

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host Allison Tyra and today I'm joined by DeAnne Blanton, co-author of *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil War*. Deanne is also a retired reference archivist from the National Archives and Records Administration, where she worked for over 30 years and specialized in the Civil War and 19th century women's history. Today she's here to tell us about women who served, why they did it and how their efforts were erased from historical narratives about the war.

DB: So the subject of my book and something that my co-author and I spent a little more than a decade researching, as anyone who's researched women's history, is you have to ferret them out and find them hiding. And so what our book is about is the hundreds, if not thousands - and I can explain later why we don't know how many there actually were - but during the American Civil War there were women who actually served as soldiers and a handful of officers on both the Union and the Confederate side. And what they did is because they wanted to go into the army, they just pretended they were men. They passed themselves off as men because the army is not going to take a girl in 1861. But they'll take an underage teenage boy and that is what a lot of these women ended up presenting as, because you take a 20-something-year-old woman and she would cut off her hair. She would bind her chest to look a little flatter in that area and then she put on her brother's or her father's clothes and go off and enlist in the army. And while the both of the armies were supposed to do physical exams, the fact is they didn't really, very rarely, because there was so much pressure to fill the ranks that most of the examining "surgeons," they just sort of looked the soldier up and down. They wanted to see teeth because soldiers generally opened their cartridge caps with their teeth, so they wanted to see teeth, so you had to smile. They made you walk a little bit, they want to see if you were lame. They were obviously checking to see if you could hear, or hear enough. And then a firm handshake. And that's how the bulk of soldiers got into the army. So it was very easy for women to get into the army.

And you have to remember that in the 19th century no one carried an ID. One of the the cool asides about military history is every company would have what was called the descriptive book and the book listed every soldier and what they looked like, so height, weight, eye color, skin color, any markings on the body like a tattoo or a mole or something that would be descriptive, because people weren't walking around with photo IDs or any ID at all. People didn't have birth certificates and in fact if you wanted to disappear, a good time to live would be the 19th century, because as an adult you could just go somewhere where no one knew you and just recreate yourself. So women were just making up names. Some of the names are quite fun, I'm like "I wonder where she got that from?" Other women like Rosetta Wakeman, she enlisted as Lyons Wakeman, so she kept her surname. Most women didn't, they just went way far afield. Frances Hook was Frank Martin, so Frances, Frank. And so once women were in the ranks, that's where it could get a little tricky and we do have evidence of women who were discovered within 30 days of their enlistment. And while no medical officer would tell us why, I think we can all make an assumption as to why less than 30 days might have been a tricky time period. But there were lots of women who, they got into the army and they were there pretty much till they were found out. From the women that we could firmly document, the average enlistment was about two years. And mostly women learned to be soldiers once they were in the army. But this is no different from the men, because during the Civil War, the vast amount of soldiers were just boys who were called to service, so they didn't know how to soldier either. So women who who got into the ranks pretending to be men, they were out there drilling and learning how to soldier alongside the young men beside them. So that wasn't really an impediment. Another thing we have to understand though about these women who went to war, who decided they were going to be soldiers, even though their country didn't want their service, is that upper-class women didn't do this. Mostly middle-class women didn't do this. The vast majority of women who went to war as soldiers were working-class women. They were immigrant women and they were farm girls. So Rosetta Wakeman is a great example. She grew up on a farm. She was the oldest child and she spent most of her life as her dad's chief farmhand. So here's Rosetta, who was already well accustomed to hard work and privation and was strong, so she made a great soldier. And in fact to our knowledge, no one knew that Lyons Wakeman was female, ever. And that is truly astonishing because she spent two weeks in an army hospital with dysentery and nowhere in

the service record of Lyons Wakeman does it say that anybody figured out that Lyons was a woman. Now it's possible that a nurse somewhere in that hospital did know and just didn't say anything because I just can't imagine dying of a wasting disease where you're constantly, I would say on the toilet but they didn't have those. It's very hard for me to think that someone who's having to basically live on a pot till they die, which is terrible, nobody knew. I suspect at that point they did, but the soldier's dying so what's the point? But Lyons Wakeman gets buried under the name Lyons Wakeman in a national cemetery. So in this case her service only ended because she died. And she died like most Civil War soldiers did, of disease. More soldiers died of disease than of wounds, but that was another way that women soldiers got found out and sent home if they survived, like Frances Hook, who I mentioned earlier. She got shot in the leg so the surgeon who went to see if he could retrieve the bullet or cut off her leg was like, "oh you're a girl." Frances Hook spent time in a military hospital until she she recovered and then they were like, "okay, missy, go home," which is usually what happened if a woman was found out to be a woman. By and large, military authorities were like, "we need to send you home, young lady, and don't do it again." But from our research, we don't have a single instance of a woman getting found out because she was a bad soldier and I think that's really significant.

