

Woman in the Civil War

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There have been many great women throughout history, but not many are known from the Civil War. Some women during that time chose to serve the army, whether for following their sweethearts, or feeling as it would be best their country. Others created a spark of controversy that ignited into a wildfire. Some changed the living conditions for many people for the greater good. From war hero Emma Edmonds, to fiery “Dragon Dix”, these are some great woman of the Civil War.

Emma Edmonds, born as Sarah Emma Evelyn Edmondson, was born in December of 1841 in New Brunswick, Canada. Edmonds, at age sixteen, ran away from her abusive father who resented her as he wanted a son. After running away, she lived in Moncton for about a year and moved to the United States, as she feared her dad would find her, and worked under the name of Franklin Thompson, selling bibles in Hartford, Connecticut. When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Edmonds enlisted in the war under her already established alias of Franklin Thompson, and wasn't discovered to be a woman as there were no physical exams. “Although Edmonds was not an American citizen and had no obligation to participate in the war, she argued that she could not allow so many people to suffer while she had a comparatively easy life.” (A Female Soldier in the Civil War: Emma E. Edmonds). When she enlisted, she was put in the Flint Greys of Second Michigan regiment on May 17, 1861. In the army, she worked many jobs to serve her regiment. She was a nurse for several months, and around March 1862, she was assigned as a mail carrier and worked as a spy, using the identity

of an Irish peddler. Although there is no documented proof of Edmonds being a spy, she had details of being a spy in her memoir. During the summer of 1862, she made one hundred mile journeys to deliver mail and was also a stretcher bearer (Stretcher bearers carried the sick or wounded on stretchers). During the Battle of Second Manassas, she served as a courier (a courier is a person who transports cargo or documents).

Edmonds rode a mule after her horse was killed. She was thrown in a ditch and broke her leg, and sustained internal injuries - these injuries would follow Edmonds for the rest of her life. In the spring of 1863, Edmonds had gotten malaria and, not wanting to be discovered as woman, she deserted the army. Edmond later worked as a nurse at United States Christian Commission after recovering from malaria from June 1863 to the end of the Civil War. Edmonds published her memoir *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army* in 1864 and used her profit from the book to donate to soldier aid groups. After the Civil War had ended, Edmonds attended a war reunion, with her comrades who would later assist her in clearing desertion in her military records, and received a government pension in 1884. Emma Edmonds then died on September 5, 1898. Despite Edmonds not documented directly fighting on the battlefield, she greatly benefited for her cause and couldn't have served the Union better in her own way.

Harriet Beecher Stowe was born on June 14, 1811 in Litchfield, Connecticut. Although not a war hero like Edmonds, Stowe was an abolitionist who wrote one of the most influential novels of the time period; *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe was educated at a school her sister Catharine enrolled her in, who also happened to run the school, and also shaped Stowe's social views. Stowe and her family moved to Cincinnati, Ohio in

1832, where she met Calvin Ellis Stowe at the association Semi-Colon Club. They became friends and got married on January 6, 1836. Like Harriet, Calvin had a strong abolitionist view. When Congress passed the Fugitive Slave law in 1850, Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, showing the horrors of slavery. Stowe was inspired by the death of her eighteen month old son, Samuel Charles Stowe. This experience "later credited that crushing pain as one of the inspirations for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, because it helped her understand the pain enslaved mothers felt when their children were taken from them to be sold." (Harriet Beecher Stowe's Life). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* caused an uproar in both the North and the South, even gaining the attention of Union president Abraham Lincoln after the start of the start of the Civil War. Although much isn't known about the exchange between Stowe and Lincoln, it took place in Washington D.C.. Though this has been questioned for its authenticity, it has been said Lincoln greeted with "so you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war." As if that wasn't enough, there were plays based on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe continued to write many papers like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but they never rose in popularity like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Harriet Beecher Stowe died on July 1, 1896 in Hartford Connecticut. With Stowe's writing, she was given a place to record her independent thought and voice her opinion where a woman's thoughts weren't denied.

Dorothea Lynde Dix was born April 4, 1802 in Hampden, Maine. Despite Dix later caring for the treatment of the mentally ill, and prisoners in prison, unlike Harriet Beecher Stowe, she was not against slavery. Dix was the main caretaker of her three younger siblings as her mother suffered from depression and her father was a preacher

who wasn't home very often. As a result; Dix had a lonely and difficult childhood. Her father, Joseph Dix taught Dorothea to read and write, and because of this, Dix had a eagerness for learning. Dix's education would continue at twelve years old, when she moved to Boston, Massachusetts with her wealthy grandmother who encouraged her to learn. Dix later opened schools in Boston and Worcester. In the 1820's, Dix's deteriorating health made it difficult to manage the schools and she closed them down in 1836. Later that year, Dix went to England and witnessed the horrible treatment of people in jail, who were with the mentally ill. In the jails she saw the prisons unregulated and unhygienic, along with the prisoners being starved, flogged, chained, physically and sexually abused. It has been suggested by biographer David Gollaher that Dix suffered from depression at several point in her life, and "perhaps her own struggles helped make her a more compassionate person advocate for the people who had been diagnosed mentally unstable or insane."(Dorothea Dix (1802-1887)). Moreover, after her findings in England, she continued her investigation in Massachusetts and submitted her findings to the Massachusetts legislature. Thus, treatment of people in mental hospitals and prisons were standardized and more mental hospitals were later built. When the Civil War started, Dix became the superintendent of woman nurses, and earned the nickname "Dragon Dix" as she was feared and disliked by her nurse volunteers and clashed with army officials. Dix was later sent back home in 1863. After the Civil War, Dix was a social reformer for the mentally ill and died July 17, 1887 in Trenton, New Jersey. Even though Dix had a rough start in life, she turned her suffering

into something wonderful, something that would give her a legacy and would follow to the modern world.

In conclusion, there have been many great women who served the U.S. in their own way. Edmonds was an American version of Mulan, the Chinese warrior, Stowe's writing gave her a voice where no other place would, and Dix smashed the patriarchy, as she saw things that women were supposed to sheltered from at the time, and gave better living conditions to convicts and mentally ill people. These were great women of the Civil War.