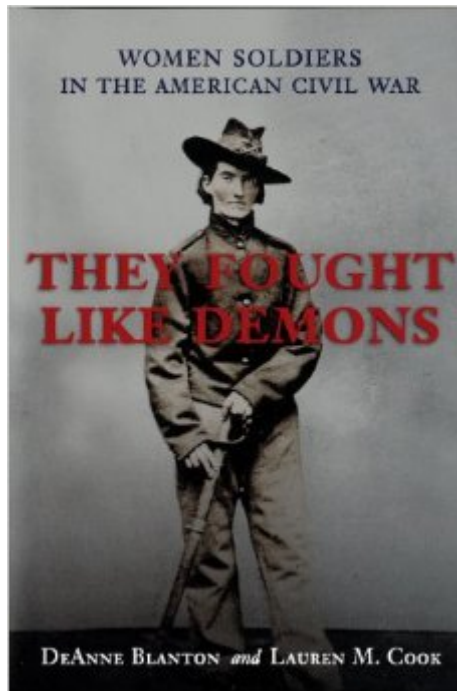


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They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers In The American Civil War (Conflicting Worlds Series)



Synopsis

Popular images of women during the American Civil War include self-sacrificing nurses, romantic spies, and brave ladies maintaining hearth and home in the absence of their men. However, as DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook show in their remarkable new study, that conventional picture does not tell the entire story. Hundreds of women assumed male aliases, disguised themselves in men's uniforms, and charged into battle as Union and Confederate soldiers—facing down not only the guns of the adversary but also the gender prejudices of society. *They Fought Like Demons* is the first book to fully explore and explain these women, their experiences as combatants, and the controversial issues surrounding their military service. Relying on more than a decade of research in primary sources, Blanton and Cook document over 240 women in uniform and find that their reasons for fighting mirrored those of men—patriotism, honor, heritage, and a desire for excitement. Some enlisted to remain with husbands or brothers, while others had dressed as men before the war. Some so enjoyed being freed from traditional women's roles that they continued their masquerade well after 1865. The authors describe how Yankee and Rebel women soldiers eluded detection, some for many years, and even merited promotion. Their comrades often did not discover the deception until the "young boy" in their company was wounded, killed, or gave birth. In addition to examining the details of everyday military life and the harsh challenges of warfare for these women—which included injury, capture, and imprisonment—Blanton and Cook discuss the female warrior as an icon in nineteenth-century popular culture and why twentieth-century historians and society ignored women soldiers' contributions. Shattering the negative assumptions long held about Civil War "stiff soldiers," this sophisticated and dynamic work sheds much-needed light on an unusual and overlooked facet of the Civil War experience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This account of female combatants in the War Between the States is quite fascinating. The notion of women fighting for the Rebs and Yanks was something I had never even thought about, so reading this book served as a significant learning experience for me. Clearly, a great deal of research went into this monograph, and the authors do an excellent job of describing the significant limitations imposed upon the researcher into this topic. Military records are incomplete, especially in the case of the Confederate Army, and some women served without ever being discovered at all. In the case of many, there is no record of their real names. The best substantive evidence comes from those whose actual gender was ascertained while being treated for serious wounds or who really let the cat out of the bag by giving birth. It is quite amazing to me to learn that women in the late stage of pregnancy not only kept their gender a secret but actually fought fiercely in battle at the same time. Women soldiers were also captured and imprisoned along with men, many of them refusing to divulge their secret despite the fact it might well win them release from the terrible conditions of prison camps. Clearly, one must ask why women chose to fight. The authors devote a lot of attention to this important question. Many women took up arms in order to remain close to a loved one, be it a husband, fiancé, father, or brother; many fought for truly patriotic reasons, fuelled by the same motivations as men to defend their land and way of life. Some fought for economic reasons, knowing they could earn much more money as a soldier than they ever could as females at home; some loved the independence and removal of Victorian restrictions that a soldier's life offered them.

Neither the Union nor the Confederate Army in the Civil War authorized women to enlist or welcomed women combatants. Indeed, they were actively discouraged from the traditionally male preserve of combat. Yet a small number of women had the drive to assume male disguise and to enlist and fight. This book helps tell their story. The authors of "They Fought Like Demons" DeAnne Blanton, a military archivist, and Lauren Cook, of Fayetteville State University spent more than a decade in researching primary sources to recreate the role of women as Civil War combatants. Their book tells us something about roughly 250 women soldiers, who fought either for the Union or the Confederacy. The book spends a great deal of space on the motivations that caused women to disguise their sex and enlist. It finds that patriotism and devotion to their respective cause was the

chief motive, as it was with men; but also finds that in many cases women enlisted to be with a male loved one, whether husband, lover, father, or brother. This latter motivation seemed important in the accounts and it seems to me different from the motivation of most male combatants. The book gives good detail on women soldiers and, in the process, of Civil War military life. It describes how many women managed to avoid detection (of course, many were unsuccessful in so doing, particularly if they were wounded), the strength with which they fought, how they were regarded by their peers, both when they were assumed to be men and following the discovery that they were women, how women were treated as prisoners of war, in hospitals, and the extent of female casualties in the war.

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