So that's in a nutshell what we wrote about. We wrote about these women who fought for a country that wouldn't allow them to vote, and in some cases giving their lives for a cause that they they believed in and then going home when it was over and not really being able to reap the benefits that are often given to veterans. A few women did, but most of the women, they just disappear back into society and as far as we can tell, didn't claim their veteran benefits. Although like I said, a couple did, very high-profile cases. And to me it's just this astonishing example of women's patriotism, of 19th century women basically going off and showing that everything the Victorian said women should be, these women weren't. Although of course we know that all of those Victorian lady stereotypes really only applied to the middle and upper classes anyway. They never applied to working-class women and they certainly didn't apply to African American women and we have a few of those. We have three formerly enslaved women who entered the United States Colored Troops, as the segregated Black troops were called. I suspect that there were more Black women in the army, just we weren't able to find them

AT: So let's get more into how their actions as combatants flew in the face of every Victorian notion of womanhood because I do want to also discuss women who were known to be women. So Harriet Tubman led troops in the Civil War, which weirdly goes unremarked a lot of times when her story is told. They just focus on the Underground Railroad side of things and leave out that also she fought in the Civil War so there were women contributing presenting as women. But the women who were disguising themselves as men, how did this just completely violate all the social norms?

DB: I will say about Tubman, I think the reason that for so long her military service has been ignored is because her military service breaks gender conventions. Everybody knows that there were men *and* women who worked the Underground Railroad. But leading troops, only men get to do that. And so of course that part of Tubman's extraordinary life would be dismissed or downplayed. Because I'm sure that there are a lot of historians, not as many today as there once were, I have read some Civil War historians from the early to mid-20th century and I literally wanted to throw the book across the room and I may have at one time because their attitudes are just so... I imagine that there's back in the day, I'm sure there's some historians who hate writing about Tubman, period. Because she's a woman, she's a Black woman, and she totally kicks ass. And that's very threatening or it can be. She should be on the \$20 bill, there should be statues of her everywhere. As far as the women who went and served in the Civil War, their first Victorian transgression is that they passed themselves off as men that's a no no no no no no. Victorian society was so incredibly gender divided. It's, "there's girls and there's boys and women dress like this and men dress like this and women's hair is like this and men's hair is like this. And women are in charge of the domestic sphere and men are in charge of the world. And women are gentle and loving, they're the angels of the household and men are the ones that

have to go out and do all that dirty stuff out in the world. But then they come home to their pure wife.” That’s the Victorian ideal. Now like I said that ideal really only applies to white people with money. So first of all these women soldiers, they dare to put on pants and that was actually illegal. There were ordinances all over the United States, literally. Mostly city ordinances that if you were caught cross-dressing, you went to jail ,you paid a fine, you ended up in front of a judge. So they’ve broken that taboo.

They’ve broken the violence taboo. Women are never ever to be violent. Women are the angels of the home and here’s women that are killing men. That’s not gonna fly in Victorian society. You read some of these Victorian romances and a woman is assaulted and did she take revenge on her assailant? No, she kills herself. These are women who aren’t killing themselves, they’re killing other men. And so that’s not good in Victorian society. The fact that they were brave, the fact that they were strong enough to do a man’s job. There is nothing more masculine in Victorian society than being a soldier, and here’s women doing the ultimate masculine job and doing it well. So it’s no surprise that these women are not going to be lauded in the history books because they broke all the rules of their society. But what’s interesting and what we didn’t expect to find out is that the men they served with did not badmouth them. Later historians would badmouth them. The press would say nasty things about them. But the men they served with didn’t. And then it’s that revelation of the whole band of brothers, is these men who went through combat, they might have known that one or two of their comrades were women. They might not have. But when they did find out that these comrades were women, they had already been through hell with these women. They already knew that these fellow soldiers had their back and could be counted on in a fight. And so for the soldiers themselves, gender propriety didn’t matter because it was war and. And if someone can shoot straight and save you and drag you off a battlefield, well that’s your buddy even if it’s a woman. So that was the attitude of the common men in the ranks. And the men in the ranks in the post-war period, you can still read about women soldiers usually because they show up in regimental histories. Those were written by the soldiers themselves. It was the military brass that always wanted to kick them out of the army and then once the war was no longer written about by the people who lived through it and war started to be written about by historians, that’s when women soldiers disappear from the narrative by and large.

