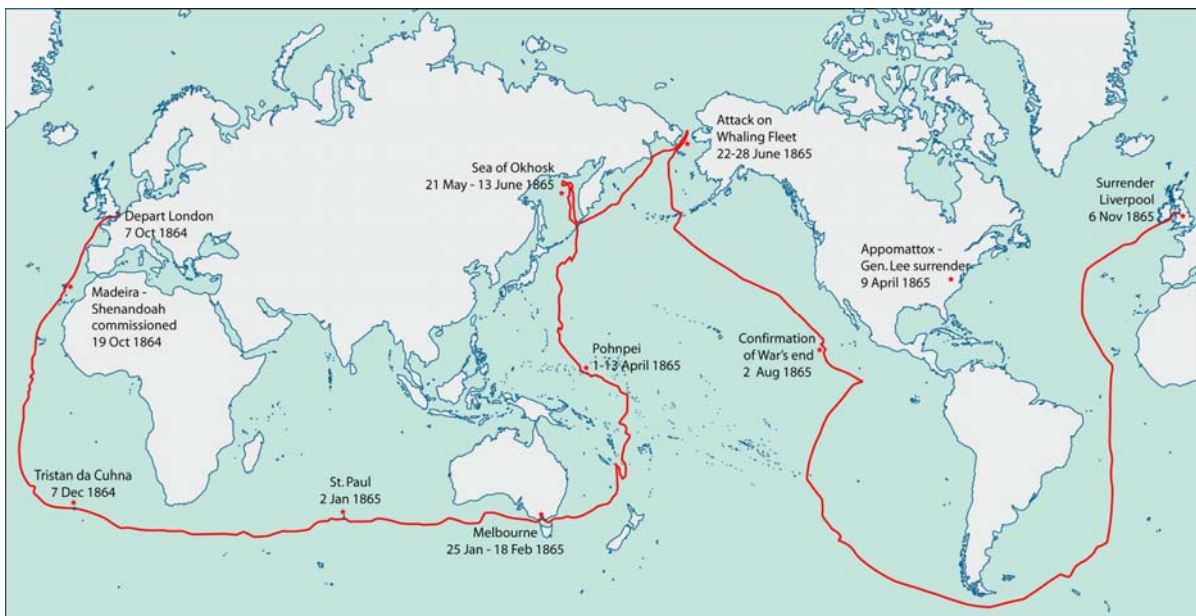


Figure 30
Voyage of CSS *Shenandoah* 7 October 1864–28 June 1865

On the evening of 20 March, shortly before the Equator was crossed, Lieutenant Whittle noted in his diary: “the Southerners Cross hung in the heavens, as if to rebuke the discord below.”⁴⁵ On 1 April 1865, *Shenandoah* entered the harbour at Ponape Island and was rewarded with the capture of four Yankee whaling ships, which were captured, stripped of their stores and set on fire.⁴⁶ (Figure 31)



Figure 31
Destruction of whalers at Ponape Island

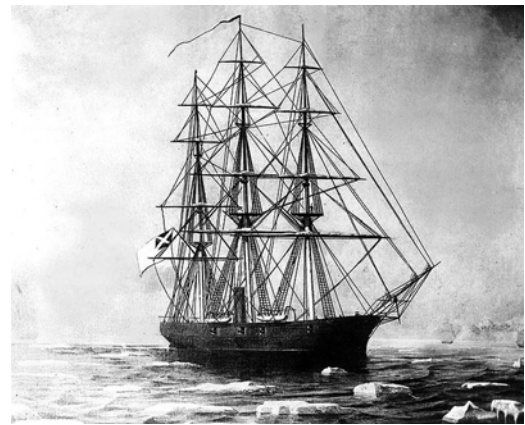


Figure 32
Shenandoah in the Arctic ice

25 May 1865 found the *Shenandoah* in the Sea of Okhotsk near the coast of Siberia, where it attacked its first whaler in Arctic waters.⁴⁷ (Figure 32) There were plenty of whales and perilous ice about, but no further ships were sighted, so Captain Waddell decided to proceed further north-east into the Bering Sea.⁴⁸ Two whalers were captured on 22 June in the Bering Strait⁴⁹ and they brought grave news—the Union Army had captured Richmond and General Robert E. Lee and the Army of North Virginia had surrendered. (Figure 33) Initially the officers of the *Shenandoah* expressed disbelief and clung to the faith that the Confederacy was still fighting on. The next day four more whalers were captured with further confirmation of Lee’s surrender, but they clung to hope that the South was still fighting on. (Figure 34)



Figure 33
Fall of Richmond, April 1865

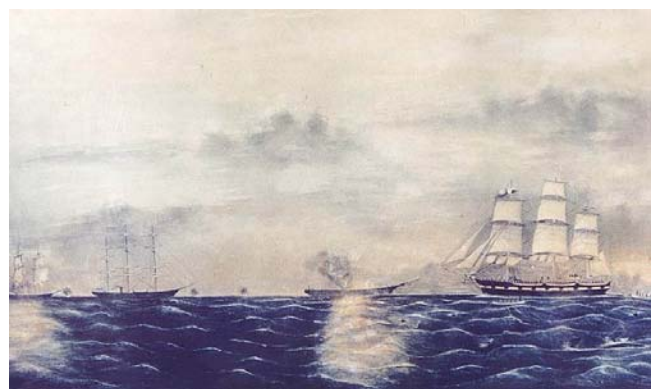


Figure 34
Destruction of whalers off Cape Thaddeus

Over that week a total of 24 American whalers were captured, resulting in about 1,000 prisoners, who were loaded into long boats and towed like “obedient ducklings” through the icy waters.⁵⁰ Four of the ships were used to transport the prisoners to an American port and the rest were stripped of supplies and burnt. (Figure 35) The last ship was captured on 28 June. Most of the whalers had surrendered when confronted, but one had attempted to escape and been fired upon with live cannon on 22 June 1865. The whaling fleet of New England substantially destroyed, the *Shenandoah* turned south.



Figure 35
“*Shenandoah* at Work”

Doubts as to the prudence of continuing its mission started to trouble Captain Waddell and as it approached San Francisco it sought to obtain news from a passing ship. On 2 August contact was made with the English bark *Barracouta*, which informed them that President Jefferson Davis had been captured and all Confederate army and navy forces had surrendered.⁵¹ (Figure 36) Captain Waddell ordered the removal of all of the *Shenandoah*'s armaments.⁵² Its war was also now over, having fired the last shot of the Civil War.



