

Major Confederate Naval Victory

Florida — 1864

The Rogero brothers, **ALBERT CRESPIN ROGERO** and **JOHN CLAUDE ROGERO**, serving as scouts, are two of the 16 sharpshooters and their Captain, who helped define this historic event.

At a time when Confederate defeats elsewhere were sapping morale, Captain J. J. Dickison of the Confederate States Army and his “sharp-shooters,” (including two ROGERO brothers) captured and sunk the enemy ship *Columbine*.

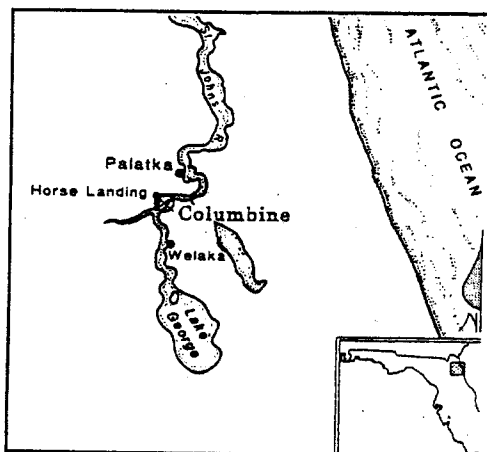
When the Civil War began in 1861 most of the young men from Florida were assigned military duties in other states, leaving Florida with few to defend it from Union attacks. Although the Confederates didn't expect much from Florida, there were numerous skirmishes in Florida during the war, resulting in Union troops occupying several important towns like St. Augustine and Key West. The only real pitched battle that took place in Florida was the Battle of Olustee, in which southern troops routed Union forces in February 1864, west of Jacksonville. The man who did much to keep Union forces at bay and inspired many stories and songs about his exploits was Captain J. J. Dickison (1816? - 1902) of Ocala and his loyal troop of “sharpshooters.” Serving as scouts with Captain Dickison were two brothers, **ALBERT CRESPIN ROGERO** and **JOHN CLAUDE ROGERO**¹.

In order to prevent ships from leaving or entering Confederate ports, Union ships blockaded the southern coast and raided coastal installations at will. While successfully maintaining that blockade for the last part of the war it was necessary to cruise the inland waters to prevent the movement of supplies and troops. This meant using shallow-draft vessels that could maneuver the often shallow rivers, bays and lakes.

In May, 1864, the Union *Columbine* joined the *Ottawa* and the transport ship, *Charles Houghton*, in patrolling the St. Johns near Palatka. The commander of the *Columbine*, Acting Ensign Francis W. Sanborn gave instructions to the *Ottawa*'s skipper to only provide help if the *Columbine* fired a rocket. The sound of gun-fire was to be considered normal and not to be heeded.

¹ Albert Crespin Rogero and John Claude Rogero, sons of Francisco Cristobal Rogero who was the son of Alberto Rogero.

After leaving Welaka on the afternoon of May 23, the *Columbine* approached Horse Landing, three miles north of Welaka, around 4 p.m. and began firing artillery at suspected Confederates near the landing.



After Captain Dickison had been notified of the approach of the *Columbine* by scouts, he placed two 12-pounder Napoleon field pieces in the woods on the river's east bank and had his 16 sharpshooters stand by. When the *Columbine* came within 60 feet the order was given to fire. The shots quickly disabled the vessel, causing it to drift onto a sandbar. One shot pierced the main steam pipe, causing the ship to lose steam. The ship's two 32-pounders proved almost useless before the accurate fire of the sharpshooters. Over half of the 148 men on board the *Columbine* were killed or wounded, and several drowned trying to escape by swimming across the St. Johns. All of the officers except one were killed in battle. Non of the Confederates were killed. Dickison and his sharpshooters took the Union survivors as prisoners, and seized many rifles and rounds of ammunition, and then burned the ship to the water's edge before the *Ottawa* arrived.

The scuttling of the *Columbine* did not have much effect on the outcome of the war, but it did rally Floridians behind Dickison and gave his troops a much-needed psychological lift in the weary months at the end of the war.