So there’s that group of women pretending to be men so they can be soldiers but then there were, as you mentioned, some women who went to war without disguising their their gender identity their sex, like Harriet Tubman, like Dr. Mary Edwards Walker. Dr. Walker wore pants. She insisted on that because, how are you going to be a medical officer in a big old skirt? It’s so ridiculous. You read about Mary Walker and she was really amazing. She went and served as a medical officer without pay because they wouldn’t pay her because she was a woman. And then after the war devoted herself to to improving medicine for women and working for suffrage, but most of her press was all about people losing their minds because she wore pants. And the Victorians, and then of course Dr. Walker lived into the Edwardian period, they just had conniptions about women and pants

AT: She’s actually featured in my book *Uncredited* because after the war, so keeping in mind all the things that she did. She was held in a Confederate military prison for four months. But after the war she was awarded the Medal of Honor, which is the the highest military decoration for members of the armed forces who have distinguished themselves by acts of valor. And to this day, she is the only woman who has been awarded that medal in over a 160 years. And so in 1916, shortly before her death, they took her medal from her because a report by the Medal of Honor Review Board, which Congress had established the year before, had identified 911 recipients that it felt should not have been given the medal. And to be fair, there were very few rules at first. Medals were given out for a variety of reasons including almost 900 of those were just for non-combat enlistment extensions. And so that seems perfectly reasonable to say, “okay you don’t get the highest military honor.” But Dr. Walker objectively saved lives, she would cross battle lines into enemy territory to get to injured people. Like I mentioned, I’m sure the Confederate military prison was not a fun four months for anyone. But the reason that they gave was even dumber than just saying “we don’t want a woman to have this.” She was

awarded her medal directly by President Andrew Johnson, who was a horrible person but that's not the point. So because that's how she got it, rather than being formally recommended, that was their excuse. But even then, the board declined to revoke the medal of at least two other male surgeons who were likewise ineligible. So it took until 1977 that lobbying efforts by her family were successful in reversing the decision and officially had it reinstated. But for her part she just refused to return the medal, and she wore it every day until she died in 1919. So I love that about her.

DB: She was awesome. At the National Archives where I worked for a very long time and was the 19th century army specialist, we have those Medal of Honor files. So we have the file for all the Medal of Honor winners and you can go in them and read the citation and what they got it for. And of course we have the records of the committee that reviewed them because it was always intended to be for valor above and beyond. But during the Civil War and into the Indian Wars, it could be used politically. So reviewing the medals, I don't have a problem with intellectually, because literally an entire company got the Medal of Honor just if they would reenlist, which is not what it was intended for. And some other famous people like Buffalo Bill Cody had his Medal of Honor rescinded and in his case it was because he was a civilian. He was never enlisted in the military, he just worked for the military. And so they're like, "wait, wait he's a civilian! We can't give this to a civilian!" I was always astonished that they didn't use the civilian excuse for Dr. Walker because they would not enlist her as a medical officer. They ended up making her a contract surgeon, which meant you're working for the army but you're a civilian. So it's a no-brainer probably that a 1916 Commission was gonna want to take a medal away from a woman but it surprised me that they used the dumb excuse instead of just saying, "well she's a civilian, we can't give it to civilians." But you know, bureaucrats.

AT: Bess their hearts (DB, laughing: Yeah.) That's the thing that I find over and over again, is people who are looking for excuses to justify bigotry and discrimination in whatever form it takes, the veneer is so thin. It's so transparent what they're doing. And sometimes it just feels like they're not even trying. (DB: Right, exactly.) Put some effort into it guys. (DB: Right!) One of the things that often comes up in conversations is that, I think a lot of people view history as static. These things already happened and therefore nothing changes. And that's not true, because we change. We hopefully evolve and our understanding of things changes, whether because we have hopefully become more enlightened or just because new materials come up. Every so often there's a treasure trove that is discovered that changes how we understand things. And with that in mind I'd like to discuss Albert Cashier. So can you tell us this person's story and why they're in your book and why they they maybe wouldn't be if you wrote it today?