Figure 36
Defeat—capturing the battle flag

Shenandoah continued southward, rounded Cape Horn and turned north into the Atlantic, avoiding the shipping lanes, which might harbour Federal warships. As Captain Waddell stated, it was a matter of honour to safely return his ship to England, “I had a responsibility ... which involved ... the honour of the flag entrusted to us which had walked the waters fearlessly and in triumph”.⁵³ They also realised that they were no longer combatants in a war, but possibly could be regarded as pirates in the eyes of international law. The ship's ensign was lowered to half-mast when one of the crew died of disease, prompting Lieutenant Whittle to write: “When I saw our poor flag weeping, I could but be plunged into the depths of thought connected with it ... our poor downtrodden country, our weeping flag, we are as it were, the rear guard of the armies of the South.”⁵⁴

The surviving whalers reached San Francisco, and the American press and public became incandescent with rage at the destruction that had occurred after the war's end. The target of their anger was the British Government, which was accused of allowing

the Confederate Navy to acquire British built warships, contrary to the international laws of neutrality. The United States government sought compensation from Britain for the losses from the various commerce raiders that it had not stopped being secretly purchased by the Confederacy. The *Shenandoah* was the “English pirate”.⁵⁵ (Figure 37)

A despatch to all British colonies advised that “having received information that the ship “Shenandoah” had continued her captures and depredations on the high seas” after having been apprized that “the Confederate Flag has ceased to be recognized by any nation as the flag of a belligerent”, the Commanders of Her Majesty’s ships of war were instructed to forcibly detain the vessel if she came into a British port or was found on the high seas equipped as a vessel of war.⁵⁶ The despatch included a Law Office report that *prima facie* such a vessel flying an unrecognized flag would be liable to be regarded as a pirate.

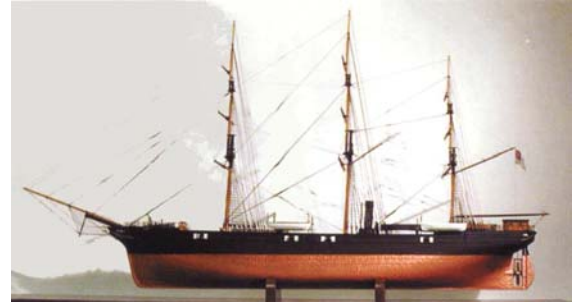


Figure 37
Model of *CSS Shenandoah*

On 5 November 1865, *Shenandoah* entered the Irish Sea and took onboard a pilot who guided them into the Mersey River, Liverpool the next morning. Captain Waddell anchored the *Shenandoah* directly astern of the British warship *Donegal* and he formally surrendered his ship to the British Government. The Confederate colours were lowered from the mizzen gaff: “the last flag down”.⁵⁷

A contemporary illustration of the *Shenandoah* in the Mersey shows a large signal flag in place of the naval ensign. (Figure 38) There are no colours, but it would seem that it was the “Blue Peter”, the signal code for a ship about to sail—surely an ironic signal at the end of such a voyage.⁵⁸ (Figures 39 & 40)

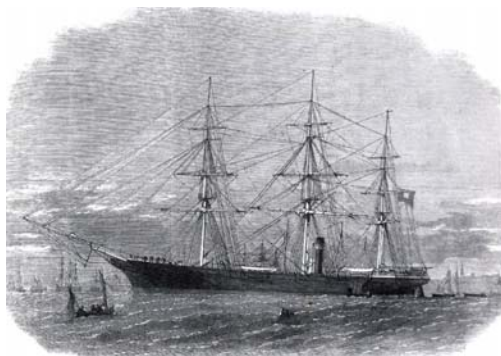


Figure 38
Shenandoah in the Mersey, 6 Nov 1865



Figure 39
Detail of signal flag



Figure 40
Commercial Code P-Blue Peter

After a few days of arrest by Royal Navy marines, all the crew were released without penalty. The *Shenandoah* was handed over to the U.S. Government, which subsequently sold the ship to the Sultan of Zanzibar.⁵⁹ *Shenandoah* had travelled 53,000 miles over 13 months. During the voyage it had captured 38 Federal merchant ships and taken 1,053 prisoners but its hostilities had

not resulted in a single death or serious injury on either the *Shenandoah* or any of the ships it attacked. This contrasts with the over 600,000 deaths in the Civil War.

Impacts in Australia

In Australia, the visit of the *Shenandoah* had created considerable interest. There was generally a degree of sympathy for the cause of the South, with some remembering the little rebellion at Ballarat in 1854 when miners at the Eureka Stockade fought for their democratic rights. For others, the visit of a foreign warship operating as a commerce raider roused fears and identified a need for self-defence.

There had been earlier fears about the possibility of Russian Imperial ambitions. The Crimean War of 1854-55 had created apprehension in the Australian colonies about the rising naval power of the Russian Empire, whilst cruises of the Pacific by various Russian naval ships confirmed the vulnerability of the Australian colonies.⁶⁰ (Figures 41 and 42)



Figure 41
Russian trophy, 1862



Figure 42
HIRMSC *Svetlana*
visit to Melbourne, 1862

In Melbourne in 1856 artillery batteries were built at Williamstown and Sandridge to defend the port and two forts were built at the entrance to Port Phillip. In 1859, the British Admiralty established a separate naval squadron in Australian waters—five Royal Navy vessels, based in Sydney.⁶¹ The annual ship visit to Melbourne however did not provide much comfort for the colonials. The British government view was that whilst the reputation of the Royal Navy was sufficient deterrent against aggression, the colonies could have stronger defence, if they paid for it out of their own resources.



Figure 43
HMCSS *Victoria*

Victorian Governor Hotham decided to have a seagoing screw steamer built in London. The HMCSS *Victoria*⁶² arrived in Melbourne on 31 May 1856—an event that marked the foundation of the second colonial navy in the British Empire.⁶³ (Figure 43) The Victorian Colonial Navy had no clear legal status and the British government disallowed legislation passed in 1860 by the Victorian Parliament to commission officers and pay and regulate the crews of armed vessels in the

service of the colonial government, as it usurped the Imperial prerogatives of the Royal Navy.⁶⁴

At the beginning of the American Civil War in 1861, the colony's sole warship, the *Victoria*, was on loan to New Zealand as part of the First Maori War. Whilst the ship had done useful services, the burden of its high operating costs led to its decommissioning in July 1864 and its transfer to survey duties. The defence of Melbourne relied solely on the artillery batteries on the harbour shores and an experimental gun-raft. (Figure 44)

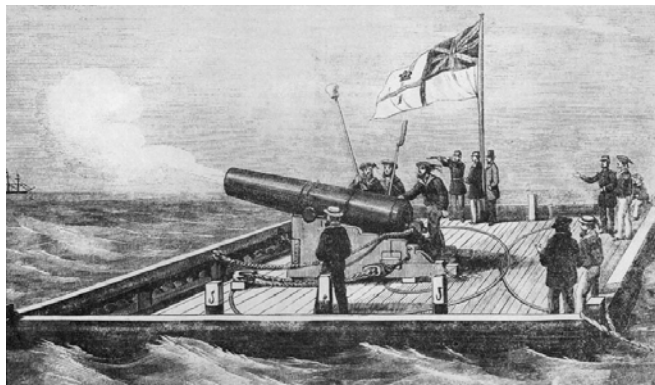


Figure 44
The gun raft, February 1865

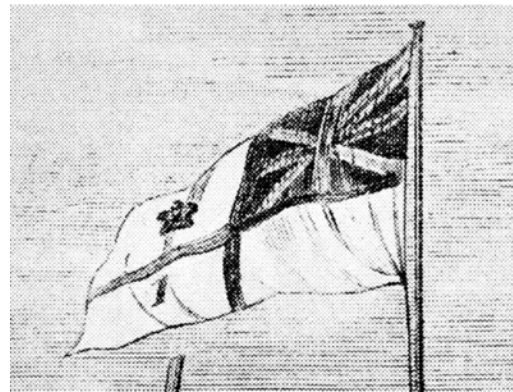


Figure 45
The gun raft flag

The illustration of the gun-raft, which is dated 18 February 1865, shows an interesting, unidentified flag—a British white ensign with a crown and a letter (possibly a “T” for Treasury Department or a “1”, possibly representing a unit number). (Figure 45) The colour of the ensign is not clear in the black and white drawing, but it is presumed to be white with a red St George cross.⁶⁵ Newly available research has established that prior to the official adoption of a flag for the colony of Victoria, there were semi-official flags used by various government departments.⁶⁶

