



**Secret  
Soldiers**

**ENGLISH**

**VERSION**

**WAKE UP TO HISTORY!**  
Participate • Debate • Decide

**TheatreEspresso** 

## Secret Soldiers



**ALBERT D. J. CASHIER**  
OF  
**COMPANY G, 95TH ILLINOIS REGIMENT**

Photographed November, 1864



What Happened?

During the Civil War, the U.S. military recorded over 250 cases of women who fought in the Union Army disguised as men. Because of the secretive nature of women's participation in battle, the actual number was likely much higher. At least three African American women are known to have fought in "colored" regiments. Several cases of Confederate women who fought in disguise are also documented. Like the men, the women who fought risked their lives. Many women were injured, became gravely ill, and even died as a result of their service. Women had various reasons for wanting to fight in the Civil War. Once enlisted, they needed to hide their true identities from fellow soldiers. If discovered, newspaper reports treated women differently depending on the reason they gave for enlisting.

*Secret Soldiers* transports you to the battle-torn city of New Orleans in 1864. As medical officers, you are called to an emergency meeting. Nurse Bartlett is accused of concealing the identity of a seriously ill female soldier, Sarah Rosetta Wakeman. Nurse Bartlett admits that she entered Sarah's male alias, Private Lyons Wakeman, into the hospital records. She did so to protect Wakeman and her family from ridicule in the press and from neighbors. Nurse Hughes, who discovered the false entry, argues that if Wakeman dies, no one will know about the sacrifices she made. She reminds you that hundreds of women are fighting on the front lines, but fear discovery. Nurse Hughes urges you to expose Wakeman's sex and send a message that women's contributions to the war effort should be honored, not hidden. You must decide: should Wakeman's name be corrected in the hospital record to reflect her true identity as Sarah Rosetta, or should it remain Private Lyons Wakeman to protect her secret? You will witness key moments that led this dilemma, question witnesses, sift through conflicting testimony, debate the issues with your classmates, and vote on a solution.

**Questions to consider**

- What may have motivated women to break the law and enlist in the army?
- How do you think women were able to hide their identities and pass as male soldiers?
- What might happen to a soldier who was discovered to be a woman?
- What benefits could come from exposing the true identities of female soldiers?
- Why would a woman's reason for joining affect the way the public viewed her?
- How does this story relate to the integration of the military during the Civil War, and modern-day questions about women's roles in the military?

**Arguments for concealing Wakeman's identity**

**Arguments for revealing Wakeman's identity**

**July 19-20, 1848:** The first Women's Rights convention in the Western world is held in Seneca Falls, New York. The Declaration of Sentiments written at the convention will be seen as a founding document in the campaign for women's rights.

**February 1861:** Delegates from six seceded states form a government and create the Confederate States of America.

**March 4, 1861:** Abraham Lincoln is inaugurated as the sixteenth President of the United States.

**April 12-13, 1861:** Fort Sumter is attacked by Confederate soldiers.

**May 25, 1861:** Sarah Emma Edmonds (under the name Franklin Thompson) is mustered into service with the 2nd Michigan Infantry.

**July 21, 1861:** Sarah Emma Edmonds and Loreta Janeta Velazquez fight on opposite sides in the First Battle of Manassas/Bull Run, which ends in a victory for the Confederate Army.

**February 16, 1862:** Surrender of Fort Donelson, Tennessee to Union Army.

**April 6-7, 1862:** Union Army wins at the Battle of Shiloh, Tennessee.



**April 25, 1862:** Capture of New Orleans by the Union Army.

**August 30, 1862:** Sarah Rosetta Wakeman enlists with the 153rd New York Infantry under the name Lyons Wakeman.

**January 1, 1863:** Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, which declares that slaves in the seceded states are now free.

**March 13, 1863:** 54th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, the first official unit of African-American Union officers, is organized.

**April 1863:** Sara Emma Edmonds (in disguise as Franklin Thompson), becomes sick with malaria. Fearing that Army medical attention will uncover her secret, she goes home to recover and is later charged with desertion.

