



# Commander Will Cushing: Daredevil Hero of the Civil War

*Jamie Malanowski*

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**The lead writer of the *New York Times*'s award-winning "Disunion" series introduces William Barker Cushing, the Civil War's most celebrated naval hero.**

October 1864. The confederate ironclad *CSS Albemarle* had sunk two federal warships and damaged seven others, taking control of the Roanoke River and threatening the Union blockade. Twenty-one-year-old navy lieutenant William Barker Cushing hatched a daring plan: to attack the fearsome warship with a few dozen men in two small wooden boats. What followed, the close-range torpedoing of the *Albemarle* and Cushing's harrowing two-day escape downriver from vengeful Rebel posses, is one of the most dramatic individual exploits in American military history.

Theodore Roosevelt said that Cushing "comes next to Farragut on the hero roll of American naval history," but most have never heard of him today. Tossed out of the Naval Academy for "buffoonery," Cushing proved himself a prodigy in behind-the-lines warfare. Given command of a small union ship, he performed daring, near-suicidal raids, "cutting out" confederate ships and thwarting blockade runners. With higher commands and larger ships, Cushing's exploits grow bolder, culminating in the sinking of the *Albemarle*.

A thrilling narrative biography, steeped in the tactics, weaponry, and battle techniques of the Union Navy, *Commander Will Cushing* brings to life a compelling yet flawed figure. Along with his three brothers, including one who fell at Gettysburg, Cushing served with bravery and heroism. But he was irascible and complicated—a loveable rogue, prideful and impulsive, who nonetheless possessed a genius for combat.

In telling Cushing's story, Malanowski paints a vivid, memorable portrait of the army officials, engineers, and politicians scrambling to win the war. But he also goes deeper into the psychology of the daredevil soldier—and what this heroic and tragic figure, who died before his time, can tell us about the ways we remember the glories of war.

8 pages of illustrations

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