Name: _____ Date: _____

Blockade-running via The Bahamas

In the first week of the Civil War President Lincoln declared a blockade of the ports of the Southern States. He knew that it was vital for the South (which had few industries) to receive war materials such as guns and ammunition, medicine, and clothing via its ports. It was also vital that the South exported its crops to Europe to pay for these materials. Lincoln figured that if Southern ports were blockaded, the entire economy and war effort there would collapse, and the Northern states would win the war.

Blockade-running- breaking through the blockades – became inevitable. At first that task was easy enough since the North was not fully mobilized. But by 1863, the North had more blockade ships in service. These were long and narrow, capable of high speeds. They were concentrated around the important ports of Charleston, Wilmington, and Savannah.

Many Southern planters thought that The Bahamas was ideally positioned to help them get their goods across the Atlantic to Europe. The Southern ports were less than 650 miles from our islands. The Bahamas could also be used as a roundabout route to import weapons, medicines and any other goods that the Southern states needed but could not produce themselves. The Bahamas was also British and neutral so the North could not interfere with their export trade. Nassau was an ideal place for goods to be stored and then shipped either to the South or to Europe. The first of the blockade-runners arrived in Nassau on 5 December 1861, with about 140 bales of cotton bound for Europe. It had been estimated that from that date until the end of the war, 397 ships entered Nassau from Confederate ports and 588 sailed out of Nassau. Soon, the individual blockade-running sea captains were joined by large foreign companies that built and financed whole fleets of 'Greyhounds'. These were long, narrow steam-driven ships that were very fast. They were also difficult to see (as they were low-lying, painted grey and used smokeless fuel) and hear (as they blew off steam under water), making them suitable for blockade-running.

Running the blockade was always a risk. It was often very difficult to get coal to fire the ships' engines. On some runs, practically everything on board was burned to give enough steam to get to the safety of Nassau Harbour. In all, 42 ships were caught by the Northern blockaders, and 22 were run ashore and wrecked. But the risk was worth it, since cotton, selling in Charleston for ten cents a pound, could be resold in Nassau for a dollar and in England for almost double that amount! Even though some ships were lost to the North, their owners still made great profits, so much so that the salary of a blockade-runner captain could be as high as one thousand pounds per trip – an enormous sum of money in those days.

On occasion, more than just cotton arrived in Nassau on the blockade-runs. On the second ship to arrive from Charleston, the Eagle, was a stowaway slave who had hidden among the bales. Finding himself in The Bahamas, where former slaves were now free, he fell to his knees on the dock and thanked God for his deliverance from bondage. Thomas Taylor, the Nassau merchant dealing with the Eagle's cargo, had to pay $4000 in compensation to the slave's owner next time he went to Wilmington. This extra expense led to ships' captains smoking out all holds and spaces to force out stowaways.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

• Prosperity comes – and goes

Before blockade-running, The Bahamas Treasury was almost 50,000 pounds in debt and most of Nassau's 4000 inhabitants lived a life of semi-poverty. Suddenly all this changed, and Nassau became a thriving commercial centre. Nassauvians experienced a great improvement in their living standards because wages more than doubled. Sailors swarmed the streets on spending sprees, much as pirates and privateers had done a century or more before. Those fleeing the war in the South added to the swelling population, as did confederate soldiers on leave. The streets were crowded with barrels, boxes and bales, and the harbour was a hive of activity as ships were loaded and unloaded.

Many new buildings projects were started. Bay Street was widened, and kerbstones and lights were added for the first time. The Royal Victoria Hotel, begun in 1859, and intended for winter visitors arriving on the Cunard steamship from New York, was completed in 1861. It became the scene of many riotous balls and banquets financed by the blockade-runners.

One blockade-runner called Captain Carleton Flanders described a typical scene in his diary: 'There was a spectacular firework display in the gardens, and the guests merrily danced to 3 orchestras and were entertained by 2 choirs and 4 soloists. During the ball $1000 was raised for the noble cause of the Confederacy. The Ball went on till cock-crow…'

But along with prosperity came some negative effects, too. A wave of crime swept through Nassau's crowded and prosperous streets. To deal with this, The Bahamas Police Force was created in 1864. Yellow fever, probably brought from Wilmington, became rife. Thomas Taylor, the captain of the Banshee and author of Running the Blockade (1896) lamented: I have counted 17 funerals pass my house before breakfast, and in one day I have attended interments of 3 intimate friends….' The Out Islands did not share in the increased prosperity. Indeed, their economies may even have suffered, since many of their men were attracted to the prospect of work in Nassau. Farming was neglected and family life was affected. When the American Civil War ended in 1865, Nassau's bubble of prosperity suddenly burst. It soon became obvious that few Bahamians had profited from four years of blockade-running. Most of those who had profited were foreigners. Warehouses and hotels stood empty; the old Bahamian had prophesied all this with these words: 'Well de war make Nassau, and when de wars over it go right straight to de debbel whar it came from'.

Questions

How much could be earned on a round trip? (1)

_____

What was the name of blockade ships? (1)

_____

Why do you think running the blockade was dangerous? (2)

_____

_____

Give the names of 3 Southern Ports and how far were they from Nassau? (3)

_____

_____

Why was smuggling cotton so profitable? (2)

_____

_____

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Why did the Southerners sold the cotton so cheap? (2)

Describe the greyhounds? (4)

What items were taken from Nassau to the Southern ports?(3)

Name the disease which ravaged Nassau? (1)

When did the Civil War end? (1)

Which side won the War? (1)

"The Civil War benefitted The Bahamas? Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.(5)

LIVEWORKSHEETS