

## William Barker Cushing (Courage, Commitment)

William Barker Cushing's actions during the American Civil War exemplified the courage and commitment aspects of the Seven Cs.

During the American Civil War, the Union and Confederacy introduced a new kind of ship, the ironclad, a wooden, steam-powered gunboat clad with iron armor. Seemingly impervious to cannon fire, ironclads made quick work of the wooden ships they encountered. Just one Confederate ironclad, CSS *Albemarle*, became a menace on the Roanoke River, holding the operations of the North Atlantic Squadron in check. In the space of a week, *Albemarle* sank two U.S. warships, captured another, and killed a high-ranking officer, Commander Charles Flusser, a close friend of Lieutenant William Barker Cushing. After Flusser's death, Cushing declared, "I shall never rest until I have avenged his death."

Union naval leaders agreed: CSS *Albemarle* must be destroyed. Cushing believed it feasible to destroy *Albemarle* by attaching an underwater explosive to its hull. He preferred to capture the ship, but if he could not haul the ship away safely, then he and his crew would destroy it. Cushing's secret mission took place on October 27, 1864. Aboard their small boat, Cushing and 28 men sailed silently past the Confederate pickets and, as they caught sight of the hulking ship, breathed a sigh of relief that they made it with no one seeing them. Cushing prepared to board the ship and take it back to Union lines, but he was suddenly met by two problems: first, a barking dog alerted the Confederate sentries that someone was on the river; and second, a ring of logs surrounded *Albemarle* in an attempt to keep anyone from reaching the ship. At that moment, Cushing realized he had no choice: he would have to blow up the ship.

He mounted the bow of the boat even as Confederate sentries shot at him. Cushing held in his hand the lines to set off his explosive. His boat rode over the logs, burying the explosive into the belly of *Albemarle*. He counted to five slowly, allowing the torpedo to rise under the hull of *Albemarle*. A bullet tore Cushing's collar, another ripped his sleeve, and two more plowed through his clothing. He led a charmed life. None of the bullets drew blood. When he reached "five," he pulled the firing line. A roar filled his ears.

Cushing's well-planned mission was a success, blowing up *Albemarle*, and he lost only two of his men. Captain Alexander Warley, commanding officer of *Albemarle*, concluded in his official report, "A torpedo had been exploded, [putting] a 'hole in her bottom big enough to drive a wagon in'....That is the way the *Albemarle* was destroyed, and a more gallant thing was not done during the war." In short, both Cushing's superiors and his adversaries expressed astonishment at what he had accomplished.

*Courage is defined as "the moral and mental strength to do what is right, even with criticism or adversity." How did Cushing's actions reflect this definition?*

*Commitment is defined as “the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause or activity.” How did Cushing’s actions reflect his commitment?*