

THE MOST DARING NAVAL RAID of the American Civil War 1864

CSS *Albemarle* was a steam-powered ironclad of the Confederate Navy. With her two 6.4-inch Brooke rifled cannons and thick iron armor, she became the biggest opponent to the US Navy on the Roanoke River in North Carolina. During the Battle of Plymouth, NC, on April 19, 1864, *Albemarle* appeared in the river, sinking USS *Southfield*, damaging USS *Miami*, and driving off the US Navy ships supporting the Plymouth garrison.



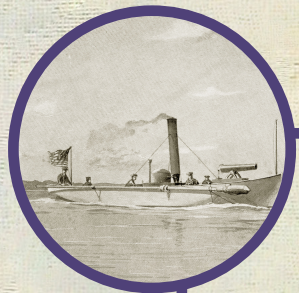
APRIL

On May 5, *Albemarle* escorted two ships down the Roanoke River. They encountered a flotilla of eight US Navy warships, including USS *Miami*, USS *Mattabesett*, USS *Sassacus*, and USS *Wyalusing*, in what would become known as the Battle of Albemarle Sound. Shot after shot bounced off of *Albemarle*. She was then rammed by *Sassacus*, which caused minor damage, but knocked *Sassacus* out of the fight. More than 500 shells were fired at *Albemarle* during the battle leaving her with minimal damage. She steamed back up the Roanoke River and moored at Plymouth, NC.



MAY

Albemarle dominated the Roanoke River and the area around Plymouth, NC, through the summer of 1864. By the fall, the US Navy decided drastic action must be taken to meet the threat. Two plans were submitted by Lieutenant William B. Cushing, whose friend, Lieutenant Commander Charles Flusser, was killed in the *Southfield/Miami* incident. One plan was approved: use two small steam boats, fitted with spar torpedoes, move close to the *Albermarle*, and detonate under the waterline.

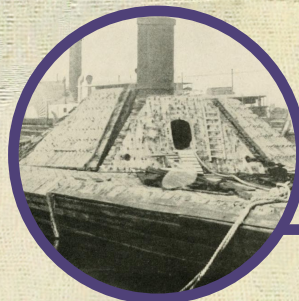


SUMMER

On the nights of October 27 and 28, 1864, Cushing and his team began steaming their way upriver. They made it past several sentry points but as they approached the *Albemarle* were spotted in the dark and came under heavy fire. As Cushing closed on the ironclad, he quickly discovered she was defended against this sort of attack by floating log booms. However, the logs had been in the water for many months and were covered with heavy slime. The steam launch rode up and over them without difficulty. As the spar came against the ironclad's hull, Cushing stood up on the bow and pulled the lanyard, detonating the torpedo's explosive charge. Cushing's raid blew a massive hole in *Albemarle's* hull at the waterline. She sank immediately into the heavy river bottom mud neutralizing her as a threat.

OCTOBER

The explosion threw Cushing and his men overboard. Cushing swam to shore, where he hid under cover until daylight and avoided Confederate search parties. The next afternoon he was able to steal a small skiff and rejoin Union forces downriver. Another man also escaped, two others drowned, and the remaining eleven were captured. Cushing was hailed a national hero for his daring exploits. After the fall of Plymouth, NC, the US Navy raised and temporarily hull-patched the Confederate ram in the hopes to use her later. By the time *Albemarle* reached drydock the war had ended and she was scrapped. Lieutenant William B. Cushing's successful effort to neutralize CSS *Albemarle* was honored by the US Navy with a battle star on the Civil War campaign streamer.



AFTERMATH

