

11th TN Infantry  
CSA

# PATRIOTS IN DISGUISE

Women Warriors  
of the Civil War

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## Confederate Officers and Gentlewomen

*A beautiful, dashing lady, in the uniform of a [Confederate] Captain, passed on the Northern train towards Richmond yesterday afternoon.*

—Lynchburg *Virginian*, October 6, 1864.

After the battle of Chickamauga, Tennessee, on September 19–20, 1863, a captured Union soldier was returned through the lines with the following note: “As the Confederates do not use women in war, this woman, wounded in battle, is returned to you.” The Confederate commander who penned this note would be surprised—more probably astonished—to learn how wrong he was.

In 1876, General Jubal Early was outraged by Loreta Janeta Velazquez’s claims to have served in the Confederate Army. Although he did raise some serious questions about portions of her memoirs, the bottom line was that she did not fit his preconceptions about the flower of southern womanhood, who in his estimation would not have done the things she claimed to have done. Indeed, he refused to believe that she could be a southern woman and insisted that she must be from the North.

In the South, at the outset of the war, even the notion of women serving as military nurses in battlefield areas was frowned upon, and though some Confederate units had *vivandieres* or the equivalent, the numbers appear to have been fewer and the role somewhat different. In some instances “mother figures” (typically the wife of a soldier) served on or near the battlefield, sharing the dangers and tending to the wounded. These were the closest parallels in the South to the young women like Anna Etheridge and Bridget Deavers who served openly as women, and whose battlefield exploits were widely admired. In the South they tended to be

“mothers of the regiment,” and their presence seems to have been justified in terms of “motherly” care of the soldiers. In the North the young women provided “sisterly” care to the soldiers and were romanticized as inspirational “angels” of the battlefield, setting an example of bravery and encouraging the men on to greater exploits.

Despite what the Confederate commander at Chickamauga thought, however, women did find their way into the ranks of the Confederate Army. Aside from Velazquez, one of the more remarkable stories is that of Mrs. Amy Clarke who served in General Braxton Bragg’s Army of the Tennessee. The oft-repeated legend has her enlisting with her husband, continuing in service after he is killed at Shiloh (April 6–7, 1862), her later being wounded and captured, her sex discovered, and her release back into Confederate lines in a dress that Union officials insisted she wear. This core story has appeared in a number of sources.

Some important clues that may eventually help to uncover her whole story were found by Professor Stuart Sprague of Morehead State University, Kentucky. The *Cairo City Gazette* of December 25, 1862 reports that one “Anna Clark” (almost certainly Amy Clarke, since it mentions her husband’s death at Shiloh, her capture and release in a dress) was a prisoner of war about to be exchanged. She had been serving as a private soldier in the ~~Confederate Army~~ using the name “Richard Anderson,” was born in Iuka, Tennessee, and her husband’s name was Walter. She was said to be “well informed upon politics, literature, and other general topics.”

Less than a week later, Clarke was seen in Jackson, Mississippi, having been exchanged, and was on her way back to Bragg’s command. Repeating the core story about Shiloh, the *Jackson Mississippian* of December 30, 1862 added that she had personally buried her husband on that battlefield. She had then continued fighting in the ranks until “twice wounded—once in the ankle, and then in the breast.”

Evidence that she in fact did return to Bragg’s command is contained in an August, 1863 letter home by Robert Hodges, Jr., a Texas cavalry soldier. Hodges told his father of an unexpected encounter with a female lieutenant at Turner’s Station, Tennessee. Outside of camp shortly before August 7th, he found a crowd of people and asked what was going on:

One of the soldiers directed my attention to a youth apparently about seventeen years of age well dressed with a lieutenant’s badge

on his collar. I remarked that I saw nothing strange. He then told me that the young man was not a man but a female.

(This was one of several mentions of Clarke that lends credence to the basic story.) Hodges told his father that he had heard of the brave deeds of the female soldier, and repeated the basic story of her husband's death at Shiloh, her later being wounded and captured. (According to him "she was twice wounded in the ankle and then in the breast" before being released wearing a dress.)

