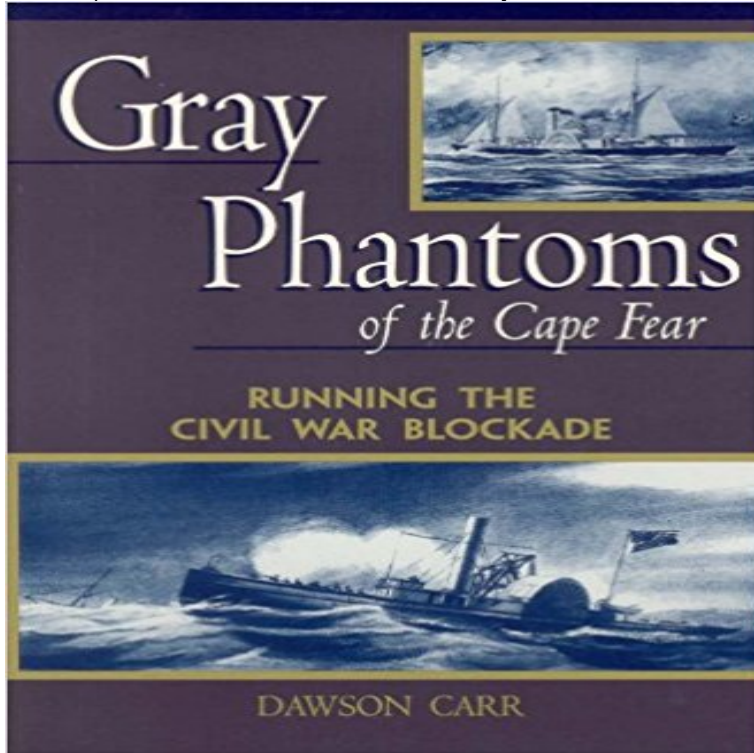


Gray Phantoms of the Cape Fear: Running the Civil War Blockade



In mid-1863, the small city of Wilmington, North Carolina, found itself facing a difficult task: it had to supply Robert E. Lees army if the South was to continue the Civil War. Guns, ammunition, clothing, and food had to be brought into the Confederacy from Europe, and Wilmington was the last open port. Knowing this, the Union amassed a formidable blockading force off storied Cape Fear. What followed was a contest unique in the annals of warfare. The blockade runners went unarmed, lest their crews be tried as pirates if captured. Neither did the Union fleet wish to sink the runners, as rich prizes were the reward for captured cargoes. The battle was thus one of wits and stealth more than blood and glory. As the Union naval presence grew stronger, the new breed of blockade runners got faster, quieter, lower to the water, and altogether more ghostly and their crews more daring and resourceful. Today, the remains of nearly three dozen runners lie beneath the waters of the Cape Fear, their exact whereabouts known only to a few fishermen and boaters. Built for a special mission at a brief moment in time, they faded into history after the war. There had never been ships like the blockade runners, and their kind will never be seen again. *Gray Phantoms of the Cape Fear* tells the story of their captains, their crews, their cargoes, their opponents, and their many unbelievable escapes.

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