



The Summer Confederate

LEGIONNAIRE

The Newsletter of the General William B. Bate Camp No. 34

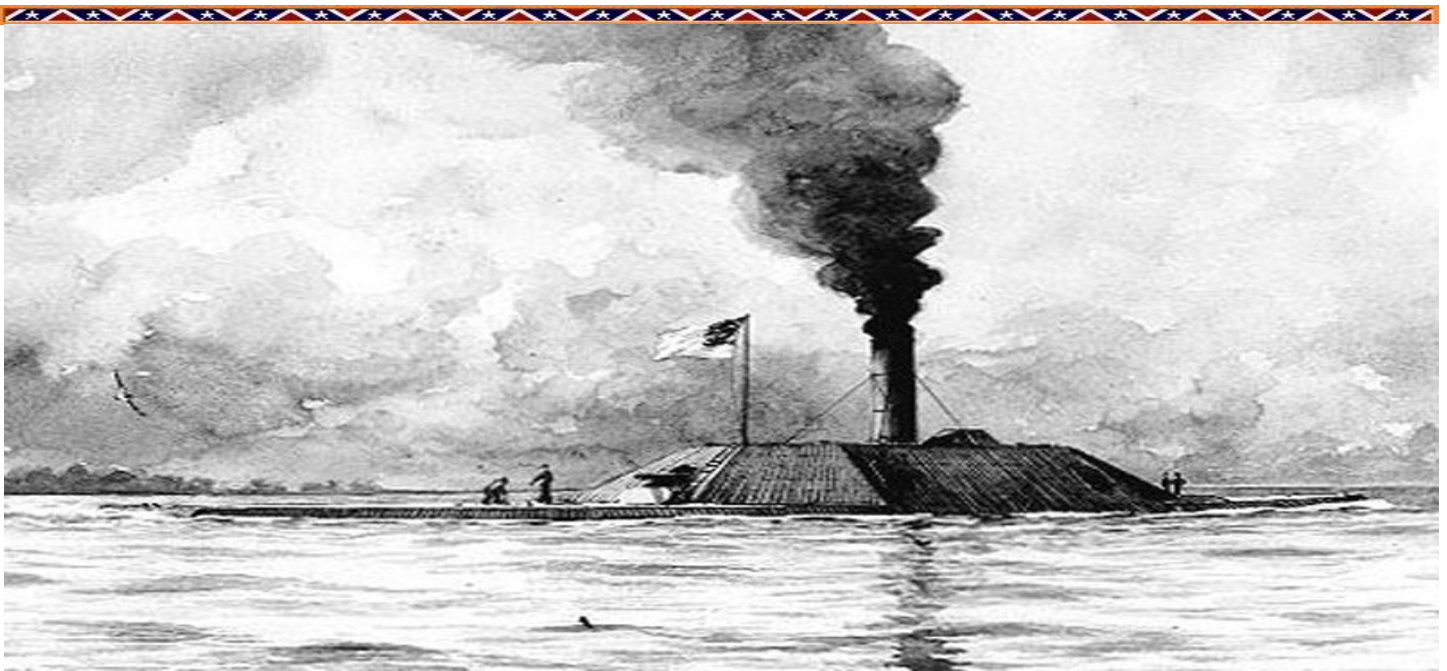
Sons of Confederate Veterans



Volume 6, Issue 8

August 2016

THE CONFEDERATE RAM ALBEMARLE



DURING the spring of 1863, having at different points in eastern North Carolina been previously engaged in unsuccessful and Virginia, I undertook a contract with the efforts to construct war vessels, of one sort Navy Department to build an iron-clad gun- or another, for the Confederate Government, boat, intended, if ever completed, to operate

OUR NEXT REGULAR MEETING WILL BE HELD ON AUGUST 11, 2016 AT 7:00 P.M. AT THE NEW LOCATION OF BELIEVERS FELLOWSHIP, STILL ON THE PUBLIC SQUARE BUT NOW AT 126 NORTH WATER AVENUE. PLEASE PLAN TO ATTEND.

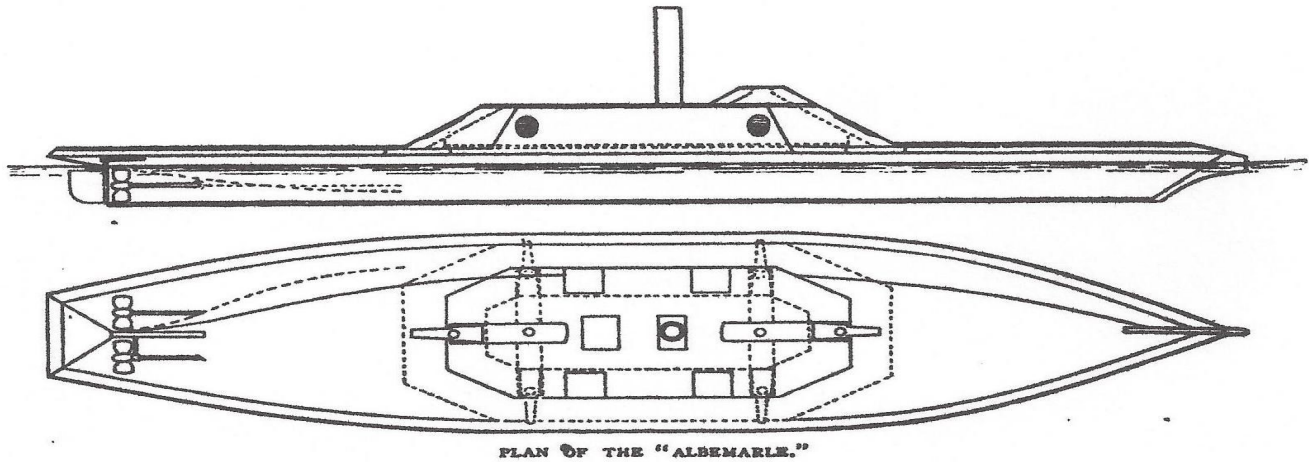
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This is our last meeting at Believers' Fellowship as it is closing. We are still working to find a new meeting site. If you have a suggestion, please contact me at batecamp34@comcast.net



