

THE EUROPEAN FLEET OF THE SOUTHERN CONFEDERACY is making waves ...

by Hubert Leroy and Gerald Hawkins

May 13, 2000, was a big day. A cocktail had been organised in the CHAB's Club House where Serge Noirsain presented and dedicated his new book. Besides the large crowd, the county Mayor of Woluwe-St-Lambert was also present as well as representatives from the Belgian naval forces. A few days later, during a convention gathering French language writers from all over the world, Serge's work was highlighted at the Camille Lemonnier Museum, which is the headquarter of the Association of Belgian Authors. Since Serge's contact details were mentioned in his book, this literary event earned him quite a few orders, all the more flattering since they originated from well-known historians and authors. At the same time, Serge's book was on sale in many specialised bookstores of Brussels, several of them working in close cooperation with French, Belgian and Swiss libraries.

On June 20, Hubert Leroy, Gerald Hawkins and Serge Noirsain drove to Cherbourg to participate at the opening of the year 2000 archaeological diving season on the wreck of the CSS *Alabama* and to supply the three main bookstores of the town with dozens of Serge's books. Knowing that they would be present in Cherbourg, the bookstore *Plein Ciel* (which has subsidiaries throughout France) had arranged for a press conference that took place the following day in the presence of journalists from many towns of Northern France. It is no surprise that several articles praising Serge's book appeared in the columns of the next day's newspapers. According to the three major bookstores of Cherbourg (*Plein Ciel*, *Ryst* and *Lanchon*), this press publicity generated hefty sales.

Further to the positive echoes of the Cherbourg press, the mayor of the town sent invitations to Serge, Hubert and Gerald to attend the hauling ceremony of the first French nuclear submarine *Redoutable* to its new resting berth. Decommissioned and preserved as an historical monument, this submarine will be permanently kept in a dry dock before being moved to the *Cite de la Mer*, a museum currently under construction that will be ready by next year. Serge Noirsain was the only CHAB member able to participate in the event during which he had the honour to dedicate a copy of his book to the mayor of the town.

During his stay in Cherbourg, Serge was invited by Mrs. Ulane Bonnel and Dr. Gordon Watts to view a film shot by the divers during their recent investigations on the wreck of the CSS *Alabama*. Apart from the preparation activities prior to the actual diving sessions, the video showed the retrieval of numerous artefacts including a 32-pounder gun.

Serge's book was also reviewed and commented in two well-known maritime magazines: the French *Col Bleu* and the *Neptunus* of the Belgian naval forces. The book is also sold on the Internet in the catalogue of www.chapitre.com, the French equivalent of www.amazon.com.

Many of our American friends, notably Oliver Semmes III (the descendant of the commander of the *Alabama*), Ethel S. Nepveux (the great granddaughter of the Confederate financial genius George Trenholm), Roger DeMik (prominent Tennessee lawyer) and the historian Lee Kenneth have congratulated Serge Noirsain for his remarkable research work and Gerald Hawkins for the layout of the book and the superb quality of its photographic portfolio. We are conscious of the frustration of many of them and others for not being able to read French fluently. Patience please! We are currently in contact with several American publishers with the hope that one of them might possibly acquire the rights of Serge's book and publish an English version of it. Needless to mention that Serge is willing to give away a part of his book's rights to any American intermediary who is willing and able to negotiate such a deal.



Top: after having been immersed for 135 years, a 32-pounder gun of the Alabama is hauled from the sea on July 21, 2000 to be carefully stored in a special container located on a Cherbourg dock. (photo Presse de la Manche)

Right: further to the conference press given by Serge Noirsain, Gerald Hawkins and Hubert Leroy, the mayor of Cherbourg invited them to the official ceremony of the transfer of the French nuclear submarine "Redoutable" into the maritime museum "Cité de la Mer". (photo S. Noirsain)



Serge Noirsain and Hubert Leroy relaxing and enjoying the sun at a cafe terrace alongside a dock of Cherbourg.



Speeches of Serge Noirsain, Gerald Hawkins, Ulane Bonnel, Georges Désir & Daniel Frankignoul at the dedication cocktail.



Viviane et Hubert Leroy in company of a representative of the Belgian navy.



Surrounded by a large public, Gerald Hawkins and Serge Noirsain dedicate their new book.



From left to right : Tristano Gambini, Georges Dewaelheyns and Dominique De Cleer.



Hubert & Viviane Leroy, Jean-Claude & Françoise Janssens and Dominique De Cleer at the dinner after the cocktail.



Prior to the press conference at the bookstore "Plein Ciel", Mrs. Ulane Bonnel browses through S. Noirsain's book.



Gerald Hawkins, Serge Noirsain and Hubert Leroy next to a Confederate sailor at the bookstore "Plein Ciel".



Gerald Hawkins, Serge Noirsain and Ulane Bonnel during the press conference at the bookstore "Plein Ciel" in Cherbourg.



During several days, the shop window of the bookstore "Plein Ciel" in Cherbourg displayed a mini exhibition themed on the contents of S. Noirsain's new book



The Department of the Navy building in Cherbourg where Semmes and Winslow settled the administrative formalities necessary to enter the town's harbour.



At the old cemetery of Cherbourg, G. Hawkins and S. Noirsain examine the grave of a sailor killed during the battle between the Alabama and the Kearsarge.



The church of Querqueville from where it was possible to follow the duel between the Alabama and the Kearsarge.



Hubert Leroy and Serge Noirsain walking in the cemetery of Querqueville.



Hubert Leroy and Serge Noirsain on the great seawall of Cherbourg. Both look at the West pass of the harbour.



Gerald Hawkins and Hubert Leroy on the great seawall near the West pass where the Alabama entered in Cherbourg.