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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.

Richard Hall. *Women on the Civil War Battlefield.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006. x + 397 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1437-0.

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Thorough Research, Missed Opportunities

In 1915, at seventy-one years of age, Civil War veteran Albert Cashier died at the Watertown State Hospital in Illinois. For the majority of those years between the war and 1915, friends (including those who had served in the Civil War) had no reason to doubt that Cashier was a man. To say that those friends and colleagues were surprised to discover that Cashier had been hiding his female identity for almost fifty years would not fully describe the shock they must have felt. Jennie Hodgers had enlisted under the assumed identity of Albert Cashier in the 95th Illinois Infantry in 1862 and served a full three-year enlistment, seeing extensive field service. When Cashier mustered out with the regiment in 1865, no one suspected her true identity. Rather than reassume her traditional gender role at the close of the war, Cashier continued her masquerade almost until her death. As a man, Cashier lived and worked in four Illinois towns before settling in Saunemin, Illinois. There, Cashier worked as a farmhand, handyman, day laborer, janitor, property caretaker, and lamplighter for more than forty years. As she aged and became infirm, Cashier applied for and received a veteran's pension. In 1911, she was accidentally struck by an automobile driven by her employer, an Illinois state senator, which fractured her leg. In the process of setting the leg, the doctor treating Cashier discovered her true identity. Only the senator, the doctor, and a pair of caretakers learned the secret and they vowed to keep her trust. After her injury, Cashier was taken to the Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Home in Quincy, where she remained bedridden for nearly three years. As her mental state deteriorated, doctors at the Soldiers' Home transferred her to a mental institution. At about this time, the story of her masquerade was leaked to the public, and officials at the State Hospital required her to wear skirts for the first time in her adult life. Perhaps as a result of trying to walk in such unfamiliar clothing, Cashier fell at the age of seventy-one and broke her hip–an injury from which she never recovered.

The story of Albert Cashier is one of the best-documented and most remarkable tales of a woman soldier in the American Civil War. Cashier's decision to pass as a man in civilian life for so many years was extraordinary, even among her female-soldier peers. While we do not know her sexual orientation, Cashier's story at least suggests a woman determined to transcend the vast inequities of nineteenth-century gender norms. Although most of Cashier's female comrades in the Civil War armies did not go the extreme of life-long gender passing, they all, at some level, recognized and made conscious steps to subvert the limitations of their gendered worlds. According to DeAnne Blanton and Lauren Cook in *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War* and Richard H. Hall in *Women on the Civil War Battlefront*, Albert Cashier/Jennie Hodgers was one of hundreds, if not thousands, of female soldiers and other battlefront personnel who saw military service in the American Civil War. There has been so little thorough research on women combatants during the war that any book-length treatment of the subject should be a welcome and major addition to the state of the scholarship. Unfortunately, each of these books only partially fulfills this expectation.

Despite their long overdue appearance and generally thorough research, neither Blanton and Cook nor Hall have written especially well-conceived books. Missed opportunities abound in each and neither has been completely successful in shifting perceptions of their subjects away from the familiar tropes of military novelty or gender aberration through which female soldiers have long been viewed by Civil War scholarship. This results from

a deep conceptual flaw in both books that seeks to justify the extensive and multiple contributions of women soldiers vis-a-vis their male comrades, rather than on their own terms.

In the first of their promising but ultimately disappointing leading statements, Blanton and Cook tell us that, "the story of the rank-and-file Civil War soldier has been told in distinctly masculine terms" (p. 1), and they offer their work as a corrective. Unfortunately, in speaking about female soldiers, the authors are unwilling to undertake the assertion that soldiering is not really the axial subject here; but rather the willful and apparently widespread violation of nineteenth-century gender norms in pursuance of radical political activity. Women soldiers were different from male soldiers in mid-nineteenth century America, and there is little to be gained by a direct point-by-point comparison. For Blanton and Cook, however, the "essential conclusion is that, with the exception of their sex, female soldiers did not differ in any fundamental way from male soldiers" (p. 7). An endless string of partially substantiated anecdotes does little to set the female soldiering experience in its historical, social, or cultural context. Repetitive chapters provide a list-style narration of women's experiences at war, but the significance of these experiences is completely overlooked as Blanton and Cook seek to prove only that women soldiers enlisted for similar reasons, and were just as patriotic and duty-bound as their male comrades.

The organization of Blanton and Cook's book presents the greatest problem for general readers and academic audiences alike. The introduction and first four chapters tell essentially the same story of female soldiers' motivations and life in the ranks through only slightly different organizational lenses, and could have been condensed into two tight and useful chapters. Again, the authors seem to be on the right track in several statements, but ultimately fail to follow them through. In speaking about how women discovered in the ranks sought to justify their deception, Blanton and Cook begin to tease out the complicated reception such women received. Blanton and Cook suggest that in order to justify military service, "women soldiers shrewdly downplayed their new independent identities as men and instead stressed their patriotism and wifely devotion as explanations for their flight from confining Victorian womanhood and rejection of home and hearth" (p. 41). Similar statements throughout the book suggest another richer thematic direction the authors might have taken, but after dropping these thought-provoking nuggets, the authors return to a litany of anecdotes to support their main argument for equivalence between female and male soldiers.