PLAN OF THE "ALBEMARLE."

on the waters of Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds. A point on the Roanoke River, in Halifax County, North Carolina, about thirty miles below the town of Weldon, was fixed upon as the most suitable for the purpose. The river rises and falls, as is well known, and it was necessary to locate the yard on ground sufficiently free from over flow to admit of uninterrupted work for at least twelve months. No vessel was ever constructed under more adverse circumstances. The ship yard was established in a corn-field, where the ground had already been marked out and planted for the coming crop, but the owner of the land was in hearty sympathy with the enterprise, and aided me then and after wards, in a thousand ways, to accomplish the end I had in view. It was next to impossible to obtain machinery suitable for the work in hand. Here and there, scattered about the surrounding country, a portable saw-mill, black smith's forge, or other apparatus was found, however, and the citizens of the neighborhoods on both sides of the river were not slow to render me assistance, but cooperated, cordially, in the completion of the iron-clad, and at the end of about one year from the laying of the keel,

during which innumerable difficulties were overcome by constant application, determined effort, and incessant labor, day and night, success crowned the efforts of those engaged in the undertaking.

Seizing an opportunity offered by comparatively high water, the boat was launched, though not without misgivings as to the result, for the yard being on a bluff she had to take a jump, and as a matter of fact was "hogged" in the attempt, but to our great gratification did not thereby spring a leak.

The plans and specifications were prepared by John L. Porter, Chief Constructor of the Confederate Navy, who availed himself of the advantage gained by his experience in converting the frigate Merrimac into the iron clad Virginia at the Gosport Navy Yard.

The *Albemarle* was 152 feet long between perpendiculars; her extreme width was 45 feet; her depth from the gun-deck to the keel was 9 feet, and when launched she drew 6 1/2 feet of water, but after being ironed and completed her draught was about 8 feet. The keel was laid, and construction



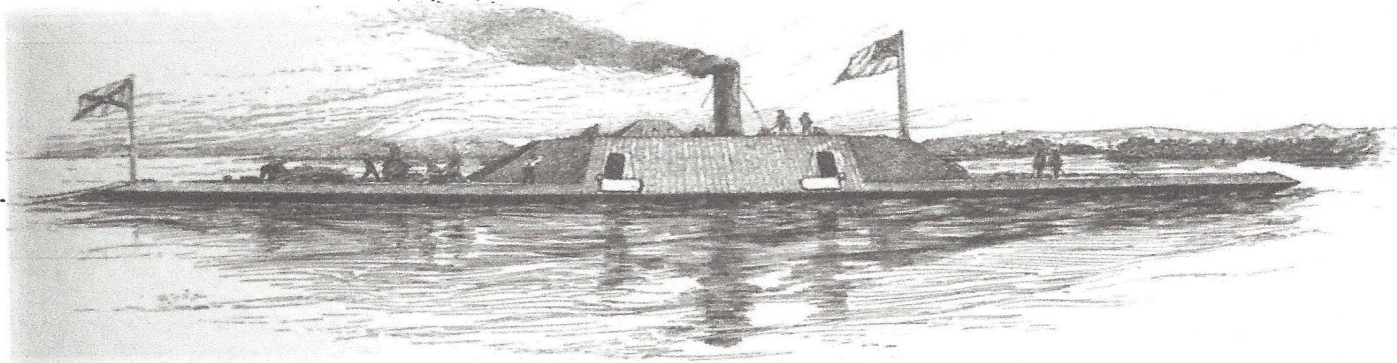


USS Albemarle under construction

was commenced by bolting down, across the frames, and if calked would have floated in center, a piece of frame timber, which was of that condition, but she was afterwards yellow pine, eight by ten inches. Another covered with 4-inch planking, laid on frame of the same size was then dovetailed longitudinally, as ships are usually planked, into this, extending outwardly at an angle of and this was properly calked and pitched, 45 degrees, forming the side, and at the outer cotton being used for calking instead of end of this the frame for the shield was also oakum, the latter being very scarce and the dovetailed, the angle being 35 degrees, and former almost the only article to be had in then the top deck was added, and so on abundance. Much of the timber was hauled around to the other end of the bottom beam. long distances. Three portable saw-mills were Other beams were then bolted down to the obtained, one of which was located at the keel, and to the one first fastened, and so on, yard, the others being moved about from working fore and aft, the main-deck beams time to time to such growing timber as could being interposed from stem to stern. The be procured.