**July 1–3, 1863:** Union victory at the Battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

**July 18, 1863:** Confederate victory at the Second Battle of Fort Wagner, Charleston, S.C.

**November 19, 1863:** Lincoln delivers the Gettysburg Address.

**March-April 1864:** Sarah Wakeman fights in the ill-fated Louisiana Red River Campaign.

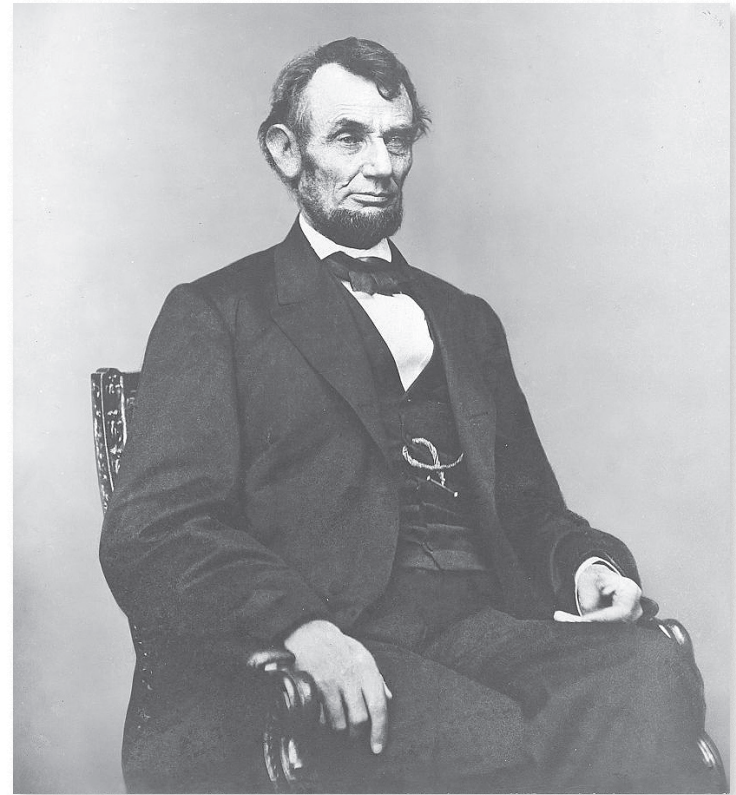
**June 28, 1864:** Lincoln signs a bill repealing the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

**January 31, 1865:** Congress passes the Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery throughout the United States.

**June 30, 1886:** Desertion charges against Sarah Emma Edmonds (alias Franklin Thompson) are dropped, and she receives a \$12/month pension.



Frances Clalin Clayton in uniform as "Jack Williams"



President Abraham Lincoln

1. Prior to the Civil War, what attempts were made to achieve equal rights for women? Did the Civil War help or hinder the Women's Rights Movement? How so?
2. What might the female soldiers have had in common with the soldiers of the 54th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry?
3. How many years after the Civil War ended were desertion charges against Sarah Emma Edmonds dropped? Why might it have taken so long for this to happen?

**Abolitionist:** Someone who is opposed to slavery.

**Casualty:** A soldier who was wounded, killed, or missing in action.

**Cavalry:** A branch of the military mounted on horseback.

**Confederacy:** The States that seceded from the United States of America to form their own nation, the Confederates States of America.

**Courier:** A soldier who served the officers of his regiment by carrying mail or messages.

**Deserter:** Someone who abandons their military duty without permission.

**Emancipation:** Freedom from slavery.

**Furlough:** A leave from duty, granted by a superior officer.

**Infantry:** A branch of the military in which soldiers traveled and fought on foot.

**Muster:** To formally enroll in the army or to call roll.

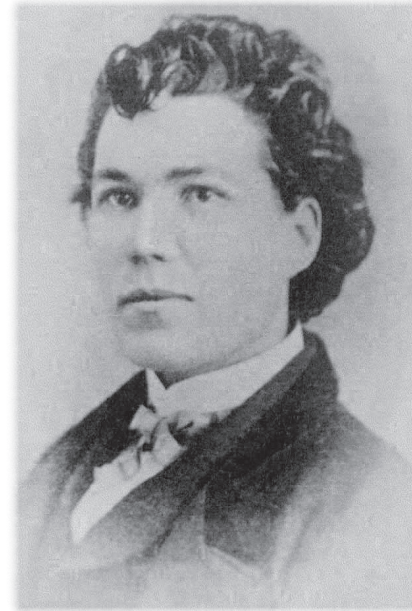
**Pension:** Money paid regularly to a retired soldier