The unexpected visit of CSS *Shenandoah*, especially the confrontation with the police, had shown that Port Melbourne would have been poorly defended against a hostile naval attack. Following the visit, the Victorian government undertook a review the colony's defences⁶⁷ and this was reinforced by the British government forming the view that the colonies should take more responsibility for their own defences. The British Parliament passed the *Colonial Naval Defence Act* on 7 April 1865, to authorise the colonies to acquire and use vessels of war, raise and maintain seamen and a body of volunteers and for appointing commissioned officers. The volunteers were to have the “privilege” of being part of the Royal Navy Reserve and colonial ships and crew were to be available to serve as part of the Royal Navy if required by the “mother country”.⁶⁸

In 1866 the Treasurer negotiated the acquisition of a 55 year-old Royal Navy sail warship, the HMVS *Nelson* for use as a training vessel and authorised the construction of HMVS *Cerberus*, a turret ironclad for harbour defence—Australia's first battleship. These would protect the city and harbour from an attack by a warship such as the *Shenandoah*, whilst the might and vigilance of the Royal Navy, which continued to rule the seas, would defend against a larger naval force.

Initially, the Victorian Naval Brigade is believed to have used a British red ensign, which ambiguously was the ensign of Royal Navy warships not attached to a squadron⁶⁹ and the merchant shipping flag.

The international legal issues that surrounded the recognition of the belligerent status of CSS *Shenandoah*, particularly after the end of hostilities, had focused the Admiralty on the need to provide for an appropriate flag for colonial warships. Initially the Admiralty expected that colonial warships would be commanded by a commissioned officer of the Royal Navy and accordingly, the colonial naval ensign should be a British White Ensign with the addition of the coat of arms or a distinguishing mark to represent the colony.⁷⁰ In December 1865 the British Admiralty and Colonial Office determined that, as the colonial warships would form part of the Royal Navy Reserve, the proper flag should be the British Blue Ensign “with the seal or Badge of the Colony in the fly thereof”.⁷¹ (Figure 46) As the *Victoria* was not in naval service at the time, there was no initial response to the Admiralty’s directive.

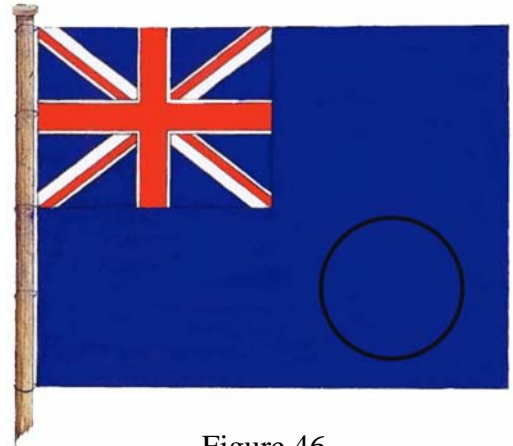


Figure 46
British Blue Ensign, 1865

However, by 1870, with the arrival of HMVS *Nelson* and the imminent arrival of HMVS *Cerberus*, the need for a naval ensign became more apparent. On 1 February 1870 the Victorian Government adopted a new flag for vessels in the government’s service—“the Blue Ensign, having in the fly thereof the distinguishing badge of the colony, viz: five white stars, representing the constellation of the Southern Cross.”⁷² (Figure 47) HMVS *Nelson* had arrived in Melbourne on 4 February 1868 and it is unclear what flag it initially used, though it may have used the White Ensign, possibly with a crown as a badge (i.e. the gun-raft flag).⁷³ The new Victorian naval ensign and the new mercantile flag were formally inaugurated on HMVS *Nelson* on 9 February 1870 with a cruise around the Bay for 200 dignitaries.⁷⁴ (Figure 48)

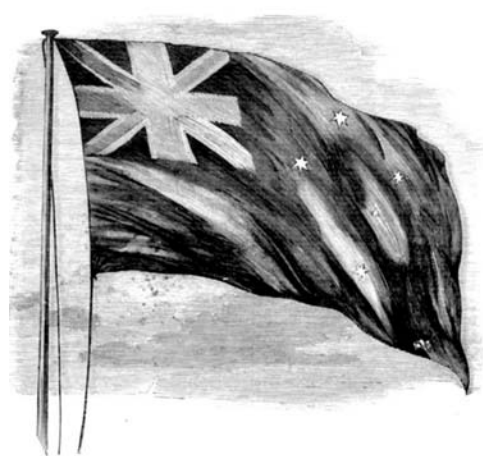


Figure 47
The Victorian Ensign, February 1870

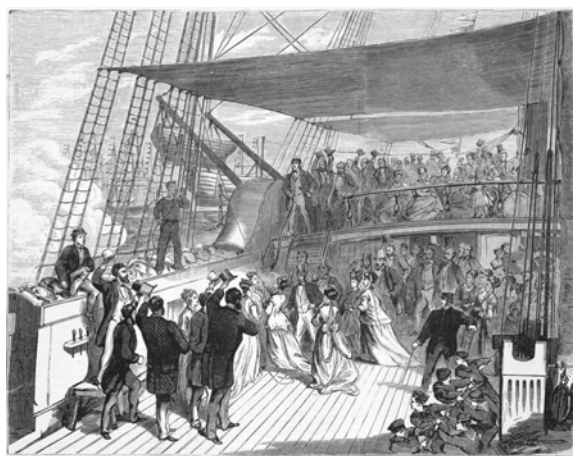


Figure 48
Inauguration of ensign aboard *HMVS Nelson*

No reasons for the use of the Southern Cross are recorded in the archives or the newspaper reports of the period. (Figure 49) One paper commented: “Our flag is a gay, a picturesque, and a significant emblem. It is the meteor flag of England, with stars added thereto—the noble constellation of the cross—which recall the banner of another mighty Anglo-Saxon nation on the West of the Atlantic.”⁷⁵ This was a reference to the use of stars on the United States flag, one of only five national flags at the time to use stars (U.S., El Salvador, Chile, Liberia and Turkey). Whilst the visit of the *Shenandoah* had increased the importance of naval defence, there is no suggestion that the design of the Confederate flag had any influence on the design of the Victorian flag. It was a coincidence that both flags were described as the “Southern Cross Flag” for the saltire on the Confederate flag is referring to “the South” and not to the constellation, which is not visible in southern USA. Another paper was dismissive of the new flag, observing that in practice only the red mercantile shipping version of the flag would be widely used and “at a distance it will be difficult to distinguish the Victorian from the purely British ensign.”⁷⁶



Figure 49

Victorian Government Ensign, February 1870

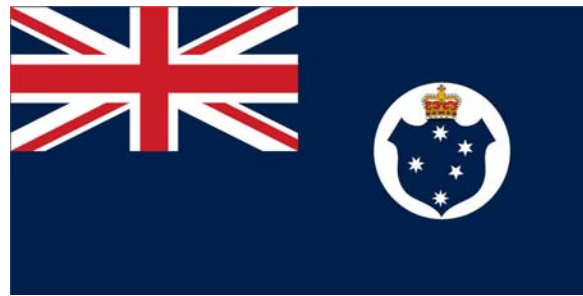


Figure 50

Victorian Government Ensign, March 1877

The Victorian government ensign was modified in 1877 by the addition of an Imperial crown above the Southern Cross, initially as part of a blue shield, and later directly onto the blue field.⁷⁷ (Figure 50) The format of the stars also altered to a 5-6-7-7-8- pointed arrangement.

