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Confederate Women

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In 1861, passionate Confederate defender Loreta Janeta Velazquez disguised herself as a Lieutenant Harry T. Buford and showed up ready for combat at the First Battle of Manassas (known in the North as the First Battle of Bull Run). Months later, in the midst of the Battle of Balls Bluff, she appointed herself commander of a company of soldiers that had lost its leader. Yet it was not until 1862 that her most daring exploits of the war occurred, when she went undercover as a Confederate spy.

Few Americans are aware of the hundreds of women and teenaged girls who served as soldiers during the Civil War, and even fewer realize the extent to which all women contributed to the war effort. This anthology seeks to remedy that lack of knowledge with ten historical and biographical essays that resurrect the war experiences of little-known and previously unheralded Southern women, including Catholic sister nurses, Confederate women POWs, volunteers for soldiers' aid, "Nancy Hart" home guard defenders, and patriotic poets.

The editor, a Civil War writer and researcher whose articles have appeared in *Gettysburg Magazine*, *Georgia Journal*, and *Military Heritage*, has gathered articles from a host of Confederate specialists, many of whom are Civil War reenactors or participants in living history events. In their search for authentic details to perfect their portrayals of people from the Civil War era, many reenactors visit state and local historical archives. This practice has informed each essay, as the authors draw on letters, diaries, period newspapers, and obscure primary source documents housed in archival collections.

The story of Mary Stockton Terry of Virginia, imprisoned in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, on a trumped-up charge of blockade-running, is a case in point. The writer of this article, Jeanne M. Christie (author of three books about women in Vietnam), discovered new information about Terry's incarceration at the Fitchburg Historical Society, the Virginia Historical Society, and the National Archives.

On occasion the authors take a strong pro-Confederate stance, which threatens their historical objectivity and gives the impression that, at least in some corners, the Civil War is still being fought. Among the old sectional debates belabored in this volume is the protest that the Union prisons at Elmira, New York, and Alton, Illinois, were just as bad as the Confederate prison at Andersonville, Georgia.

Although *Confederate Women* will hold especial appeal to Civil War buffs, and, from a regional standpoint, to Southern audiences, any reader with an interest in women's history will find the stories of this group of unsung heroines an eye-opening experience. This book will go far to dispel the notion that war is strictly a man's province.

JUDITH E. HARPER (October 16, 2004)

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