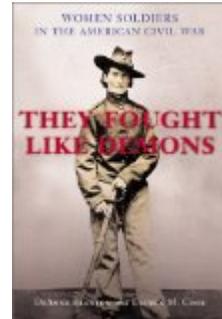


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

DeAnne Blanton, Lauren M. Cook. *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002. xiii + 277 pp. \$29.99 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2806-0.

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The recent military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown the strengths and contributions of women in combat. As we celebrate their bravery and sacrifice in the field, we are reminded that many of these women have left behind more than their civilian responsibilities. They have been separated from their children and significant others. However, we forget that in the past women served their country in a war where they had to resort to subterfuge in order to fulfill their desire to fight for the beliefs and the individuals they held dear. They also fought for a country that extended no rights or privileges to them regardless of their service and sacrifice.

During the American Civil War, many determined women enlisted in the Confederate and Union armies. Strong-minded and strong-willed women chose not to remain at home, weep, and wait for their absent loved ones. They joined the military. As DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook point out, these women enlisted for many reasons. They enlisted for the adventure, a steady paycheck, to be with their loved ones, and for countless other reasons. They cut their hair, put on men's clothing and were able to slip past the enlistment officers. These women then embarked on the adventure of their lives.

Blanton and Cook have meticulously researched women who fought during the war in the uniform of a male soldier. Their research has brought to light the stories of an incredible number of women who were determined not to stay at home and remain passive bystanders during the war. A few of the women are well-known to students of nineteenth-century women's history. Due to notoriety they might have received in the press and through pension records, some have detailed stories of their experiences. A few, like Sara Edmonds and Loreta

Janeta Velaquez, wrote of their exploits and became well-known even while the war was in progress. Others may have told their family members, while many never spoke of their service.

In today's rigorous enlistment process, it is difficult to understand how women could have passed the physical examination and still maintain the secrecy of their gender. The authors have been diligent in describing the military and cultural loopholes that occurred that made female service possible. What may come as a surprise to readers is the response of the many male soldiers who discovered there was a woman in their ranks. These comrades-in-arms often helped hide the identity of the women and supported their desire to serve.

Blanton and Cook have combined the true story of these remarkable women without making excuses for them or attempting to cover their sins and mishaps. When possible, they have followed the women through their lives and given us a conclusion to their stories. The authors have ensured that these remarkable individuals are not left in the purgatory of history. Their stories have a beginning and an end. This information is important. We can now compare their Civil War experiences with those of women who have served and are currently serving in the military. Issues such as reentry into civilian culture and post-traumatic syndrome can be discussed.

It is important for military historians and Civil War buffs to acknowledge the presence and contributions of the female soldier during the Civil War. In the past, it has been possible to visit a Civil War battlefield and never hear the story of the many women who stepped outside the threshold of nineteenth-century decorum and stood shoulder-to-shoulder with their male comrades in

the regiment. As battlefield interpretation changes, this book will be a great resource for interpreters and visitors alike.

Women historians and individuals interested in women's history have had to search many avenues to find the information compiled in this one volume. Researchers everywhere are indebted to Blanton and Cook for their painstaking work. They have done more than

just present their research in a readable format. They have created a wonderful reference work that has already been compared to Bell Wiley's *Billy Yank and Johnny Reb*. In doing so, they have honored the military service of these women warriors and dismissed the myths surrounding the motives that led them to enlist. No higher complement can be paid to the female soldiers of the Civil War.

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