

Patriots in Disguise: Women Warriors of the Civil War, by Richard Hall. New York: Paragon, 1993. Pp. xiv-224. \$21.95.

Historians have long known that most contemporary arguments concerning women's effectiveness in combat roles fall moot, given that women have voluntarily or involuntarily found themselves in the thick of conflict for as long as there has been war. Soldiers' suffering during the United States' own Civil War was often horrific in ways that modern warfare never will be, and the indomitable spirit of American women fighting and dying in both the Blue and the Gray is evident in Richard Hall's *Patriots in Disguise*—a recounting of several episodes of women's participation in the Civil War.

Hall begins his book describing the capacities in which women served openly, primarily for the North since the South preferred its women to aspire to a more ladylike image. The bulk of the book is split into two sections: the first details the adventures and accomplishments of Union women and the second details those of Confederate women. The final two chapters of the book briefly address a variety of points for the curious, including how female soldiers were found out, as well as miscellaneous acts of female heroism and bits of legend.

Belied by the book's title (therefore initially a bit confusing for the reader) the first chapter gives an overview of women openly serving during the war, mostly as nurses, vivandiere, and "daughters of the regiment." Both of the latter were elaborate mascots, of sorts, serving as motivators, flag or water bearers, or nurses. But, besides performing a variety of domestic duties, many women also marched and drilled with the soldiers of their unit. Kady Brownell, for instance, "became one of the quickest and most accurate marksmen in the regiment" and practiced with the long sword, "till she felt herself as familiar with it as the carbine." By virtue of these women's proximity to their units and the war, they often came under fire. Indeed, as a color bearer at Bull Run, Brownell "stood unmoved and dauntless" under intense fire. Belle Reynolds, a vivandiere in camp with her

husband, came under fire in the Battle of Shiloh. She made her way to the river where the wounded were being treated and loaded onto boats for evacuation. For some 36 hours she ministered to hundreds of the wounded and dying and assisted in their evacuation, despite showers of enemy fire. Hall relates that her journal describes, "those bloody boards," on which, "the surgeon would wield over his wretched victim the glittering knife and saw; and soon the severed and ghastly limb, white as snow and spattered with blood, would fall upon the floor—one more added to the terrible pile."

Hall continues describing the exploits of a number of Union women in disguise, notably those of "Albert Cashier," an Irish immigrant whose true name was Jennie Rodgers, and Frances Hook, or "Frank Martin." Through three years of wartime adventure and forty battles, Cashier's sex was not discovered. In fact, it was not until 1911 when the old war veteran "Al" was treated by a physician after being struck by an employer's car that Jennie Rodgers was discovered. Frances Hook, like many other women, served in several regiments. After being found out in one regiment, she moved on to another, once again to assume male disguise in order to continue to serve.

Most of the discussion of Union women's participation in the war might be subtitled "Women of the 2nd Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment." Discussion of a Daughter of the Regiment named Anna Etheridge again contradicts Hall's book title for she did not serve as a *patriot in disguise*, though she was very much the patriot. "Gentle Annie actually functioned more like a modern combat medic," notes Hall. "Armed with a pair of pistols stuck in her belt . . . when Annie saw a man fall wounded, she would dash forward into the hottest part of the battle, lift the wounded soldier onto her horse, and carry him safely to the rear."

After a nursing stint aboard the ship *Knickerbocker*, Etheridge rejoined the 2nd Michigan. Her unit was soon embroiled in the Second Battle of Bull Run near Manassas where, "while she was treating a soldier of the 7th New York Infantry Regiment, a cannonball 'tore him to pieces under her very hands.'" Annie's achievements and service are well documented and the mere

fact that she survived all that she endured seems an element of fiction, though it isn't.