How she came to be an officer, serving (apparently) openly as a woman, is not clear. It also seems odd that someone so famous would abruptly vanish from the pages of history, but the 1863 encounter in Tennessee was the last record that could be found. No information was found about whether she survived the war, or about her later life, and death. Possibly a more complete story will emerge in time.

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Lucy Matilda Thompson, on the other hand, we know lived a long and full life even though badly wounded while serving as a soldier. She lived to be 112 years old! Born on November 21, 1812 in Bladensboro, North Carolina, her father was part Indian (Waccamau tribe). At 17 years-old, Lucy was tall and masculine in appearance, weighing 165 pounds. She learned to ride and hunt, and became an expert shot with a rifle. In 1861, at the age of 49, she married Bryant Gauss. When her husband enlisted in the Confederate army, she was not content to sit at home. "She cut her thick hair very close, remodeled Bryant's suit to fit herself, oiled her squirrel musket and went off to enlist," according to a summary of her life by John Mull, curator of the National Women's Military Museum.

Lucy's disguise was successful, and she joined her husband as a member of the "Bladen Light Infantry," which became Company D of the 18th North Carolina Infantry. Whether the company officers knew her true identity is not known. "If they did," Mull said, "they kept it to themselves. After all, what mattered most was that she was an expert shot. In addition, she sang well in a husky voice which helped keep up the spirits of the troops on the long, rainy marches between the battles." According to the story, she was wounded severely at 1st Bull Run by a piece of shrapnel

that tore her scalp open. (Regimental records do not show that the 18th North Carolina was at 1st Bull Run, but it *was* at 2nd Bull Run where it had twelve casualties, and that probably is where it happened.)

Bryant Gauss was wounded three times early in the war, and was killed in action during the Seven Days battles near Richmond in May-June of 1862. About the same time, Lucy was again wounded in the head by shrapnel from a shell, this time more serious than before. During a sixty-day stay in the hospital a silver plate was placed in her skull to protect her brain. During this hospital stay her sex apparently was discovered. When she was released, she obtained a permanent furlough and took her husband's body home for a proper burial. Thus ended her combat career, with little or no publicity.

At age 51 in January of 1864, Lucy gave birth to her first child, a girl. She stayed at home in North Carolina for the rest of the war. Shortly after the war she moved to Savannah, Georgia, where she met and married Union veteran Joseph Patrick Henry Kenney (born in 1806 and therefore about 60 years-old). They settled in Savannah where Joe was a street cleaner, and had six children, including a set of twins born when Lucy was 55 years old. She gave birth to her last child at age 68!

Her husband, Joe, died in 1913 at the age of 107, possibly without knowing that his wife had fought on the opposite side during the Civil War. Only in 1914, when she told her pastor about her military record, did the story of her Civil War combat service begin to emerge. At this time she became something of a celebrity, frequently giving out interviews about her wartime experiences. During an interview on her 109th birthday she expressed opposition to women's suffrage.

Lucy died on June 22, 1925 (having survived through, and at least indirectly experienced World War I) at the age of 112 years. She is buried at Meeks Cemetery near Nicholls, Georgia.

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The careers of some female soldiers were very short. Quite a few were unable to conceal their sex more than a few days or weeks in training camp, before they were discovered and sent home. Some were there in the first place only to be with their husbands or lovers and, unlike Amy Clarke or Frances Day, did not care to carry on

Richmond, VA: Garrett & Massie, 1936, pp. 80–81. (Ross and Freemantle anecdotes.)

Arthur J. L. Freemantle, *Three Months in the Southern States*. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1863 (Time-Life replica edition, 1984), p. 174.)

Lynchburg, Virginia, *Virginian*, October 6, 1864; p. 1 (Story of female captain on train.)

### “Moses” Goes to War

Eric Foner and John A. Garraty (eds.), *Reader's Companion to American History*. “Tubman, Harriet” entry. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1991.

John H. Franklin, “Tubman, Harriet” entry in *Notable American Women*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971.

Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad From Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1898. (1968 reprint edition by Peter Smith, Gloucester, MA.)