For those dogged enough to plow through the early chapters, the rest of the book is organized with a slightly firmer hand. Although they continue to repeat much of the information presented in the first four chapters, chapters 5 and 6 guide the reader through the experiences of women as prisoners of war and casualties with a welcome concision, but again without analysis. Chapter 7, "Women Discovered in the Ranks," topically delivers what it promises, but again repeats much of the information given in earlier chapters. The promise of the last three chapters on "Female Soldiers in the Public Consciousness, "Women Soldiers in the Postwar Years, and "The Changing Historical Perspective," remains largely unfulfilled as the authors again rely on a stream of anecdotes and quotations, but offer little interpretive material. When Blanton and Cook do move away from a list of stories and recitations of military accomplishments, it is primarily to provide amusing or shocking anecdotes about women giving birth in the ranks, being discovered by surgeons or bunk-mates, or having some other extraordinary experience.

In their most probing chapter ("Female Soldiers in the Public Consciousness"), Blanton and Cook make a slight effort to interpret the significance of the "Female Warrior Bold" motif in nineteenth-century American culture. The most compelling assertion here is that, after discovery, some women soldiers combatted negative perceptions and stereotypes by appealing to an idea of female patriotism and self-sacrifice that momentarily overflowed the bounds of home and hearth onto the battlefield. In justifying their violation of acceptable gender behavior, some female soldiers were almost apologetic, citing excessive love of country or love of a man as unusual, but understandable factors that drove them into the field. This made warrior women palatable to a culture that valued such feminine impetuousness only so long as it was directed towards noble ends. While Blanton and Cook's application of the "Female Warrior Bold" motif does something to explain the reception that the "right" kind of female solider received, they use the concept as an explanatory crutch, and seem unwilling to present their warrior women as complicating factors in our understanding of nineteenth-century gender norms. Despite the fact that their subjects constantly flouted gender expectations (in some cases, like that of Jennie Hodgers/Albert Cashier, well beyond their military service), Blanton and Cook are happy to rely on a rather outmoded and rigid interpretation of "separate spheres" rather than engage the excellent literature on nineteenth-century women's extra-electoral political and public action.[1]

To put on men's clothes and to pass successfully with full equality was a radical experience, and to do so within a masculine military culture was an even bolder statement of social, cultural, and, even, political participation. This departure from gender expectations, even within an acceptable cultural motif, deserves greater emphasis, as does the concept of previous or continued gender passing outside of the military context. However, despite their failure to engage their most compelling assertions, Blanton and Cook have written a book that should provide a jumping-off point for future scholars of soldiering women, so long as they are patient enough to discover the provocative needles in this narrative haystack.

Richard Hall's, *Women on the Civil War Battlefront* is more frustrating and less compelling. In a general sense, the book is unfocused; more specifically, despite what appears to be a great deal of research, it fails to advance beyond a summary of previous scholarship, including Blanton and Cook's work, as well as Hall's own earlier book, *Patriots in Disguise: Women Warriors of the Civil War* (1993). Despite taking an early stab at engaging the scholarship on women's extra-political public action, Hall only weakly suggests that women's involvement in the military was an attempt to extend this action onto the battlefield. This promising idea is never substantiated, and Hall even comes to an opposite conclusion by the end of the book, stating (but not arguing) that participation in the war irrevocably damaged the nineteenth-century women's movement.

Between his promising introduction and his lackluster conclusion, Hall's focus wanders, never providing a comprehensive narrative or thematic structure. The first chapter serves as a general introduction to the war and to women's early roles in preparing the armies for service. The argument here is that in a hastily raised volunteer army, women also had to volunteer to clothe, feed, and supply the troops. The second half of the chapter focuses on the role of battlefront nurses, but the chapter as a whole offers little beyond a synthesis of previous secondary work. This ground has been covered by Jane Schultz, Elizabeth Leonard, Nina Silber, and Jeanie Attie, among others, and with greater detail and analysis.[2] Hall's second chapter, "In the Field and On the March," offers perhaps the most concerted effort at interpretation, providing four categories, or types, of noncombatant "soldiering women": or daughters (or mothers) of the regiment, who boosted morale in the training camps; vivandieres or cantinieres, who provided a variety of camp and field support services; battlefield nurses; and field hospital nurses. By expanding the definition of "soldier" beyond simply combat roles, Hall greatly enlarges the scope of women's military contribution to the Civil War armies beyond Blanton and Cook's tight focus on combat soldiers, serving as a welcome addition to the scholarship.