The Victorian red ensign had been approved by the Admiralty and the Board of Trade in 1870.⁷⁸ (Figure 51) In doing so, an exception was created to the usual practice of colonial merchant ships only using the plain red ensign with no badge.⁷⁹ When the Victorian blue ensign altered in 1877, the red ensign continued without the crown and with the original 5-6-7-8-9 pointed star-arrangement.



Figure 51

Victorian Red Ensign, 1870
Southern Cross Stars: 5-6-7-8-9 points

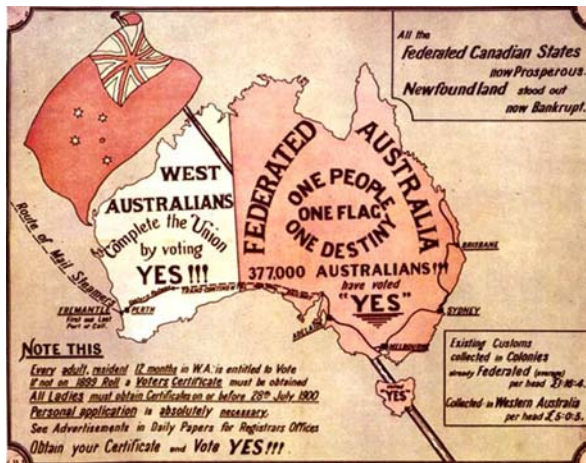


Figure 52
Federation Flag in WA and Victoria

On land, the practice had developed of using the red ensign as a local flag—additional to the Union Jack, which was regarded as the flag of the Empire. In the lead-up to Federation, the Victorian red ensign was used to promote the concept of union of the Australian colonies into a new Australian nation—particularly in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia.⁸⁰ (Figure 52)

In 1901, when the Australian states federated, the new Commonwealth of Australia conducted a competition to design flags for the use of the new Federal Government and a Merchant Shipping Flag. The winning design

represented the concept of Federation with a six-pointed star, which was added to the Victorian Red Ensign. (Figure 53) Note in particular that the number of points on the stars of the Southern Cross on the competition winning design were identical to the Victorian red ensign—5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. The evolution of this competition design to the current Australian national flag is familiar to everyone here. (Figure 54)



Figure 53
Australian Flag Competition winner, 1901
Southern Cross Stars: 5-6-7-8-9 points



Figure 54
Australian National Flag, 1909
Southern Cross Stars: 5-7-7-7-7 points

The story of the *Shenandoah* Incident continues to generate public interest in Australia, and there was a public exhibition about the ship in Melbourne earlier this year, whilst one might be familiar with some of the books about the epic voyage that have been published in recent years.

Commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the American Civil War has begun, and we pay our respects to the soldiers and sailors who fought in that tragic war, especially those that died for their nation's banners. I have learnt much about the flags of the Confederacy, especially its naval flags through the story of the *Shenandoah* and its Australian visit. (Figure 55)

In conclusion, “Would You Believe?” that the visit of the Confederate warship *Shenandoah* to Melbourne in 1856 would lead to the development of the Victorian colonial navy, giving rise to the need for a Victorian naval ensign that evolved into the current Australian National Flag.

One form of the Southern Cross flag visiting down-under led indirectly to the adoption of another form of Southern Cross flag as the national flag of Australia.

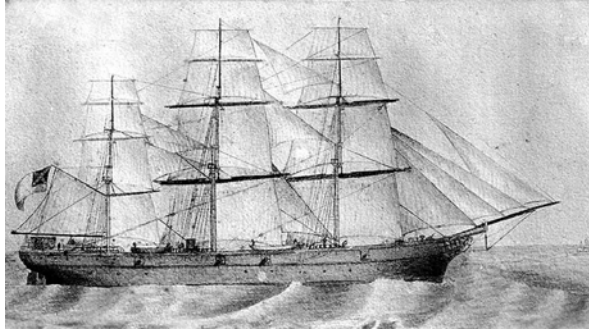


Figure 55
CSS Shenandoah under sail

Illustrations and Sources:

All flag drawings by Ralph Kelly

Figure 1— *CSS Shenandoah* at anchor in Port Phillip Bay. *The Australian News for Home Readers*, 23 February 1865.

Figure 2— Ensign of *CSS Shenandoah*. Detail from Figure 1.

Figure 3— Visitors onboard *CSS Shenandoah*. *The Australian News for Home Readers* 23 February 1865.

Figure 4— Ball at Ballarat—Craig’s Royal Hotel. *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 25 May 1865.

Figure 5— *CSS Shenandoah* in Hobsons Bay. *Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 18 February 1865 (also *The Illustrated Sydney News*, 16 February 1865).

Figure 6— American federal flag (35 stars) Image from page 38, *The American Flag: Two Centuries of Concord and Conflict*, H. Michael Madeus & Whitney Smith, 2006.

Figure 7— United States of the Ionian Islands. Image from Plate 27, *Album des Pavillons*, French Admiralty, 1858.

Figure 8— *Sea King* becomes *CSS Shenandoah*. *Liverpool Mercury*, 9 November 1865.

Figure 9— *Sinking of CSS Alabama*. Painting by Xanthus Smith, 1922—“USS *Kearsarge* sinks CSS *Alabama*”—collection of Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library.

Figure 10—Ensign of *CSS Alabama*—visited Cape Town, Aug & Sept 1863 & Mar 1864. Collection of Museum of History, Cape Town, South Africa.

Figure 11—*CSS Shenandoah* armed off Madeira. Saluting gun, now at US Naval Academy Museum —photo collection of U.S. Naval Historical Center—NH 422781.

Figure 12—False Colours. “Red Duster”—United Kingdom Merchant Shipping Ensign.