The shield was 60 feet in length and octagonal in form. When this part of the work was completed she was a solid boat, built of pine

The iron plating consisted of two courses, 7 inches wide and 2 inches thick,



THE "ALBEMARLE" GOING DOWN THE ROANOKE.





strong leadership to move into the future. Our Confederation is facing greater challenges all the time and we must be prepared to meet them and to protect the good name and honor of our Confederate ancestors in this time where they, their monuments and their name are greatly maligned. We, their descendants, must take a stand to preserve their remembrance and their honor.

We are not having a speaker this month as I want to concentrate on getting a meeting place, our upcoming events toward the end of the year and Ken needs some time to talk about membership renewal.

Compatriots, this is a time for us to come together. We need a new meeting place. As most of you know, Compatriot Steve Nelson has graciously agreed to allow us to use his church, Believers' Fellowship as our meeting place but after this month, the church is closing. I would like us to find a semi-permanent meeting room which would allow us to have our Camp flags mounted on poles and openly displayed as well as allowing the hanging of our print of General Bate. I want to take this opportunity to thank Steve for all of his help and graciously allowing us to use his church over these past months. It has allowed us a great central location in which to meet.

If you have any suggestions in this regard, please let me know.

Elections are coming up in November and as I announced in June, it is my hope that you will continue to honor me with your trust as Camp Commander. Anyone interested in standing for any of the offices in the Camp, please let me know as we need

Randy P. Lucas
Commander



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 COUNTY CLERK'S
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mostly rolled at the Tredegar Iron Works, Richmond. The first course was laid lengthwise, over a wooden backing, 16 inches in thickness, a 2 inch space, filled in with wood, being left between each two layers to afford space for bolting the outer course through the whole shield, and the outer course was laid flush, forming a smooth surface, similar to that of the *Virginia*. The inner part of the shield was covered with a thin course of planking, nicely dressed, mainly with a view to protection from splinters. Oak knees were bolted in, to act as braces and supports for the shield.

The armament consisted of two rifled "Brooke" guns mounted on pivot-carriages, each gun working through three port-holes, as

occasion required, there being one port hole at each end of the shield and two on each side. These were protected by iron covers lowered and raised by a contrivance worked on the gun-deck. She had two propellers driven by two engines of 200-horse power each, with 20-inch. cylinders, steam being supplied by two flue boilers, and the shafting was geared together.

The sides were covered from the knuckle, four feet below the deck, with iron plates two inches thick.

The prow was built of oak, running 18

feet back, on center keelson, and solidly covered on the outside with iron plating, 2 inches thick and, tapering off



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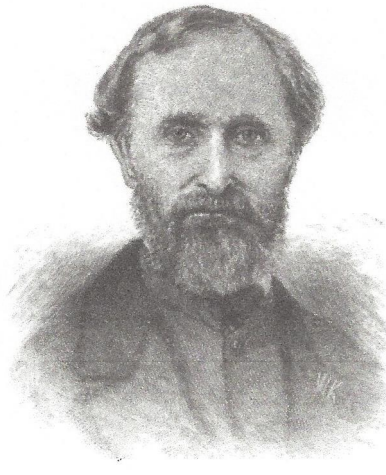
to a 4-inch edge, formed the ram. The work of putting on the armor was prosecuted for some time under the most disheartening circumstances, on account of the difficulty of drilling holes in the iron intended for her armor. But one small engine and drill could be had, and it required, at the best, twenty minutes to drill an inch and a quarter hole through the plates, and it looked as if we would never accomplish the task. But "necessity is the mother of invention," and one of my associates in the enterprise, Peter E. Smith, of Scotland Neck, North Carolina, invented and made a twist-drill with which the work of drilling a hole could be done in four minutes, the drill cutting out the iron in shavings instead of fine powder.

For many reasons it was thought judicious to remove the boat to the town of Halifax, about twenty miles up the river, and the work of completion, putting in her machinery, armament, etc., was done at that point, although the actual finishing touches were not given until a few days before going into action at Plymouth.

Forges were erected on her decks, and black smiths and carpenters were kept hard at work as she floated down the river to her destination. Captain James W. Cooke, of the Confederate Navy, was detailed by the department to watch the construction of the vessel and to take command when she went into commission. He made every effort to hasten the completion of the boat. He was a bold and gallant officer, and in the battles in

which he subsequently engaged he proved himself a hero. Of him it was said that "he would fight a powder magazine with a coal of fire," and if such a necessity could by any possibility have existed he would, doubtless, have been equal to the occasion.