After chapter 2, Hall's book becomes more diffuse and problematic. Chapters on foot soldiers and horse soldiers repeat much of the material from Blanton and Cook in much less detail; moreover, he presents many dubious stories from primary sources without substantiation. Hall also gets some basic facts wrong in these middle chapters. In chapter 5, "The Secret Service: Spies, Scouts, and Saboteurs," Hall relies on outdated scholarship and primary sources which exaggerate the threat posed by the Northern anti-war organization sometimes known as the Knights of the Golden Circle and equates them directly with northern Democrats, few of whom had any involvement with any clandestine groups. In chapter 7, "Casualties of War: Battlefield, Prison, and Hospital," Hall claims that the, "last major war on the American continent had been the War of 1812" (p. 137), apparently not acknowledging the Mexican War of 1846-48 as a "major" war, or (worse) conflating the "American continent" with the United States. The last three chapters are downright puzzling, as Hall wanders through a series of "myths and apocryphal stories," case studies (which Hall labels "historical detective work"), and stories of African American women at war. These chapters have the distinct feel of being tacked on at the end–a final miscellany in a terminally unorganized book. It is not that the stories presented in these chapters are uninteresting or unimportant, but the reader is left wondering what to make of them, as Hall offers no guiding hand.

Aside from organizational and occasional factual issues, Hall's writing itself is sometimes problematic, lapsing into a conversational tone that is too casual and colloquial to be taken seriously. In many cases, a conscientious editor (especially at a university press) should have caught many of these lapses, including the phrases "pretty much," (p. 32) and "hooked up with" (p. 74) in the main body of the text. Hall also casually references Internet sites and more than one "online article" in his main text, presenting them uncritically as sources whose credibility is on par with primary documents and scholarly work. Hall's reliance on the Internet is probably the most problematic aspect of his research. Hall even discusses his use of Google searches as a research technique *within* the main body of his text. This is the sort of sidebar that should be reserved for a footnote, and then with many qualms that Hall does not seem to feel. Equally disconcerting is the fact that, of the thirty-six websites cited in his notes, only about a dozen could be comfortably

described as scholarly, and four were no longer accessible when checked (two of which Hall even acknowledges in his notes as no longer extant). Otherwise, Hall's research appears to be solid, which makes his heavy use of the public-domain Internet all the more puzzling–it will likely be a sticking point for many readers. In a period of increased sensitivity to scholastic integrity, this sort of casual research is inexcusable, and immediately puts Hall on thin ice.

Despite their many flaws, Blanton and Cook, and Richard Hall have most centrally succeeded in making a case for greater numbers of female soldiers in the Civil War than has previously been suggested. Blanton and Cook propose hundreds, and Hall's expanded definition of "soldiering women" suggests thousands. In their heavy reliance on anecdotes to move their narratives forward, both books have also amassed a detailed look at the specific circumstances under which many women experienced military life. If both books rely a bit too heavily on stories that cannot be fully substantiated, they at least paint a vivid picture of the likely range of experiences faced by female soldiers. In particular, Hall's extremely comprehensive Appendix A, "Honor Roll of Civil War Service," will be consulted long after the rest of his book has outlived its usefulness.

As stand-alone treatments of women soldiers in the Civil War armies, neither of the books is successful. Understanding why women went to war and the implications of this action requires a greater historical, social, and cultural context than either book provides. What military or civilian precedents did soldiering women draw upon? Because they represented such a small minority of women, both North and South, we need to have some understanding of the larger group from which women soldiers deviated–not just the one they sought to join. In order to really appreciate the unique contribution of women soldiers to the war (and its remembrance), we must acknowledge that "to dress and go as a man" was not a widespread or typical reaction to the crisis. Blanton and Cook may be correct that "more women took the field during [the Civil War] than in any previous military affair" (p. 7), but in acknowledging this contribution we must take it on its own terms rather than seeking to justify it as an equivalent female counterpart to male service.

The scholarship on women's military involvement in the American Civil War has long wanted a more comprehensive description of the size and scope of their contribution. Now that we have it twice over (with varying degrees of success), this reviewer hopes that future scholarship can move beyond a chronicle-of-achievements approach and begin to say something substantive about the broader social and cultural motivations and implications of female soldiers, as well as the cultural and historical processes involved in remembering their contribution. There are significant stories here beyond the semi-fantastic recitations of women discovered birthing in the ranks or of "half-soldier heroines" grasping the regimental colors amidst a hail of bullets. The best way to honor female and male soldiers as historical subjects is to place them faithfully within the multiple contexts of their lives–neither went to war in a vacuum, and military historians must not treat them as if they did.

Notes

[1]. This work includes Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Sylvia D. Hoffert, *When Hens Crow: The Women's Rights Movement in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Judith Ann Geisberg, *Civil War Sisterhood: The U.S. Sanitary Commission and Women's Politics in Transition* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000); and Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[2]. Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Elizabeth Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the American Civil War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994); Elizabeth Leonard, *All the Daring of the Soldier: Women of the Civil War Armies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Nina Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); and Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

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