Hall's sequencing of chapters 4-7 is a bit awkward as he jumps straight into the service of another brave soldier, Sara Emma Edmonds. Hall charts her service over the course of two chapters, regresses to her childhood and youth, then skips to her later and married years. This ordering causes some redundancy. Fortunately Edmonds' story intrigues and is worth enduring the weaknesses of Hall's editing. Hall provides the specifics of Edmonds' service under her assumed, gender-disguising name of Franklin Thompson. Thompson's first duty was as a "male" nurse with the 2nd Michigan Brigade Hospital. Following hospital duty at the First Battle of Bull Run, Thompson became a mail carrier, which allowed her to function also as a spy. Owing to her accomplishments, Thompson was soon recommended for secret service and eventually completed spy missions disguised as an eavesdropping black slave by the name of "Ned," an escaped female black slave serving as a cook at the Rebel headquarters, and an Irish pie peddler under the assumed name of "Bridget." Between such spying missions, Thompson continued to serve on and off the battlefield as a nurse and messenger. Hall's chapters here are all largely a reflection upon and summary of Sarah Emma Edmonds' own book *Nurse and Spy*, complemented by Hall's biographical research.

Hall further excerpts *Nurse and Spy* to share the story of a soldier dying at Antietam. Having scrutinized Thompson to satisfaction, the young soldier confesses to being a disguised female and voices this last request: "bury me with your own hands, that none may know after my death that I am other than my appearance indicates." Then, when she died, Thompson "carried her remains to that lonely spot [under the shadow of a mulberry tree] and gave her a soldier's burial, without coffin or shroud, only a blanket for a winding sheet. There she sleeps," Edmonds muses, "in that beautiful forest where the soft southern breezes sigh mournfully through the foliage, and the little birds sing sweetly above her grave." We will likely never know how many such soldiers—women who were forced to disguise themselves for the sake of service—were buried undetected.

While the South's attitudes toward women were strikingly different from Northern attitudes, the service of Southern women is nonetheless also remarkable. Hall points out that Southern women's service was shaped by "preconceptions about the flower of Southern womanhood": Northerners described women's participation as "sisterly," whereas Southerners referred to "motherly" care of soldiers.

Hall's overview of the service of women in the South includes the story of Amy Clark who, disguised, enlisted with her husband. She continued in service, after he was killed. She was herself wounded and captured and returned to the Confederates when her sex was discovered. Hall recounts as well the story of a Georgia female militia called the "Nancy Harts," so named after the Revolutionary War heroine. Organized by women to defend the Georgia town of La Grange, the Nancy Harts engaged in drill and target practice every Saturday. Over the course of the war they contributed "police like security services, inspiration to the townspeople, and hospital work."

In contrast to the Nancy Harts who did not see battle, Hall details the colorful exploits of "Lieutenant Harry T. Buford" or Loreta Janeta Velazquez. He provides a number of excerpts from Velazquez' own book, *The Woman in Battle*. A wealthy Cuban raised in New Orleans, she paid for her own supplies and equipment and sought out opportunities to prove her battlefield skills. Although, even today, some argue that women do not possess a killer instinct, those individuals cannot look to Velazquez for pacifistic inspiration. About her experience in combat during the First Battle of Bull Run, Velazquez penned these notes: "The fiercer the conflict grew the more my courage rose . . . The example of my commanders, the desire to avenge my slaughtered comrades, the salvation of the cause which I had espoused, all inspired me to do my utmost." During the war, Velazquez went on to participate in several battles and to perform quite successfully as a detective and spy. Proof of her persistence in serving is evidenced by the three occasions she was arrested for being a woman disguised as a man. Her missions as a spy began in Washington DC and later transplanted her as far away as federally occupied New Orleans. As a double agent she

was so effective, that the Union detective she worked for nearly employed her to, in effect, capture herself.

The final chapters of Hall's book, which are somewhat haphazardly organized, present various tidbits of information, such as how many women serving as men were found out. These include a tale of two soldiers who, drunk, fell into a river and nearly drowned. Their sex was discovered during resuscitation. Other women were detected by their mannerisms, including the way in which one pulled on her stockings. Many, of course, were detected after being wounded—some mortally. And certainly, birthing exposed some women.

Patriots in Disguise is written more for the curious than the academic: the text is sometimes poorly edited, incomplete, and wanting for support and detail. Nonetheless, Hall has found some informative and often entertaining anecdotes by culling period periodicals, personal journals, and military unit archives. Hall's chapter and research notes, attached as appendices, are certain to be helpful to other researchers of women's participation in the Civil War.

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