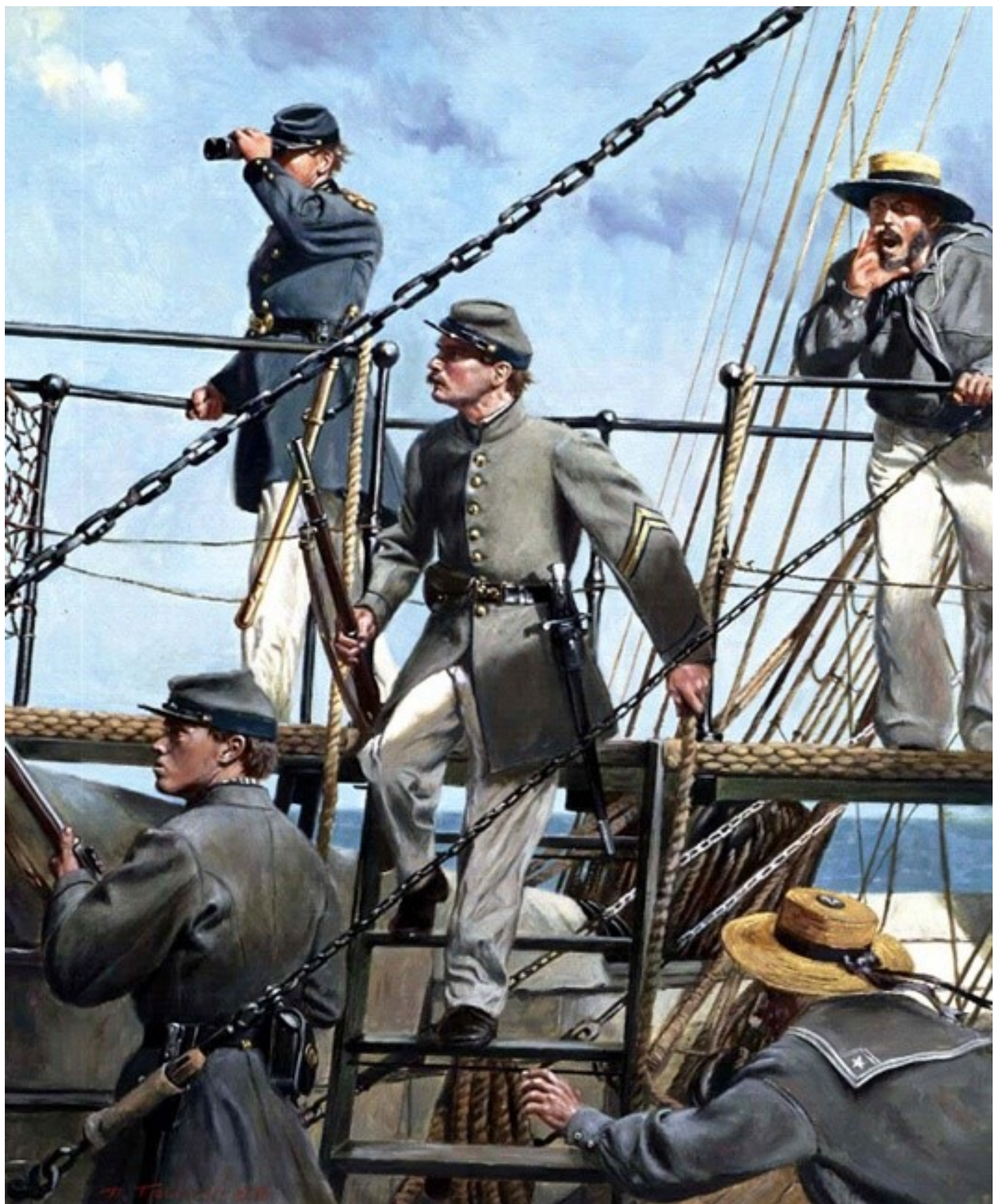
In the spring of 1864 it had been decided at headquarters that an attempt should be made to recapture the town of Plymouth. General Hoke was placed in command of the land forces, and Captain Cooke received orders to cooperate. Accordingly Hoke's division proceeded to the vicinity of Plymouth and surrounded the town from the river above to the river below, and preparation was made to storm the forts and breastworks as soon as the Albemarle could clear the river front of the Federal war vessels protecting the place with their guns.



CAPTAIN J. W. COOKE, C. S. N.