William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1991. (Tribute to Harriet Tubman, p. 263)

Jean M. Hofer, “They Called Her ‘Moses’ ”; in *Civil War Times Illustrated*, February, 1988, pp. 36–41.

## Notes to Chapter 13

Fred M. Mazzulla and William Kostka, *Mountain Charley or the Adventures of Mrs. E. J. Guerin, Who Was Thirteen Years in Male Attire*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968. (Basically reports two stories which I have labeled “Charley I” and “Charley II.” Charley I served in the Civil War, Charley II flourished just before the Civil War.)

### Charley I

Enlistment and battle of Westport, pp. 82–111; Wounded in action and sex discovered, pp. 100–109; Story told to George West, pp. 72–75; Charley's 1885 letter to George West, pp. 79–81.

### Charley II

Male disguise to avenge husband, pp. 18–28; St. Louis encounter with Jamieson, pp. 28–36; Wagon train West, pp. 37–53; Skirmish with Indians, p. 54.

Herman Hattaway, “Westport, Missouri engagement at,” in *Historical Times Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Civil War*. New York: Harper & Row, 1986, p. 816.

D. Alexander Brown, “The Battle of Westport,” in *Civil War Times Illustrated*, July, 1966, pp. 4–11, 40–43.

Emerson Hough, *The Passing of the Frontier: A Chronicle of the Old West*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1918. (A rich depiction of activities on the western frontier in the latter part of the 19th century.)

Joseph H. Crute, Jr., *Confederate Staff Officers*. Powhatan, VA: Derwent Books, 1982. (Captain A. C. McCoy is listed as a staff officer of Brigadier General Joseph O. Shelby.)

## APPENDIX A

### Honor Roll of Female Soldiers

(w) = wounded in action; (k) = killed in action

#### Alphabetical by Female Name

ANDERSON, Charlotte (“Charley Anderson”) of Cleveland, Ohio. 60th Ohio Infantry. Discovered to be a female, January 18, 1865, at City Point, Virginia, interviewed by Provost Marshal General Marsena Patrick and returned home four days later.

BARLOW, Arabela Griffith (Mrs. Francis C.). 61st New York Infantry. Campaigned with husband in the field and served in the Sanitary Commission.

BELL, Mary (“Tom Parker”) and BELL, Molly (“Bob Martin”). Confederate female soldiers arrested in the fall of 1864 in General Jubal Early's command in the Shenandoah Valley as suspected “camp followers” after serving for two years. Spent three weeks in Castle Thunder, Richmond, then sent home to Pulaski County, Virginia, still in their uniforms.

BLAYLOCK, Malinda (Mrs. S. M.). Enlisted as “Samuel” in 26th North Carolina Infantry to serve with her husband. Later engaged in guerilla activities.

BROWN, Harriet. Enlisted as “Harry” in Illinois regiment. Not discovered for three months. Arrested at Union depot in soldier's uniform en route from Lexington, Kentucky, to Chicago. Put in hospital to serve as nurse.

BROWNELL, Kady (Mrs. Robert S.). 1st and 5th Rhode Island Infantry regiments. Served with husband who was orderly sergeant. Color bearer at 1st Bull Run. Daughter of regiment in 5th.

BURNS, Mary (“John” Burns). 7th Michigan Cavalry. Enlisted to be with boyfriend; discovered in about two weeks and sent home.

CLALIN, Frances. Said to be in Missouri or Maine Militia Cavalry, but not traceable to either of these units. Photos from Boston Public Library.

CLAPP, Sarah A. 7th Illinois Cavalry. Maiden name Chardrock. Claimed to be assistant surgeon and surgeon in 7th Illinois Cavalry.

CLARKE, Mrs. Amy (w). Served in General Braxton Bragg's command in Mississippi-Tennessee. Enlisted with husband, and continued in service after he was killed at Shiloh. She was later wounded and captured, and her sex discovered; sent into Confederate lines in a dress. (“Anna Clark”—almost certainly the same person—was reported to have served as Confederate private “Richard Anderson” with her husband Walter in the 11th Tennessee Infantry. Husband killed at Shiloh.)