A Wolf in Port Phillip Bay

During the American Civil War of 1861 to 1865, the southern states used armed merchant ships as raiders to attack the merchant vessels of the north. The visit of one of these 'Wolves of the Sea' to Melbourne was the only occasion on which Australia had a connection to the Civil War.

Built in 1863, the **Shenandoah** was chosen and purchased by an agent of the Confederacy because of her speed. She left the Thames supposedly on a passage to India but actually to meet another ship at Madeira. This ship carried the guns the **Shenandoah** would use to attack Union shipping.

CSS Shenandoah arrived at Port Phillip on January 25, 1865, to replenish her coal supplies and to make repairs to her damaged machinery. Though strict international agreements limited the time the ship could spend in Melbourne, her captain gained the permission of the Governor to repair his ship.

The ship and her crew received an enthusiastic welcome to Melbourne and,

The **CSS Shenandoah**, a 70m full-rigged ship with a 250hp auxiliary steam engine, as depicted in the Illustrated Australian News, January 1865.

when opened to visitors, thousands took the opportunity to go aboard. While in Melbourne, the officers and crew members were invited to banquets in their honour, to the theatres, and seven officers accepted an invitation to visit Ballarat. The vessel was undermanned but men could not be recruited in a neutral port under international law. Forty-two stowaways, however, signed on as crew members on February 19, the morning after the ship left Port Phillip.

During June 1865 in the northern Pacific, **Shenandoah** captured 25 whaling ships owned by states of the Union, having taken four more on her way north. She had previously taken nine ships before visiting Melbourne. After the war had ended, **Shenandoah** was sailed to Liverpool and surrendered to British authorities.

A tribunal set up in Geneva in 1871 found that Britain was responsible for acts committed by the **Shenandoah** after she left Melbourne. The decision of the tribunal was that the colonial government had allowed greater than necessary assistance to the ship and 42 men had illegally joined her crew. Nearly $US4 million in damages was awarded against the British Government.

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