



# Confederate Heroines: 120 Southern Women Convicted by Union Military Justice

*Thomas P. Lowry*

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From 1861 through 1865, southern women fought a war within a war. While most of their efforts involved activities such as rolling bandages and organizing charity fairs, many women in the Confederacy, particularly in border states, challenged Federal authority in more direct ways: smuggling maps, medicine, and munitions; aiding deserters; spying; feeding Confederate bushwhackers; cutting Federal telegraph wires. Thomas P. Lowry's investigation into some 75,000 Federal courts-martial—uncovered in National Archives files and mostly unexamined since the Civil War—brings to light women caught up in the inexorable Unionist judicial machinery. Their stories, published here for the first time, often in first-person testimony, compose a remarkable picture of courage and resourcefulness in the face of social, military, and legal constraints. Lowry focuses on 120 women who were convicted of war-related offenses against the U.S. army or government. The court records tell of unusual pluck and bravado among women ranging from plantation elites and city dwellers to impoverished individuals from the margins of southern society. Their crimes included spying and smuggling, desecrating the U.S. flag, participating in invalid marriages to Union soldiers, and managing brothels in which Federal soldiers contracted venereal diseases. Rarest, and perhaps most intriguing of all, are cases in which women took part in armed robberies dressed as men or they concealed documents inside their bodies. Many of the convicts spent time in the little-known Fitchburg Female Prison in Massachusetts. At long last giving these women their place in the pages of history, Lowry shows them striking—and receiving—a blow for the Confederate cause, against the conventions of passive femininity. *Confederate Heroines* brings a new and surprising perspective on the conduct of the Civil War. **AUTHOR BIO:** Thomas P. Lowry is the author of seven previous books, including *Don't Shoot That Boy: Lincoln and Military Justice* and *Venereal Disease and the Lewis and Clark Expedition*. He is a retired psychiatrist and lives in Woodbridge, Virginia.

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