- Figure 13—A British vessel approaches? *Harper's Weekly* June 1863—"The approach of the British Pirate *Alabama*"—collection of U.S. Naval Historical Center—NH 59351).
- Figure 14—Looting a prize. Illustration from *The Naval History of the United States* by Willis J. Abbot (Chapter XI).
- Figure 15—Burning a prize. Illustration from *The Naval History of the United States* by Willis J. Abbot (Chapter XI).
- Figure 16—Stars and Bars—First National Flag of Confederate States of America, 4 March 1861 (initially with 7 stars).
- Figure 17—General Beauregard's Battle Flag for the Army of the Potomac, September 1861.
- Figure 18—The Stainless Banner—Second National Flag of the Confederate States of America, 1 May 1863.
- Figure 19—Flag on General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's coffin, 12 May 1863. Collection of the Museum of the Confederacy—0985.13.0047.
- Figure 20—Admiral Raphael Semmes' flag. Collection of the Alabama Department of Archives & History—Catalogue No. 86.1893.1 (photograph digitally enhanced to remove distortion).
- Figure 21—First Navy Jack, 4 March 1861.
- Figure 22—First Navy Pennant, 4 March 1861.
- Figure 23—Second Navy Jack, 1 May 1863.
- Figure 24—Second Navy Pennant, 1 May 1863.
- Figure 25—Flag of *Shenandoah*—Museum of the Confederacy. Collection of the Museum of the Confederacy—0985.03.0194—modified to improve image.
- Figure 26—*Shenandoah* flag at Charleston Museum. Collection of the Charleston Confederate Museum (photo from NAVA 43 Photo Gallery—modified to improve image).
- Figure 27—Third National Flag of the Confederate States of America, 4 March 1865.
- Figure 28—*Shenandoah* in dry dock. Photograph—collection of U.S. Naval Historical Center—possible retouch of flag—NH 85964.
- Figure 29—Royal Artillery shore battery deployed. *Australasian Sketcher*, 4 May 1885.
- Figure 30—Voyage of CSS *Shenandoah*—route of voyage from 7 October 1864—28 June 1865. Map by Ralph Kelly. Details of course from map reproduced in *Rebel Down Under* by Cyril Pearl, opposite page 135.
- Figure 31—Destruction of whalers at Ponape Island. Painting *Burning of whaleship "Pearl" at Ponape* in collection of Shelburne Museum, Vermont.
- Figure 32—*Shenandoah* in the Arctic ice. Photograph of a painting—collection of U.S. Naval Historical Center—NH 42279.
- Figure 33—Fall of Richmond—April 1865. *Harper's Weekly*, 22 April 1865.
- Figure 34—Destruction of whalers off Cape Thaddeus, 23 June 1865. Coloured lithograph by B. Russell—collection of President Franklin D. Roosevelt Library—image—U.S. Naval Historical Center—NH 50454-KN.
- Figure 35—"The *Shenandoah* at work" Engraving by Frederick Grosse in *The Australian News*, 23 February 1866—collection of State Library of Victoria.

- Figure 36—Defeat. Capturing the battle flag of the Thirtieth Louisiana Regiment at Battle of Ezra Church. *Harper's Weekly*, 17 September 1864.
- Figure 37—Model of CSS *Shenandoah*. In collection of Museum of the Confederacy
- Figure 38—The *Shenandoah* in the Mersey, 5 November 1865. *Illustrated London News*, 18 November 1865.
- Figure 39—1857 Commercial Code Signal for P—"Blue Peter". Detail from Figure 38.
- Figure 40—1857 Commercial Code Signal for P—"Blue Peter"—"Go Aboard—About to Sail".
- Figure 41—Russian trophy. Watercolour by George Gordon McCrae, collection of National Library of Australia nla.pic-an63276736-v.
- Figure 42—Russian naval ship HIRMSC *Svetlana* visit to Melbourne, 1862. Watercolour by George Gordon McCrae, collection of National Library of Australia nla.pic-an6304088-v.
- Figure 43—HMCSS *Victoria*. Photo in collection of Australian War Memorial—300060.
- Figure 44—The gun raft. Engraving from *The Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 18 February 1865.
- Figure 45—The gun raft flag. Detail from Figure 44.
- Figure 46—British Blue ensign, 1865. Drawing in enclosure to Circular Despatch of 22 December 1865 from Colonial Office to Governors of Colonies, based on photograph from Public Records Office.
- Figure 47—Victorian Ensign. *The Illustrated Australian News*, 21 February 1870.
- Figure 48—Inauguration of Victorian Ensign aboard HMVS *Nelson*. *The Illustrated Australian News*, 21 February 1870.
- Figure 49—Victorian Government Ensign, February 1870.
- Figure 50—Victorian Government Ensign, March 1877.
- Figure 51—Victorian Red Ensign, February 1870.
- Figure 52—Victorian Red Ensign, Federation Flag used in Victoria and Western Australia. Photograph in collection of National Library of Australia—nla.oic-vn3302372.
- Figure 53—Australian Flag Competition winning design, 1901. Stars: 5-6-7-8-9 points—The Victorian red ensign plus Federal Star.
- Figure 54—Australian National Flag, 1909 to present.
- Figure 55—CSS *Shenandoah* under sail. Photograph of a drawing—U.S. Naval Historical Center —NH 42280.

End notes

- 1 The *Shenandoah* entered Port Phillip Bay through its narrow southern entrance and dropped anchor in Hobson's Bay, the small bay containing Station Pier, Port Melbourne, then known as Sandridge.
- 2 *The Shenandoah: or, the Last Confederate Cruiser*, Cornelius Hunt, 1867, p. 47.
- 3 *The Argus*, 26 January 1865, p. 5.
- 4 *Last Flag Down*, by John Baldwin and Ron Powers, p. 157.
- 5 *The Argus*, 26 January 1865, p. 5.
- 6 The phrase "St. Andrew's Cross" is not limited to the flag of Scotland. The term is derived from the traditional belief that the saint was crucified on a diagonal cross, and it has come to be regarded as an appropriate term for a saltire of any colour on any coloured field. The naval ensign of Russia and the state flag of Alabama are regarded as St. Andrew's Crosses. The designer of the original version of the Confederate battle flag, Congressman William Porcher Miles, described it as a heraldic saltire and did not claim any link to religion or St. Andrew.
- 7 *The Argus*, 27 January 1865, p. 5.
- 8 *The Herald*, quoted at p. 44 in *Rebel Down Under* by Cyril Pearl, 1970, Heinemann, Melbourne.
- 9 The first reports were sent by the local Reuter's agent via telegraph and were published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Queanbeyan Age*, *South Australian Advertiser*, *South Australian Register* and *The Brisbane Courier* issues of 26 January 1865.
- 10 *The Argus*, 26 January 1865, p. 4.
- 11 Repairs to the propeller, its casing and the rudder had been attempted at sea, but a large crack required a foundry to make effective repairs.
- 12 *The Argus*, 27 January 1865, p. 5.
- 13 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 January 1865.
- 14 *The Herald*, 27 January 1865.
- 15 *The Argus*, 11 February 1865 and 4 February 1865.
- 16 *The Herald*, quoted in *Rebel Down Under*, p. 44–45.
- 17 When the American Civil War started and the Federal navy began to blockade the Southern ports, the South hoped that the British Government would intervene to support it to restore the supply of cotton to British mills. However, the British only recognised the Confederacy as a "belligerent" and it laid down strict neutrality rules that accepted the blockade and prohibited war supplies to either the North or the South. The neutrality regulations set a limit of 24 hours, but this could be extended to allow repairs of *bona fide* damages or bad weather. Re-supply was limited to provisions for the subsistence of the crew and coal sufficient to return to the nearest port in the vessel's country. The terms for the provision of assistance to either American or Confederate ships of war in British colonial ports were set out in a despatch from the British Foreign Secretary, Earl Russell dated 31 January 1862 which was copied to all the colonies. (*Rebel Down Under*, p. 5) The Queen's Proclamation of Neutrality had been made on 13 May 1861. (*A World on Fire*, Amanda Freeman, p. 92).
- 18 *The Argus*, 27 January 1865, p. 5. One possible reason for the Ionian flag being displayed was that the British Government had ended its protectorate of the "United States of the Ionian Islands" and transferred control to Greece in May the previous year— perhaps a word-play on the "United States"?
- 19 *The Argus*, 28 January 1865, p. 4. The previous day, advertisements appeared for two steamers, *Resolute* and *Yarra*, to ferry visitors to the Confederate ship for one-shilling return.
- 20 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 January 1865.
- 21 *The Herald*, quoted in *Rebel Down Under*, p. 44.