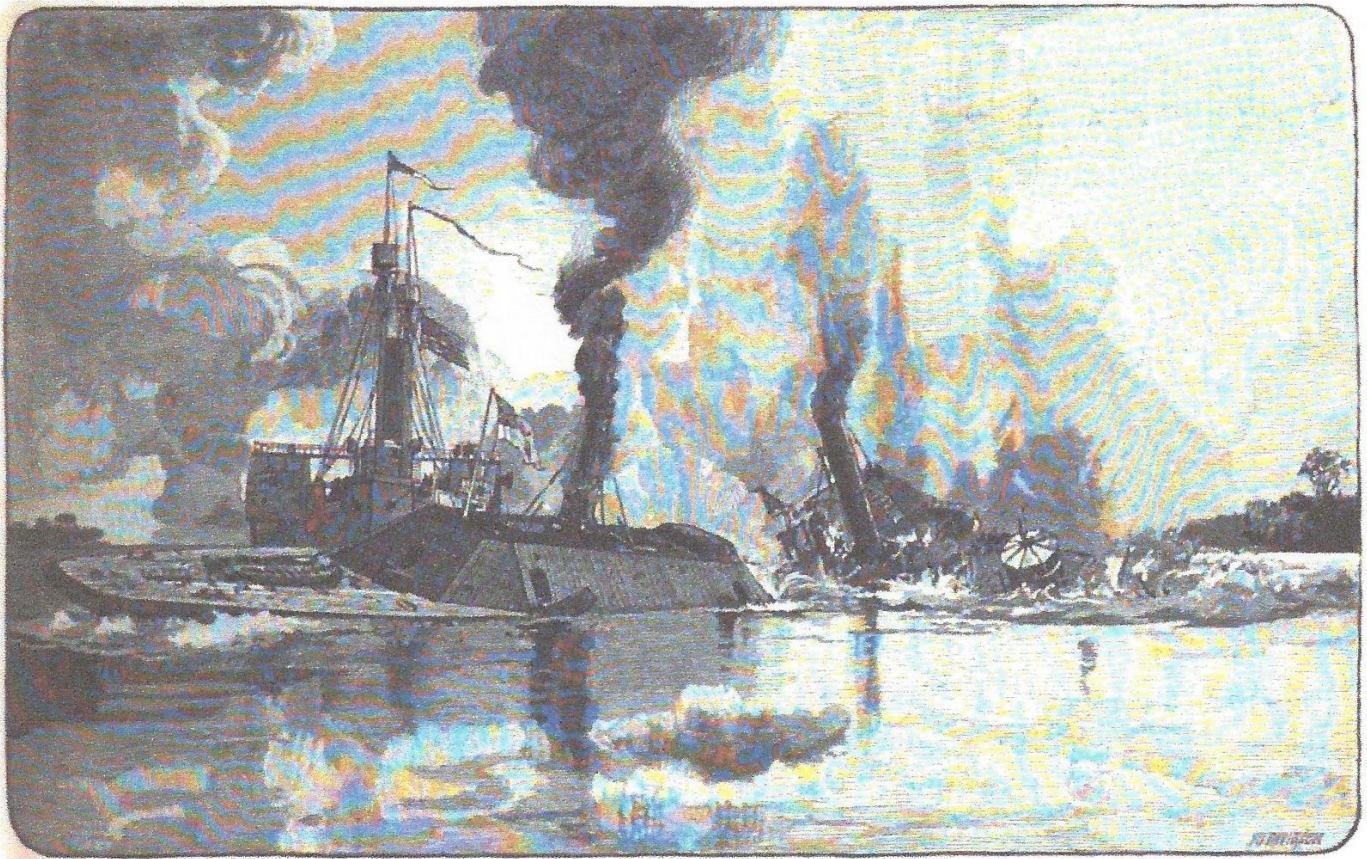
On the morning of April 18, 1864, the *Albemarle* left the town of Hamilton and proceeded down the river towards Plymouth, going stern foremost, with chains dragging from the bow, the rapidity of the current making it impracticable to steer with her head downstream. She came to anchor about three miles above Plymouth, and a mile or so above the battery on the bluff at Warren's Neck, near Thoroughfare Gap, where torpedoes, sunken vessels, piles, and other obstructions had been placed. An exploring expedition was sent out, under command of one of the lieutenants, which returned in about two hours, with the report that it was considered impossible to pass the obstructions.





Confederate Marines in Service





THE SINKING OF THE "SOUTHFIELD."

Thereupon the fires were banked, and the officers and crew not on duty retired to rest.

Having accompanied Captain Cooke as a volunteer aide, and feeling intensely dissatisfied with the apparent intention of lying at anchor all that night, and believing that it was "then or never" with the ram if she was to accomplish anything, and that it would be foolhardy to attempt the passage of the obstructions and batteries in the day-time, I requested permission to make a personal investigation. Captain Cooke cordially assenting, and Pilot John Luck and two of the few experienced seamen on board volunteering their services, we set forth in a small lifeboat, taking with us a long pole, and arriving at the obstructions proceeded to take soundings. To our great joy it was ascertained that there was ten feet of water over and above the obstructions. This was due to the remarkable freshet then prevailing; the proverbial "oldest inhabitant" said, afterwards, that such high water had never before been seen in Roanoke River. Pushing on down the stream to Plymouth, and taking advantage of the shadow of the trees on the north side of the river, opposite the town, we watched the Federal transports taking onboard the women and children who were being sent away for safety, on account of the approaching bombardment. With muffled oars, and almost afraid to breathe, we made our way back up the river, hugging close to the northern bank, and reached the ram about I o'clock, reporting to Captain Cooke that it was practicable to pass the obstructions provided the boat was kept in the middle of the stream. The indomitable commander instantly aroused his men, gave

the order to get up steam, slipped the cables in his impatience to be off, and started down the river. The obstructions were soon reached and safely passed, under a fire from the fort at Warren's

Neck which was not returned. Protected by the iron-clad shield, to those on board the noise made by the shot and shell as they struck the boat sounded no louder than pebbles thrown against an empty barrel. At Boyle's Mill, lower down, there was another fort upon which was mounted a very heavy gun. This was also safely passed, and we then discovered two steamers coming up the river. They proved to be the *Miami* and the *Southfield*.

