



# The Sinking of the USS Cairo

John C. Wideman

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In 1862, in one of the South's most amazing secret operations, a Confederate team, using newly invented explosive mines, blew up the USS Cairo, one of the Union's most feared ironclad gunboats. It sank within minutes.

The USS Cairo is the only remaining vessel from the Union navy's river fleet. For 102 years, the ironclad rested deep in the mud of the Yazoo River. In 1964 it was rediscovered and salvaged. Now the USS Cairo is one of the premier exhibits at the Vicksburg National Military Park. This historic vessel, its entire cargo of weapons and personal effects, and its role in the war continue to spark the imagination of Civil War buffs and thousands of tourists.

Here, for the first time, in a carefully documented study is the entire story of the Confederate Secret Service team that sank the USS Cairo. With family oral histories never before consulted and with newly examined documents from the National Archives, *The Sinking of the USS Cairo* disproves some previous theories and corrects factual errors found in earlier reports. It shows conclusively that the Cairo was not sunk by "an electrically detonated mine" but by a different method. Also, it identifies the members of the Confederate crew, whose names supposedly were "lost to history." For the first time in a book about this river war, there are illustrations of all five gunboats that were engaged in this action.

Told from the Confederate perspective for the first time, this refocused story of the Cairo is a significant addition to the history of the Confederate Secret Service, to the history of the operations around Vicksburg, and to the history of the war on the western frontier.



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