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- 22 *The Argus*, 19 January 1865, p. 6, sourced from *Liverpool Paper*.
- 23 *Sea King* was built in August 1863 to be a fast tea-clipper and on its maiden voyage it was used to convey troops to New Zealand for the second Maori War. It had been reported to have been wrecked on a rock in Funchal Bay, Madeira. (Report from London, 26 November 1864, published in *The Argus*, 17 January 1865).
- 24 Secrecy was soon lost, as the *New York Times* of 1 November 1864 carried a report from the *London News* dated 15 October 1864 that stated: “The *Laurel*, which left Liverpool on the 9th with Capt. Semmes and a number of Confederate officers and seamen on board, will, it is expected, put into Madeira. A Federal man-of-war went immediately in pursuit of her.” The *Laurel* had been purchased by the Confederacy, though it retained its British registration, and it openly advertised to ship freight to Havana, though many most likely inferred that it would act as a blockade-runner, and in fact it arrived in Charleston in 2 December 1864. Raphael Semmes was the famous Confederate captain of the commerce raiders CSS *Sumter* and CSS *Alabama*, however he was aboard neither the *Laurel* nor the *Shenandoah*, having remained in Glasgow to acquire more vessels.
- 25 Memoirs of Captain James Waddell, quoted in *Rebel Down Under*, pp. 25–26.
- 26 *The Argus*, 27 January 1865, p. 5.
- 27 *Last Flag Down*, p. 52.
- 28 The exception was the bark *Kate Prince* that claimed its cargo of coal was neutral English-owned and it was allowed to proceed to Bahia, Brazil with thirteen prisoners. This was in accordance with the Paris Declaration Respecting Maritime Law of 1856. The United States had refused to ratify the treaty, as it wanted to retain the right to authorize privateers to intercept enemy shipping in the same manner as the Confederate commerce raiders. Several of the Australian newspapers drew attention to this irony.
- 29 *The Argus*, 27 January 1865, p. 5.
- 30 *Last Flag Down*, p. 53. In the Atlantic and Pacific the decoy flag was the British red ensign and in the Arctic, the Russian flag was used (*The Confederate Navy*, The Museum of the Confederacy, 2006, p. 61).
- 31 *South Australia Advertiser*, 27 January 1865, p. 2. As the commerce raiders such as CSS *Florida* and CSS *Alabama* became active, a large number of American merchant ships transferred their ownership to neutral countries, mainly Britain. The Confederate raiders respected the neutrality, though they sometime suspected that the change of registration was fraudulent or merely a flag of convenience. The first ship attacked by *Shenandoah*, the *Mogul*, was American built but flew the red ensign and was released. The second ship attacked was *Alina*, which claimed British owners, but its papers were defective and it had raised the Federal flag when challenged—it was *Shenandoah*’s first capture, on 30 October 1864. By the end of the war 1,600 United States ships had transferred to foreign flags—eight times the number of Federal ships sunk by raiders.
- 32 *Last Flag Down*, p. 145, based on diary of First Lieutenant (William) Conway Whittle.
- 33 The best history is *The Flags of the Confederacy: An Illustrated History* by Devereaux D. Cannon, Jr., 1988, St. Lukes Press, Memphis, Tennessee. The proportions were not fixed, varying from 2:3 to 1:2, though 5:9 was the most common. The number of states was officially thirteen, however this included Missouri and Kentucky, which were under the control of the Federal Government. The eleven-star version is the most predominant of surviving examples of the “Stars and Bars”.
- 34 General Beauregard consulted the Chairman of the Congressional Flag Committee, William Porcher Miles, who had submitted a similar design (with seven stars) in the original flag design process. Note, the First Battle of Manassas on 21 July 1861 is also known as the First Battle of Bull Run. The prototype was approved by General Joseph E. Johnston in September 1861 and silk flags were distributed to the regiments of what had become the Army of Northern Virginia in November 1861. These were replaced by bunting flags in 1862. General Beauregard was transferred to become second-in-command of the Army of the Mississippi and he introduced a version of the pattern (with a pink border) in February 1862. General Johnston introduced the pattern (in the proportions 2:3 and with no border) to the Army of the Tennessee in March 1864. See Chapter 8 of Devereaux Cannon’s book for full details.

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- 35 Devereaux Cannon, p. 19. Note that the official specifications of the second national flag had the proportions 1:2, though in practice the flag was usually made in various sizes, typically 2:3, which were the official proportions for the naval ensign. During the Civil War there was wide variation in the manufacture of individual flags in both the North and South. A comprehensive survey of all the known surviving naval ensigns was conducted by Howard Michael Madaus, in “Rebel Flags Afloat”, *The Flag Bulletin*, No. 115, Jan–April 1986.
- 36 The large silk ensign is in the collection of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. It was presented to Admiral Semmes by ladies in England following his rescue from the sinking of CSS *Alabama*. At the Washington Flag Congress, a flag that had been flown by the *Alabama* during its final battle against the USS *Kearsage* was displayed as part of the Zaricor Flag Collection.
- 37 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 February 1865, p. 4.
- 38 *The Herald*, quoted in *Rebel Down Under*, p. 40.
- 39 Attempts to recruit the English crew of the *Sea King* had failed; only 8 of the crew of 55 had agreed to stay with the ship after the transfers were made in Madeira. Many of the men from the *Sea King* were English, and their recruitment was made difficult by the *Foreign Enlistment Act 1819*, which criminalised the recruitment of mercenaries from within the British Empire and by the rules of neutrality. Captain Waddell offered incentives to recruit volunteers from the Yankee ships that were captured and had a good response, adding about 29 men to his crew. Many of these were European sailors who “shipped” rather than be shackled as prisoners.
- 40 *Geelong Advertiser*, reported in *The Mercury*, 4 February 1865.
- 41 *The Argus*, 16 February 1865, p. 5.
- 42 *Last Flag Down*, p. 175.
- 43 *South Australia Register*, 21 February 1865, p. 2.
- 44 *Last Flag Down*, pp. 85 and 156 and *Rebel Down Under*, pp. 23–24. The *Shenandoah* needed to arrive in Melbourne before 26 January 1865 so that it could connect with a British mail steamer to receive and send despatches, according to on memoirs of Captain James Waddell (edited by James Horan, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 1996).
- 45 *Last Flag Down*, p. 193, quoting the diary of First Lieutenant (William) Conway Whittle.
- 46 *Last Flag Down*, pp. 198–205. Ponatik Harbor on the island of Pohnpei, which was then called Ascension Island by Europeans, later Ponape. Some sources refer to the location as Lea Harbor, which is now Lelu—but on the island of Kosrae. The island was part of the Caroline Islands, which were still under the control of traditional chiefs in 1865, however whalers and missionaries were already disturbing the islanders’ lifestyle. The Spanish began to exercise their colonial claims from 1886 but the Caroline Islands were sold to Germany in 1899. Pohnpei is now one of the states in the Federated States of Micronesia. Micronesia issued a postage stamp in 1985 depicting the *Shenandoah*. The *Shenandoah* stayed at Pohnpei for 13 days, having allowed the crew some shore leave, departing on 13 April 1865.
- 47 *Last Flag Down*, p. 224.
- 48 Waddle apparently received information as to the location of the New England whaling fleet. A dozen members of the crew of the *Abigail*, captured in the Sea of Okhotsk, agreed to ship aboard the *Shenandoah*. One of these acted as a pilot and steered the *Shenandoah* to the whaling fleet in Arctic (*Boston Evening Courier*, 26 August 1865, quoted in Ward 1967, p. 193).
- 49 The attack on the whaling fleet was made in the Bering Strait—west and north of St. Lawrence Island (then Russian, now part of Alaska) and east of the Chukotka Peninsula in northeast Siberia.
- 50 *Last Flag Down*, p. 247.
- 51 The last major battle fought was at Columbus, Georgia, on 16 April 1865, seven days after General Robert E. Lee’s surrender. The Union Major General James Wilson had been unaware of Lee’s surrender. On 26 April Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston signed surrender terms with Union Major General William Tecumseh