The two ships were lashed together with long spars, and with chains festooned

would have placed the ram at a great disadvantage, if not altogether at his mercy; but Pilot John Luck, acting under orders from Captain Cooke, ran the ram close to the southern shore; and then suddenly turning toward the middle of the stream, and going with the current, the throttles, in obedience to his bell, being wide open, he dashed the prow of the *Albemarle* into the side of the *Southfield*, making an opening large enough to carry her to the bottom in much less time than it takes to tell the story. Part of her crew went down with her.

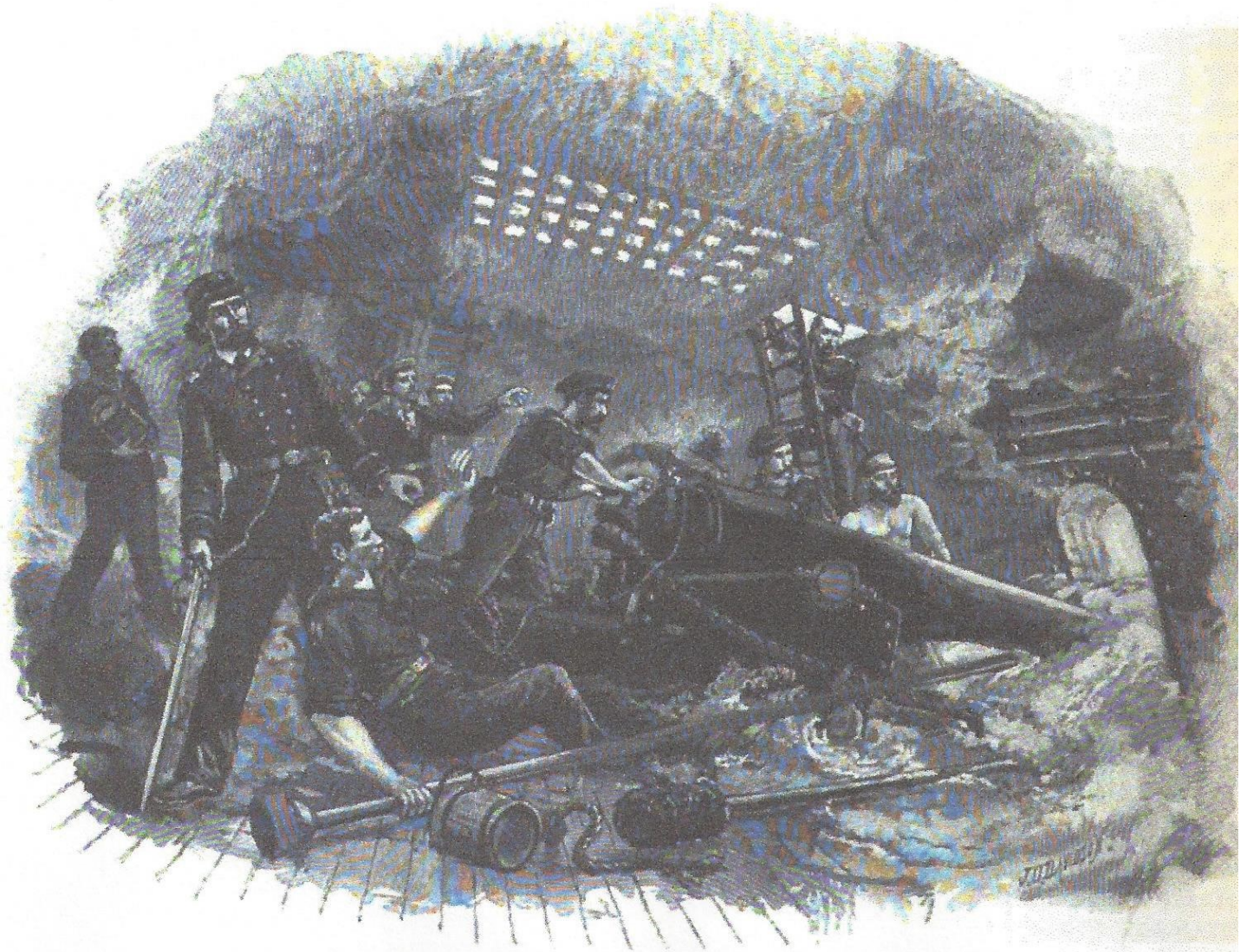
The chain-plates on the forward deck of the *Albemarle* became entangled in the frame of the sinking vessel, and her bow was carried down to such a depth that water poured into her port-holes in great volume,



The "Sasscus" Ramming the "Albermarle."

between them. The plan of Captain Flusser, and she would soon have shared the fate of who commanded, was to run his vessels so as the *Southfield*, had not the latter vessel to get the *Albemarle* between the two, which reached the bottom, and then, turning over





INSIDE THE "ALBEMARLE" CASEMATE.

on her side, released the ram, thus allowing her to come up on an even keel. The *Miami*, right alongside, had opened fire with her heavy guns, and so close were the vessels together that a shell with a ten-second fuse, fired by Captain Flusser, after striking the

Albemarle rebounded and exploded, killing the gallant man who pulled the lanyard, tearing him almost to pieces. Notwithstanding the death of Flusser, an attempt was made to board the ram, which was heroically resisted by as many of the crew as could be crowded on the top deck, who were supplied with loaded muskets passed up by their comrades

below. The *Miami*, side-wheeler, succeeded in eluding the *Albemarle* without receiving a blow from her ram, and retired below Plymouth, into Albemarle Sound.

