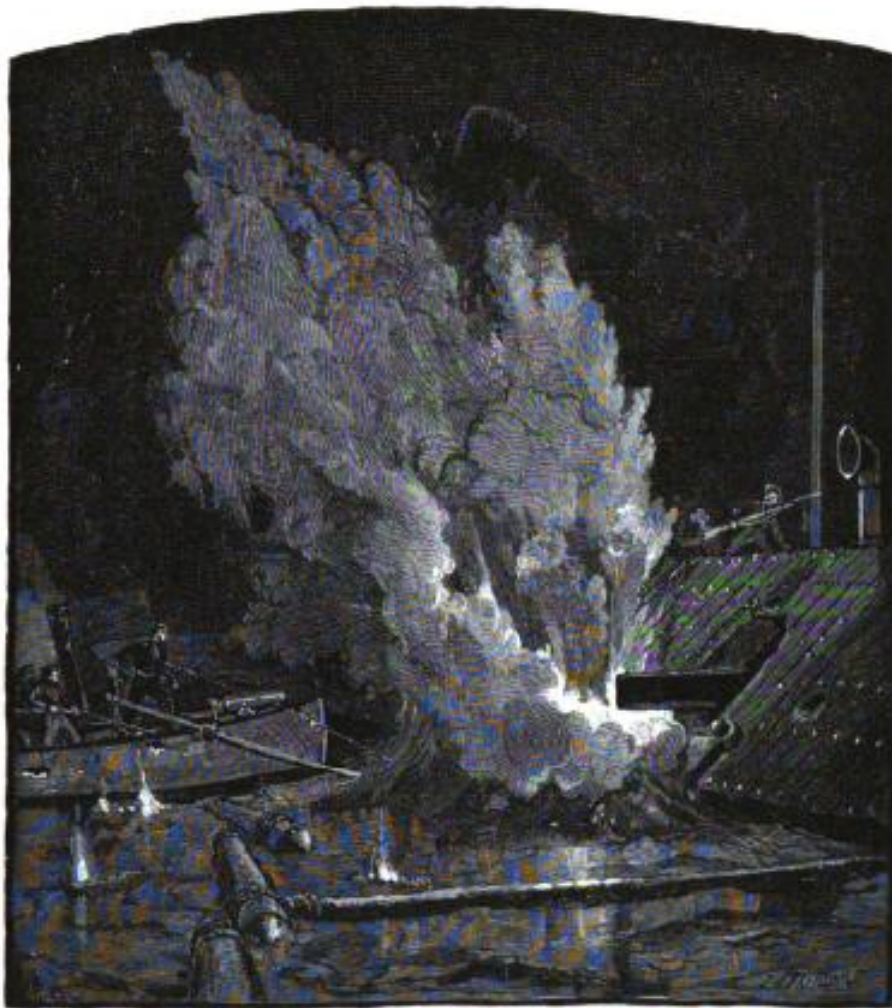


HERO-TALES FROM AMERICAN HISTORY.

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT.



THE BLOWING UP OF THE "ALBEMARLE."

VI. LIEUTENANT CUSHING AND THE RAM "ALBEMARLE."

THE great Civil War was remarkable in many ways, but in no way more remarkable than for the extraordinary mixture of inventive mechanical genius and of resolute daring shown by the combatants. After the first year, when the contestants had settled down to real fighting, and the preliminary mob-work was over, the battles were marked by their extraordinary obstinacy and heavy losses. In no European conflict since the close of the Napoleonic wars has the fight-

ing been anything like so obstinate and so bloody as was the fighting in our own Civil War. Hundreds of regiments, both Northern and Southern, suffered each in some one engagement far more heavily than either the Light Brigade at Balaclava, or the Guards at Inkerman, or than any German regiment in the Franco-Prussian war; and yet they have gone entirely unnoticed by the poet, and dismissed with but a scant line or two by the historian. In addition to this fierce and dogged courage, this splendid fighting capacity, the contest also

brought out the skilled inventive power of engineer and mechanic in a way that few other contests have ever done.

This was especially true in the navy. The fighting under and against Farragut and his fellow admirals revolutionized naval warfare. The Civil War marks the break between the old style and the new. The ships with which Decatur and Perry and Hull and Porter won glory in 1812 were essentially like those with which Drake and Hawkins and Frobisher had harried the Spanish armadas two centuries and a half earlier. They were essentially like the ships that made up the fleets of Tromp and De Ruyter, as of Collingwood and Nelson. But, in the Civil War, steam, iron armor, and entirely new weapons, worked such a revolution that the fleets of to-day differ as widely from those of Nelson as did his ships-of-the-line from the galleys of Alcibiades twenty-two hundred years before. The steam-frigate, the ironclad, the ram, and the torpedo in all its forms—the practical use of all these dates from the Civil War. Terrible encounters took place when these engines of war were brought into action for the first time, and one of these encounters has given an example which, for heroic daring combined with cool intelligence, is unsurpassed in all time.

