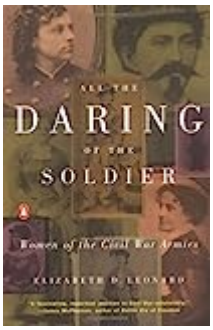
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Elizabeth D. Leonard. *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999. 368 pp. $27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-14-029858-1.

Reviewed by Judith Bellafaire (Women in Military Service For America Memorial)

Published on H-SAWH (March, 2001)

Unmasked: Civil War-Era Women Recognized at Last

Unmasked: Civil War-Era Women Recognized at Last

Civil War historian Elizabeth Leonard's *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies* fills an important gap in our knowledge of the less traditional contributions of women to the Civil War. Leonard has unearthed accounts of women who served their country as spies and daughters of their regiment, as well as those who disguised themselves as men to fight in battle. Although these types of service were uncommon – most women involved in the war served as nurses or Sanitary Commission workers and volunteers – a surprising number of women did make the more "daring" contributions that Leonard brings to light. Perhaps the best thing about this book is that it demonstrates just how many women dared – and how much documented proof exists to verify their exploits.

While a few daring women such as Belle Boyd and Rose Greenhow have become household names that are familiar to every history buff, others, such as Mary Caroline Patterson Allan and the Civil War veteran known only as "Otto Schaffer," are far less well-known. To famous and forgotten alike, Leonard applies the searching gaze of exhaustive documentary scholarship. The result is an excellent and near-definitive compilation of Civil War women's contributions to their causes.

Both professional scholars and history buffs will be gratified and impressed by the number of well-documented occurrences that Leonard presents in this exceptionally comprehensive recounting. She has combed essential government archival sources, including the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, the Veterans Administration Records, and the Records of the Adjutant General's Office, as well as the Records of the Office of the Secretary of War and those of the Confederate Secretary of War. She couples these official sources with the long-forgotten memoirs of nurses who recounted seeing women soldiers in hospitals. Finally, Leonard also perused newspaper sources from the Civil War era. The result is truly impressive. Leonard has discovered surprisingly numerous and fascinating recitations of forgotten heroines of the Civil War. She should be commended for her outstanding research.

Leonard is at her best when she presents her many wonderful examples of what have been up to now the un-

known contributions of northern and southern women during the Civil War. Read the book to learn about Florena Budwin, buried at the national cemetery in Florence, South Carolina, Mrs. Susan Bond, Frankie Abells, Nora Winder, and many, many others.

Leonard not only excels at bringing credit to women heretofore lost to history, but also brings into intelligent perspective women whom everyone has heard of at one time or another but on whom very few have attempted substantive research. This lack of primary documentation makes these folkloric stories vulnerable to scholarly "debunking," which in turn casts questions on many legitimate examples of women's military service. As the historian and curator of the Women's Memorial in Washington, D.C., I was particularly interested in learning how Leonard dealt with the infamous stories about Pauline Cushman, a New Orleans native who may have spied for the Union, and Loreta Velazquez, who claimed to have fought for the Confederacy. Although fairly well-known stories in traditional folklore, they seem to have rested on hearsay, myth, and unsubstantiated "biographies" more than on primary documentation. Since we at the Women's Memorial have not yet been able to find any official documentation of these stories, we have not to date mentioned them in our exhibits. Indeed, since the front cover of *All the Daring of the Soldier* shows a well-known portrait of Pauline Cushman that we once considered for display in our gallery, I was anxious to see what Leonard had to say about her.

Unfortunately, after reading Leonard's depiction of Cushman's exploits, I am still somewhat confused as to the veracity of her service and her actual accomplishments. Leonard has discovered one very interesting government document related to Cushman's service. It is a letter from Colonel William Truesdail, the Union Army's Chief of Army Police for the Army of the Cumberland, to Confederate General John Hunt Morgan. Truesdail informs Morgan that he has not arrested Cushman and "would not without reasonable cause," and that in such case he would "send the papers to you, for your order" (Endnote 62, Chapter One). I could not understand why the Union's Chief of Army Police in Cumberland would be awaiting orders from a Confederate general, or why the Union officer would try to convince the Confederate general that Cushman was a Confederate spy. Why should Morgan believe Truesdail, if Truesdail admitted to having the opportunity to arrest Cushman and yet did not? Certainly, if Truesdail had believed Cushman to be a Confederate spy, he would have arrested her himself. Still, the fact that Cushman was under discussion at all indicates that she was of some concern to the individuals involved. If someone can now undertake to explain the meaning of this letter, Cushman's service may be verified at last.

Leonard identifies Loreta Janeta Velazquez's published biography as a work of fiction. She believes, however, that this fictional biography may actually be "rooted in real experience." She notes that the Records of the Confederate Secretary of War contain a reference to a request for an officer's commission from a soldier named "H.T. Buford," which was Velazquez's reported pseudonym. Leonard also cites several newspaper articles that can be interpreted to support Velazquez's story. Whether these newspaper accounts were the inspiration for Velazquez's biography or whether they actually reflect her true experiences is impossible to determine. Leonard's dispassionate examination of the pros and cons of this case will be helpful as future historians attempt to make a final determination on the veracity of Velazquez's service.

In the book's substantive bibliography, I did notice a single misprint – Major General Jeanne Holm, USAF (Ret.) is identified as "Jeanne Holmes," a rather startling and disconcerting error considering the importance of Holm's *Women in the Military* (1982).[1]

I am glad to have this book on my shelf and am certain that I will refer to it frequently in the course of my work. It is in the class with Holm's work, Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall's *Crossed Currents* (1993), and Mary Sarnecky's *The U.S. Army Nurse Corps* (1999), all highly readable yet accurate and definitive studies of women's contributions in defense of the nation.[2]

Notes:

[1]. Jeanne Holm, *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution* (Novato, Ca.: Presidio Press, 1982).

[2]. Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook- (Washington, D.C.: Brasseys, 1993); Mary T. Sarnecky,* A History of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps_ (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

https://networks.h-net.org/h-sawh

Citation: Judith Bellafaire. Review of Leonard, Elizabeth D., *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies*. H-SAWH, H-Net Reviews. March, 2001.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=5023

Copyright © 2001 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.