Sherman at Bennett Place, North Carolina—this was the effective military end of the war. Wilson’s cavalry raiders drove east into central Georgia where, on 10 May they captured Confederate President Jefferson Davis. A tacit truce had existed in Texas from March and no fighting had occurred other than a Union attack on 12 May at Palmito Ranch, on the banks of the Rio Grande—the last hostilities of the war. General Edmund Kirby Smith formally surrendered the Confederate forces west of the Mississippi River on 26 May 1865 and the American Civil War was finally over. On 19 July 1865, the Confederate Navy agent in England, James Bulloch wrote to Captain Waddell ordering him to desist from offensive operations, but there was no way to get his instructions from London to the *Shenandoah*.

52 *Last Flag Down*, p. 276.

53 *Memoirs*, by Waddell, p. 176.

54 *Last Flag Down*, p. 311.

55 *The Times* newspaper, quoted in *Rebel Down Under*, p. 155.

56 Circular Despatch dated 11 October 1865 from Secretary of State for Colonies to Governor Sir John George, New South Wales Archives, Governor’s file 1865. I became aware of this particular despatch in 1987 and it was the beginning of my fascination with the story of CSS *Shenandoah*.

57 *Last Flag Down*, p. 321.

58 The Commercial Code of Signals for the Use of All Nations had been introduced in 1857. The signal P, when hoisted singly, had the meaning: “All persons go on board as the vessel is about to proceed to sea”. Alternatively, the same pattern could have been either the numeric signal for 1 (white on blue) or 8 (yellow on blue) in the 1817 Marryat Code, but it would not usually be hoisted singly. The same pattern, in blue and white, could have been the numeric signal for 2 in the Howe and Popham signal codes, but those systems had been long supplanted by the Marryat Code. The signal flag was not one of the flags used in the Confederate Navy Signal Code.

59 The *Shenandoah* was renamed the *El Majid* and was wrecked on a coral reef in the Indian Ocean during a storm in 1872.

60 The Russian warships to visit Australia included the *Amerika* (Sydney 1832 and 1835), the frigate *Svetlana* (Melbourne 1862) and the corvette *Bogatyr*, flagship of the Russian Pacific Fleet (Melbourne, March 1863). The visit by *Svetlana* was embarrassing when the Queenscliffe battery was not able to respond to the firing of a salute by *Svetlana* because the shore battery had no ammunition. Rumours of secret plans for the Russian navy to attack British ships later surrounded the visit of the *Bogatyr*, with there being a grain of truth, as the Russian fleet was based in New York and San Francisco for seven months in 1863–64 in anticipation of war between the United States and Britain.

61 After the Napoleonic Wars, Britain’s Royal Navy emerged as the most powerful navy in the world, but the lack of any significant enemy led to a gradual decline in its effectiveness. The naval protection of Australia was part of the role of the Royal Navy’s East India Station, which resulted in occasional ship visits from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) until 1821, when annual visits to Sydney by a man-of-war (usually only a frigate) began. The Australia Station included responsibility for New Zealand, the Southwest Pacific, and the Indian Ocean south of the Equator. The Sydney base for the Australian Squadron enabled the New South Wales government to avoid the need to acquire a colonial navy, with only one wooden gunboat, the *Spitfire* in service before 1878.

62 The prefix for Victorian naval vessels varied over time. Often no prefix was used or HMCS was used (Her Majesty’s Colonial Ship). From 1861 HMCSS was often used representing Her Majesty’s Colonial Steam Sloop. From 1868 the acronym HMVS (Her Majesty’s Victorian Ship) started to be used, though not exclusively.

63 The first colonial navy was Her Majesty’s Indian Navy, which had been established by the East India Company in 1686 as the Bombay Marine.

64 The *Armed Vessels Regulations Act* was assented to by the Victorian Governor on 2 June 1860, but was disallowed on 19 July 1862 by the Queen in an Order-in-Council. (*Victorian Government Gazette*, 20

November 1863). Constitutionally this is significant, since it was the first occasion that an Australian colonial act had been disallowed and one of only five such occasions.

65 Illustration from *The Illustrated Melbourne Post*, 18 February 1865. The raft was a 46 x 28 foot wooden deck laid over two longboats, armed with a 68-pound pivot gun. The raft was only two feet above the water and with a very shallow draft it could be towed to anywhere in Port Philip Bay. Whilst the trial showed the platform was stable enough to accurately fire the gun, its vulnerability to enemy fire (albeit a small target in the shallows) and the need for calm seas made it unsuitable as part of the permanent harbour defences. The gun-raft was designed in August 1864 by Captain Douglas Elder, a master shipwright in the government's Marine Yard, who was also an officer in the Naval Brigade.

66 In September 1856 the Chief Harbour Master introduced distinguishing flags for government vessels. The flags had initials corresponding to the various government departments, though the form of the flags was not specified. In 1867 the *Victoria* was reported to be using a blue ensign, the Customs Department also adopted a blue ensign with a crown and the initials H.M.C., though the gun raft flag is clearly a British white ensign. (Victoria: *A History of HMCSS Victoria*, Ian MacFarlane, unpublished manuscript, 1989).

67 Statement to Legislative Assembly by Treasurer Sir George Verdon, 25 May 1865, reported in *The Argus* of 26 May 1865, p. 6.