Captain Cooke having successfully carried out his part of the programme, General Hoke attacked the fortifications the next morning and carried them; not, however, without heavy loss, Ransom's brigade alone leaving 500 dead and wounded on the field, in their most heroic charge upon the breastworks protecting the eastern front of





CAPTAIN ALEXANDER F. WARLEY, C. S. N.

the town. General Wessells, commanding the Federal forces, made a gallant resistance, and surrendered only when further effort would have been worse than useless. During the attack the *Albemarle* held the river front, according to contract, and all day long poured shot and shell into the resisting forts with her two guns.

On May 5, 1864, Captain Cooke left the Roanoke River with the *Albemarle* and two tenders, the *Bombshell* and *Cotton Plant*, and entered the Sound with the intention of recovering, if possible, the control of the two Sounds, and ultimately of Hatteras Inlet. He proceeded about sixteen miles on an east-northeasterly course, when the Federal squadron, consisting of seven well-armed gun-boats, the *Mattabesett*, *Sassacus*, *Wyalusing*, *Whitehead*, *Miami*, *Commodore Hull*, and

Ceres, all under the command of Captain Melancton Smith, hove in sight, and at 2 o'clock that afternoon approached in double line of battle, the *Mattabesett* being in advance. They proceeded to surround the *Albemarle*, and hurled at her their heaviest shot, at distances averaging less than one hundred yards. The *Albemarle* responded effectively, but her boats were soon shot away, her smoke-stack was riddled, many iron plates in her shield were injured and broken, and the after-gun was broken off eighteen inches from the muzzle, and rendered useless. This terrible fire continued, without intermission, until about 5 P.M., when the commander of the double-ender *Sassacus* selected his opportunity, and with all steam on struck the *Albemarle* squarely just abaft her starboard beam, causing every timber in the vicinity of the blow to groan, though none gave way. The pressure from the revolving wheel of the *Sassacus* was so great that it forced the after deck of the ram several feet below the surface of the water, and created an impression on board that she was about to sink. Some of the crew became demoralized, but the calm voice of the undismayed captain checked the incipient disorder, with the command, "Stand to your guns, and if we must sink let us go down like brave men."

The *Albemarle* soon recovered, and sent a shot at her assailant which passed through one of the latter's boilers, the hissing steam disabling a number of the crew. Yet the discipline on the *Sassacus* was such that, notwithstanding the natural consternation under these appalling circumstances, two of her guns continued to fire on the *Albemarle* until she drifted out of the arena of battle. Two of the fleet attempted to foul the propellers of the ram with a large fishing-seine which they had previously procured for



CSS *Albemarle* engaging U.S. warships, May 1864

the purpose, but the line parted in paying it out. Then they tried to blow her up with a torpedo, but failed. No better success attended an effort to throw a keg of gunpowder down her smoke-stack, or what was left of it, for it was riddled with holes from shot and shell. This smoke-stack had lost its capacity for drawing, and the boat lay a helpless mass on the water. While in this condition every effort was made by her numerous enemies to destroy her. The unequal conflict continued until night. Some of the Federal vessels were more or less disabled, and both sides were doubtless well content to draw off. Captain Cooke had on board a supply of bacon and lard, and this sort of fuel being available to burn without draught from a smoke-stack, he was able to make sufficient steam to get the boat back to

Plymouth, where she tied up to her wharf covered with wounds and with glory.

The *Albemarle* in her different engagements was struck a great many times by shot and shell," and yet but one man lost his life, and that was caused by a pistol-shot from the *Miami*, the imprudent sailor having put his head out of one of the port-holes to see what was going on outside.

Captain Cooke was at once promoted and placed in command of all the Confederate naval forces in eastern North Carolina. The *Albemarle* remained tied to her wharf at Plymouth until the night of October 27, 1864, when Lieutenant William B. Cushing, of the United States Navy, performed the daring feat of destroying her with a torpedo. Having procured a torpedo-



boat so constructed as to be very fast, for a short distance, and with the exhaust steam so arranged as to be noiseless, he proceeded,

with a crew of fourteen men, up the Roanoke River. Guards had been stationed by the Confederate military commander on the wreck of the *Southfield*, whose top deck was then above water, but they failed to see the boat. A boom of logs had been arranged around the *Albemarle*, distant about thirty feet from her side. Captain Cooke had planned and superintended the construction of this arrangement before giving up the command of the vessel to Captain A. F. Warley. Cushing ran his boat up to these logs, and there, under a hot fire, lowered and exploded the torpedo under the *Albemarle's* bottom, causing her to settle down and finally to sink at the wharf. The torpedo-boat and crew were captured; but Cushing refusing to surrender, though twice called upon so to do, sprang into the river, dived to the bottom,

and swam across to a swamp opposite the town, thus making his escape; and on the next night, after having experienced great suffering, wandering through the swamp, he succeeded in obtaining a small canoe, and made his way back to the fleet.

