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**A CRISIS OF LOYALTIES**  
*The Destruction and Abandonment  
of the Gosport Navy Yard*



Stephen Chapin Kinnaman

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# A Crisis of Loyalties

*The Destruction and Abandonment of the Gosport Navy Yard*

SERIES IN AMERICAN HISTORY



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Kinnaman's "A Crisis of Loyalties" is the first complete treatment of a seminal event of the Civil War, the burning of the Gosport Navy Yard in April 1861. Kinnaman makes extensive use of contemporary deck logs, correspondence and reports to paint a compelling account of how events unfolded on an almost hour-by-hour basis. He has a clear eye for where individual leadership and responsibility lived up to its call, or fell short, all while the entire fabric of the United States and its military was collapsing in real time. This book will certainly become required reading for both academic and military curricula and professional reading programs about the Civil War.

**Dr. Larrie D. Ferreiro**

George Mason University, Fairfax, VA

## About the author

Stephen Chapin Kinnaman grew up in upstate New York and northern New Jersey. He graduated from the University of Michigan with a B.Sc. in naval architecture and marine engineering and pursued post-graduate research at Cambridge University's Department of Engineering. He is a professional naval architect and has used his understanding of technology to complement his historical treatment of the U.S. Navy's loss of the Gosport Navy Yard. The author has recently published two works of naval history, as listed below.

- "John Lenthall, The Life of a Naval Constructor." Wilmington and Malaga: Vernon Press, 2022.

- "Merrimack, The Biography of a Steam Frigate." Wilmington and Malaga: Vernon Press, 2019.

The author and his wife live in Chappell Hill, Texas.

## Summary

In the opening days of the American Civil War, the U.S. Navy suffered the catastrophic loss of its most valuable navy yard at Gosport, Virginia, commonly known as the Norfolk Navy Yard. Its fate was sealed by Virginia's vote for secession and the subsequent resignation of most of the yard's Southern officers, leaving its commandant, Charles Stewart McCauley, virtually defenseless. Early in the morning of Sunday, 21 April, fleeing federal forces set fire to and abandoned the Gosport Navy Yard, burning ten warships and surrendering 1,200 naval guns to Virginia's militia. A year later, the Confederate ironclad "Virginia", built on the charred hulk of the steam frigate "Merrimack", chose the sloop "Cumberland"—the one ship to escape Gosport—as her first target during the Battle of Hampton Roads. "Virginia" then attacked the frigate "Congress", leaving in her wake nearly 280 dead or wounded Union sailors and two sunken ships. The birds from the disaster of Gosport had finally come home to roost.

In his quest to uncover the details behind Gosport's destruction, the author methodically cross-tracked chronologies, carefully examined primary sources and dug deeper into the principal officers' backgrounds to grasp just what was in their minds during the hours leading up to the navy yard's burning. This fresh focus has yielded a more nuanced explanation of McCauley's decision to hold back "Merrimack", of Paulding's rush to burn the yard and run, and of opportunities for success missed by all three commodores present. "A Crisis of Loyalties" is the first full-length work of history to present the entire story of the destruction and abandonment of the Gosport Navy Yard.

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