

# Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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## Mad Max?

In the history of warfare there are always oddities that make a person scratch their head in amazement. Such was the case with many of the Southern soldiers and sailors of the Civil War. These Confederate warriors believed their cause was just, and that given enough time, men, resources, supplies and leadership, they could still prevail over the Northern Aggressors despite the fact that General Lee and most every other Confederate commander had surrendered.

From the beginning of the War, a great hindrance to the Confederacy was its hampered attempts at opening sea lanes so that ships from southern ports could send and receive supplies, weapons and other goods from beyond their borders. At the start of the Civil War President Lincoln ordered a blockade of all the southern states from Virginia to Texas. The results of this blockade were devastating to the South. This included the capture of New Orleans which allowed the Union army to control traffic on the Mississippi River. It has been estimated that one out of every four ships attempting to leave or dock in southern ports was captured or destroyed by Federal war ships. That may not seem like a lot, but that's a considerable amount of food, material and weapons that did not get into Confederate hands.

Another major problem suffered by the South was a rail system that was nowhere near effective enough in getting troops and supplies to the Confederate armies in the field, often requiring such material to be dropped at train depots and then loaded onto wagons driven by teamsters in hopes of finding the men in the field who needed the food, uniform items, and shot and shell to carry on the fight. The massive rail system in the Northern states had no such problem.

One of those oddities was the Confederate acquisition of Navy ships. In particular, the *CSS Shenandoah*. This ship was built in Scotland in August of 1863 and originally named the *Sea King*. The ship was purchased by the Confederate Navy and was given the singular purpose of capturing and destroying Union merchant ships. The *Shenandoah*, under the capable leadership of her captain, Lieutenant James Waddell, wreaked havoc in the performance of her duties. The Union Navy was never able to stop her aggression against the merchant ships which were no match for a heavily armored man-of-war. LT Waddell heard of the surrender of Lee in late June of 1865 but refused to acknowledge this news since there was also a story about Confederate President Jefferson Davis promising to carry on the fight, despite having abandoned the capital of Richmond, Virginia.

In August of 1865 Waddell learned of the truth that the Southern Cause was lost. He feared returning to the United States knowing he and his crew would be tried as pirates and more than likely hung. Instead, he sailed to Liverpool, England, and surrendered the *CSS Shenandoah* to the British Navy. Over the next several years most of the crew returned to the United States without repercussion. Even the ship's captain, LT Waddell, "*returned from England to the United States in 1875*

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*to captain the San Francisco for the Pacific Mail Company. He later took command of a force that policed the oyster fleets in the Chesapeake Bay. In 1886, Waddell died of a brain disorder and was buried at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Annapolis, Maryland."*

So, who's Maximilian? He was known as Maximilian I, or by his Spanish name – Maximiliano. He was born Ferdinand Maximilian Joseph in 1832 and a younger brother of Francis Joseph I, ruling monarch of Austria. Maximilian had a distinguished career in the Austrian Navy after which he entered into a scheme with Napoleon III of France to conquer Mexico. Maximilian was soon established as Mexico's one and only monarch in 1863. Upon arriving in Mexico, Max declared himself *Emperor of Mexico*. Mexico's dethroned president, Benito Juarez, took umbrage with being ousted by this European upstart. He and his forces battled against Maximilian over the next several years, ultimately prevailing in removing Max by force in 1867, and reestablishing himself once again as Mexico's president.

In his few years reigning over Mexico he took advantage of the American Civil War by extending an offer to Southern soldiers to join him in his battle to retain power in Mexico, with the promise that he would support these Southerners in returning to the United States to carry on the war. Max also frequently reneged on his promise to pay these soldiers for fighting for him. Despite Max's failed promises, these soldiers from the South held out hope that perhaps their dreams of returning to the U.S. as a military force died with Maximilian when he was captured and executed before a firing squad in 1867. His last words were, *"I forgive everyone, and I ask everyone to forgive me. May my blood which is about to be shed, be for the good of the country. Viva Mexico, viva la independencia!"* His body was returned the following year to Vienna, Austria where he is buried in a crypt for public viewing.

So, was Max mad? Probably not in the sense of being psychologically off kilter, but he certainly thought more highly of himself than he should have, causing him to prove a poor leader.

As the effects of the Civil War lessened following the War's end in 1865, Confederate soldiers and sailors were able to return to their families, taking up their lives once again in rebuilding the greatest country that has ever graced this old world.

This July 4<sup>th</sup> is her 240<sup>th</sup> birthday. Rejoice, America!