The river front being no longer protected, and no appliances for raising the sunken vessel being available, on October 31 the Federal forces attacked and captured the town of Plymouth.

Gilbert Elliott

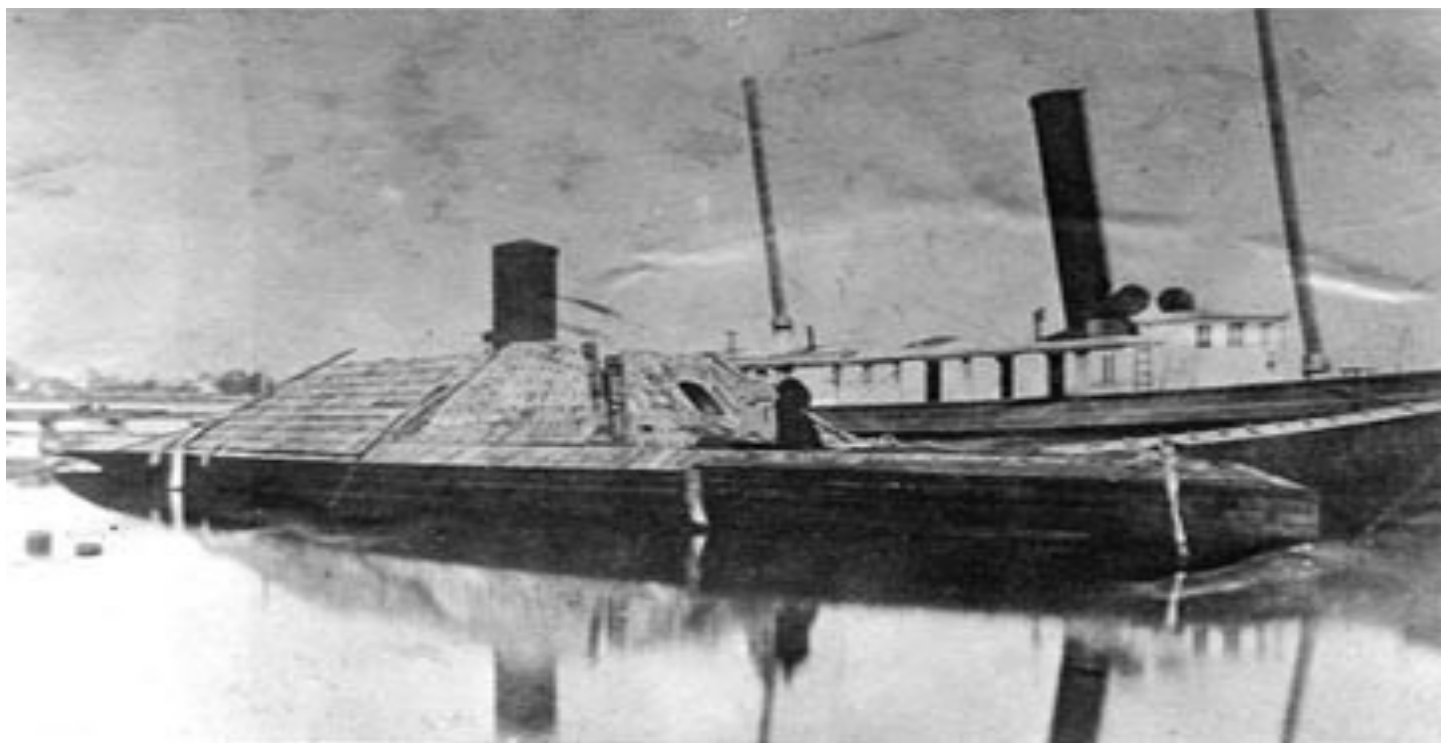
The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine

1887-88

pp. 420-427

[Editor's Note: Many of these illustrations are in the original but others have been added by the Editor.]

GSS *Albemarle* in the Norfolk Navy Yard, 1865, after her salvage



SUMNER CONFEDERATE LEGIONNAIRE

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2 Lt. Commander - John de Leusomme
Adjutant - Kenneth A. Corum
Quartermaster - Richard Hamblen
Treasurer - Kenneth A. Corum
Chaplain - Johnny Keele
Surgeon - Vacant
Historian - G. Franklin Heathman
Color Sergeant - Michael Bassette
Judge Advocate - William Bryan Roehrig, III
Editor - Randy P. Lucas

Carmack's Pledge to the South

The South is a land that has known sorrows; it is a land that has broken the ashen crust and moistened it with tears; a land scarred and riven by the plowshare of war and billowed with the graves of her dead; but a land of legend, a land of song, a land of hallowed and heroic memories.

To that land every drop of my blood, every fiber of my being, every pulsation of my heart, is consecrated forever. I was born of her womb; I was nurtured at her breast; and when my last hour shall come, I pray God that I may be pillowed upon her bosom and rocked to sleep within her tender and encircling arms.

"Wood vs. Iron" The USS Albemarle in Action, May 5, 1864