68 Part of the logic of the colonial warships being regarded as part of the Royal Navy Reserve was to provide them with the international protections of being regarded as having British-belligerent status in international law, rather than as a form of privateer. The principle was not entirely academic, as many of the ships of the Royal Australian Navy served in European waters as part of the Royal Navy during World War I and much of World War II.

69 Until July 1864 Royal Navy ships were arranged in squadrons and they used either a white, blue, or red ensign depending on the rank of the commanding admiral, or as instructed for a particular battle. Ships that were under an independent command (such as Lieutenant James Cook's HMS *Endeavour*) used the red ensign. See *Flags at Sea* by Timothy Wilson, HMSO, 1986; particularly p. 25.

70 Letter from W. G. Romaine, Admiralty to Sir Frederic Rogers, Colonial Office dated 10 May 1865. Enclosed with Colonial Office Circular Letter of 19 May 1865—copy in NSW State Archives—"Governors – 1865" file 4/1353.

71 Circular Letter from Edward Cardwell, Colonial Secretary to all Governors dated 22 December 1865—copy in NSW State Archives—"Governors – 1866" file 4/1355.

72 *Victoria Government Gazette* No. 10, 4 February 1870. The proclamation gave effect to the decision of the Executive Council meeting of 1 February 1870. The design was sent by the Governor, Viscount Canterbury, to the Colonial Office in a despatch dated 28 February 1870. Approval of the flag by the Admiralty was advised to the Governor in a despatch from the Colonial Secretary dated 22 July 1870, which was published in the *Gazette* on 7 October 1870.

73 *The Argus*, 26 February 1870, in its account of the cruise inaugurating the new flag stated: "The vessel then proceeded on her trip down the bay, carrying the St. George's ensign (the man-of-wars' flag) at the fore." This suggests that the *Nelson* was using the Royal Navy's White Ensign, possibly with the addition of the crown as shown in the gun-raft illustration.

74 *The Argus*, 31 January, 10 February, and 26 February 1870. The inauguration was conducted as part of a luncheon cruise down the Bay, with 200 guests, including members of parliament, judges, and other dignitaries and their families. The new ensign was raised in the morning, as the *Nelson* left her moorings at Williamstown, and a 21-gun salute was fired from the shore. The blue ensign was hoisted at the main and the new red ensign at the mizzen. The new flags were acknowledged by the shipping in the port saluting as the *Nelson* went passed and displaying bunting, which also festooned numerous flag-staffs.

75 *Launceston Examiner*, 15 February 1870, p. 2, reproducing article from the Melbourne *Daily Telegraph* (no date). The meteor flag is usually regarded as referring to the British Red Ensign, though the phrase has often been used in a context where the meaning refers to a Union Jack. The phrase was popular in the 19th century, being used in a poem *Ye Mariners of England: A Naval Ode* by Thomas Campbell, written in 1800 and the title

of a fiction book about the Royal Navy during the French Revolution, *Under the Meteor Flag*, written in 1884 by Harry Collingwood. The phrase is used by George Preble at p. 178 of his 1872 book. The allusion is apparently to a red ensign streaming in the wind, like a meteor's starry head and fiery tail.

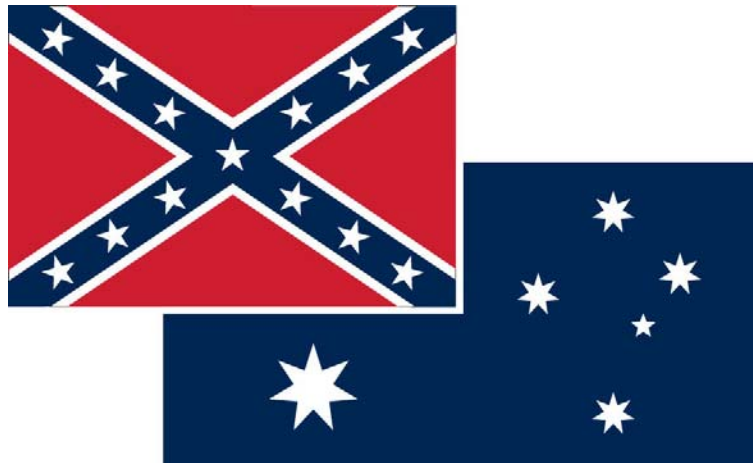
⁷⁶ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 February 1870, p. 2.

⁷⁷ Proclamations in *Victoria Government Gazette*, 6 April 1877 and 30 November 1877.

⁷⁸ Despatch from Colonial Secretary dated 22 July 1870, published in *Victoria Government Gazette*, 7 October 1870.

⁷⁹ The red ensign had been established as the flag of British merchant shipping as early as 1674 and shipping legislation prevented other British colours being used. The first use of the red ensign (with an English flag in the canton) was 1620 and a proclamation in 1674 expressly laid down that only the red ensign should be used by merchant ships. A royal proclamation dated 1 January 1801 required the red ensign (in its current form) to be used by British ships; this was confirmed in regulations issued in 1824. *The Merchant Shipping Act 1854*, section 105 prohibited the use of any ensign other than the Red Ensign. The Order in Council of 9 July 1864 abolishing squadronal colours restated that the red ensign continued to be "the national colours for all British Ships". It was, however, the practice to authorise some yacht clubs to use a red ensign defaced with a club badge and some government departments, notably Customs, used a red ensign with badge. Legal clarity was provided by the *Merchant Shipping (Colours) Act 1889* which declared that the red ensign, "without any defacement or modification whatsoever" was the proper national colours for all ships belonging to British subjects, though the exception for an Admiralty warrant continued. In informing the colonies of the Act the Colonial Office stated that the use of the un-defaced red ensign applied to the colonial shipping, but there was no objection to the use of an additional "distinguishing flag with the badge of the colony" (a provision which was only adopted in the mid Twentieth Century in Hong Kong). For further information see Chapter 2 of *Flags at Sea* by Timothy Wilson and Chapter V (iv) of *British Flags* by W. G. Perrin (Cambridge University Press, 1922).

⁸⁰ In NSW and Queensland, the old New South Wales Ensign (also known as the "Australian Ensign") was widely used as the Federation Flag. (See "Australia's Forgotten Flag" by Tony Burton, *Crux Australis*, No. 36.)



About the Author

Ralph Kelly is an Australian vexillologist from Sydney. He has presented papers at seven previous International Congresses based on his research into the history of Australian flags, his involvement in the Australian flag debate and general interest in world flags. At the Berlin ICV he was made a Fellow of FIAV. Ralph is Treasurer and a former President of the Flag Society of Australia. He is a regular contributor of articles and illustrations for *Crux Australis* and is webmaster for the flagsaustralia.com.au website. Ralph is the Chair of the Organising Committee for the 26th ICV to be held in Sydney in 2015. Ralph is also a Director of Ausflag where he provides a vexillological perspective on that entity's promotional and political lobbying for a new Australian national flag. By profession he is a company director and former investment banker.

The story of the *Shenandoah* has fascinated Ralph since the mid 1980s when he first learnt of its remarkable journey. Over time he learnt that flags were a significant part of the story, which is an enduring link between Australia and the Civil War and it seemed appropriate for an ICV that is being held in the old South.