The Confederates showed the same skill and energy in building their great iron-clad rams as the men of the Union did in building the monitors which were so often pitted against them. Both sides, but especially the Confederates, also used stationary torpedoes, and on a number of occasions torpedo-boats likewise. These torpedo-boats were sometimes built to go under the water. One such, after repeated failures, was employed by the Confederates, with equal gallantry and success, in sinking a Union sloop-of-war off Charleston harbor. The torpedo-boat itself went to the bottom with its victim, all on board being drowned. The other type of torpedo-boat was simply a swift, ordinary steam-launch operated on the surface.

It was this last type of boat which Lieutenant W. B. Cushing brought down to Albemarle Sound to use against the great Confederate ram "Albemarle." The ram had been built for the purpose of destroying the Union

blockading forces. Steaming down the river, she had twice attacked the Federal gunboats, and in each case had sunk or disabled one or more of them, with little injury to herself. She had retired up the river again to lie at her wharf and refit.

The gunboats had suffered so severely as to make it a certainty that when the ram came out



COMMANDER W. B. CUSHING, U. S. N.

again, thoroughly fitted up, to renew the attack, the wooden vessels would be destroyed; and while she was in existence the Union vessels could not attack and reduce the forts and coast towns. Just at this time Cushing came down from the North with his swift little torpedo-boat—an open launch with a spar rigged to push out in front, the torpedo being placed at the end. The crew of the launch consisted of fifteen men, Cushing being in command. He not only guided his craft, but himself handled the torpedo by means of two small ropes, one of which put it in place, while the other exploded it. The action of the torpedo was complicated, and it could not have been operated in a time of tremendous excitement save by a man of the utmost nerve and self-command. But Cushing had both; he possessed precisely that combination of reckless courage, presence of mind, and high mental capacity

necessary to the man who leads a forlorn hope under peculiarly difficult circumstances.

On the night of October 27, 1864, Cushing slipped away from the blockading fleet, and steamed up the river toward the wharf, a dozen miles distant, where the great ram lay. The Confederates were watchful to guard against surprise, for they feared lest their foes should try to destroy the ram before she got a chance to come down and attack them again in the Sound. She lay under the guns of a fort, with a regiment of troops ready at a moment's notice to turn out and defend her. Her own guns were kept always clear for action, and she was protected by a great boom of logs thrown out roundabout, of which last defense the Federals knew nothing.

Cushing went up-stream with the utmost caution, and by good luck passed, unnoticed, a Confederate lookout below the ram.

About midnight he made his assault. Steaming quietly on through the black water, and feeling his way cautiously toward where he knew the town to be, he finally made out the loom of the Albemarle through the night, and at once drove at her. He was almost upon her before he was discovered; then the crew and the soldiers on the wharf opened fire, and at the same moment he was brought to by the boom, the existence of which he had not known. The rifle-balls were singing about him as he stood erect guiding his launch, and he heard the bustle of the men aboard the ram, and the noise of the great guns as they were got ready. Backing off, he again went all steam ahead, and actually surged over the slippery log of the boom.

Meanwhile, on the deck of the Albemarle the sailors were running to quarters, and the soldiers were swarming down to aid in her defense. And the droning bullets came always thicker through the dark night. Cushing still stood upright in his little craft, guiding and controlling her by voice and signal, while in his hands he kept the ropes which led to the tor-

pedo. As the boat slid forward over the boom, he brought the torpedo full against the somber side of the huge ram, and instantly exploded it, almost at the same time that the pivot-gun of the ram, loaded with grape, was fired point-blank at him, not ten yards off.

At once the ram settled, the launch sinking at the same moment, while Cushing and his men swam for their lives. Most of them sank or were captured; but Cushing reached mid-stream. Hearing something splashing in the darkness, he swam toward it, and found that it was one of his crew. He went to his rescue, and they kept together for some time, but the sailor's strength gave out, and he finally sank. In the pitch darkness Cushing could form no idea where he was; and when, chilled through, and too exhausted to rise to his feet, he finally reached shore, shortly before dawn, he found that he had swum back, and landed but a few hundred feet below the sunken ram. All that day he remained within easy musket-shot of where his foes were swarming about the fort and the great drowned ironclad. He hardly dared move, and until the afternoon, he lay without food and without protection from the heat or insects. Then he managed to slip unobserved into a dense swamp, and began to make his way toward the fleet. Toward evening he came out on a small stream, near a camp of Confederate soldiers. They had moored to the bank a small skiff, and with equal stealth and daring he managed to steal this, and began to paddle down-stream. Hour after hour he paddled on through the fading light, and then through the darkness. At last, utterly worn out, he found the squadron, and was picked up.

At once the ships weighed their anchors, and they speedily captured every coast town and fort, now that their dreaded enemy was no longer in the way.

The fame of Cushing's deed went all over the land, and his name will stand forever among the highest on the honor-roll of the American Navy.