**Private:** The lowest rank in the army.

**Secession:** Withdrawal from the union of the United States of America.



**SARAH ROSETTA WAKEMAN (AKA PVT. LYONS WAKEMAN)** was born on January 16, 1843. She enlisted with the 153rd New York Infantry under the name of Lyons Wakeman on August 30, 1862. Pvt. Lyons worked protecting the perimeter of the nation's capital, and as a guard in Carroll Prison in Washington D.C. Eventually, Wakeman and the rest of the 153rd were assigned to active field duty. In 1864, after fighting in the brutal Louisiana Red River Campaign, Wakeman became gravely ill and was taken to a medical hospital in New Orleans.



Sarah Emma Edmonds

**SARAH EMMA EDMONDS (AKA FRANKLIN THOMPSON)** was born in December of 1841 and enlisted with 2nd Michigan Infantry under the name of Franklin Flint Thompson on May 25, 1861. Frank Thompson participated in First and Second Battles of Bull Run, Antietam, the Peninsula Campaigns, and Vicksburg. She contracted malaria. Rather than be discovered in a hospital, she left her regiment to recover. During this time Frank Thompson was listed as a deserter. The charges were eventually dropped and she received a government pension in 1886. She later fought for an increased pension due to chronic pain and illness she suffered as a result of her service. She died before a final decision was made on September 5, 1898.

**LORETA JANETA VELAZQUEZ (AKA HENRY T. BUFORD)** was born on June 26, 1842 in Cuba. Disguised as a man named Henry T. Buford, she recruited 236 men to fight for the Confederacy, fought in the First Battle of Bull Run, the Siege of Fort Donelson and the Battle of Shiloh. Her sex was discovered on at least one occasion and she was arrested on two. Velazquez eventually gave up her disguise and returned to her life as a woman.

As members of the emergency committee of medical officers, you will have the opportunity to ask questions of the following key players. Write down some questions that you may ask.

My Questions

**Sarah Wakeman:** Sarah Wakeman has been fighting under the alias of Private Lyon Wakeman. In the hospital and seriously ill, she is conflicted as to whether or not her true identity should be revealed.

**Nurse Hughes:** She would like to change Miss Wakeman’s record to reflect her real identity, so that she may be properly recognized for her service.

**Nurse Bartlett:** She is accused of keeping Miss Wakeman’s identity a secret. She believes that female soldiers should remain in disguise for their own protection.



**TheatreEspresso** performs at the John Adams Courthouse in Boston (in collaboration with the Supreme Judicial Court), at the Lawrence Heritage State Park Visitors Center, and in schools and museums throughout New England. The company thanks Mass Humanities and the following foundations for their generous support.



Cabot Family Charitable Trust, Catherine McCarthy Memorial Trust Fund, Friends of Lawrence Heritage State Park, Foley Hoag Foundation, Immigrant City Archives, National Endowment for the Arts, C. Pringle Charitable Foundation, Nathaniel and Elizabeth P. Stevens Foundation, and the White Fund

\*This program is supported in part by a grant from the Boston Cultural Council, a local agency which is funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, administered by the Mayor's Office of Arts, Tourism, and Special Events.

Since 1992, **TheatreEspresso** has toured its educational dramas to schools, museums, libraries, and courthouses throughout New England. **TheatreEspresso's** work challenges students to make critical judgments, explore social relationships, reflect on the role of law and human rights in our society, and question accepted truths about the history of America. These plays confront students with complex situations, based on actual historical events, that provoke a variety of opinions and solutions. By asking students to consider themselves participants in the drama, the company engages students in examining contradictory events and testimony in order to reach their decisions.

**TheatreEspresso** does not advocate any one viewpoint, but hopes to compel students to relate historical events to contemporary issues. **TheatreEspresso** is in residence at Wheelock Family Theatre.



**For further information, visit our website at**  
**[www.TheatreEspresso.org](http://www.TheatreEspresso.org)**