DB: I think that any history book we read isn't just a story about what happened in X year or X time period. It also reflects the time period in which the historian is writing. And in my case Lauren Cook and I were researching women soldiers in the 1990s and our book came out in 2002. And in our book we talked about Albert D. J. Cashier. And Albert Cashier is a figure that I just adore, I just think Albert's awesome. So Albert's story begins in Clogherhead, Ireland where a baby girl is born on Christmas Day 1843 and christened Jennie Rodgers. And we know that to be true. And at some point, and I'm guessing given that she was born in 1843 and the famine was going to kick off very shortly, we don't know when Jennie Rodgers immigrated to the United States, so anytime between probably the the beginnings of the Irish famine until 1860. But what we do know is that Jennie Rodgers left Ireland and Albert Cashier landed in the United States. And what we know is that in 1860, an 18-year-old Irish immigrant named Albert Cashier had made his way to Illinois because we don't know when Jennie/Albert immigrated, we don't know what port. I always assume it was New York but it didn't have to be, it could have been Baltimore, it could have been Philadelphia. There's just not immigration port records for that time period. Anyway, but we know in 1860 Albert Cashier had made it to Illinois and was working as a farmhand. The Civil War breaks out, Albert Cashier enlists in the 95th Illinois infantry and goes on to serve his full three-year enlistment, during which time he is never wounded. The only problems he had,

apparently he is just a tough little soldier. And I say little because Albert Cashier was 5'4, which is how tall I am. I went to a reenactment one time and someone handed me their rifle with the fixed bayonet and it was taller than me and then they tried to put me in wool but wool was itchy and I'm like, "no no no." I'm allergic to wool. I could have never been a Civil War soldier! The gun was too big for me and wool makes the itch. But anyway apparently didn't make Albert itch. So Albert's gun is bigger than Albert. But other than the usual intestinal disturbances that I think all 19th century soldiers had, Albert was a great soldier and his comrades talked about how Albert was tough Albert, could outmarch any of us, Albert was funny as hell. Albert couldn't grow a beard and apparently they always made fun of Albert because he just couldn't grow a beard. Albert was also illiterate, could not read could not write. We had letters written to Albert from the woman of the family that he worked for before he went to war. She apparently felt very motherly towards Albert and she wrote to him. And one gets the impression that Albert was writing back, and so I think what that means is that another soldier was writing for him, he's dictating his response.

So the war ends. Albert comes back home. He goes back to his life as a farmhand and he settles in the little town of Saunemin, Illinois and he votes in every election. He never marries. He lives in just a cabin in town, a modest cabin but he makes a living through manual labor I think over the years, farmhand, handyman, town lamplighter. I think he was a popular babysitter for a lot of the ladies in town, that Albert would look after your kids. And he just lived a quiet but apparently happy life in Saunemin. He marched in the Memorial Day Parade, he was a member of the Grand Army the Republic, which was actually a very powerful organization of Union veterans. And I suspect that Albert would have died and gone to his grave without anyone ever knowing that Albert Cashier was biologically female, except Albert got run over by a car in 1911. And the doctor who came to set his leg was like "um... huh." So but here's the coolest part of Albert's story, I think. Not for Albert, but so Albert was actually was run over by a car. The car was being driven by a state senator who lived in town and Albert did work for the state senator. So the state senator and the doctor have a little conversation and they basically said, "nobody needs to know about this. Let Albert keep living Albert's life." How enlightened is that for 1911? No one needed to know that Albert was biologically female. The state senator felt terrible that he'd hit Albert with the car. So the state senator is basically paying the doctor bills and what happens is that Albert can't really work anymore, the leg never quite heals the way it should. And so the doctor and the senator like "okay, we don't want anyone to know Albert's biologically female, because why does anyone need to know? This is just Albert's life." That's what I think is very enlightening for 1911 that they're like, "you know what? Let him live." Which I think is all that trans people today want, is for people to just let them live.

But because Albert really was gonna have a hard time earning a living anymore, the senator's like, "well Albert needs to go to the soldiers home." now at this point in the US, there were soldiers homes all over the country because millions of men fought in the Civil War and now they're elderly and they need caregiving. So the soldiers homes, I think they were the real precursors to assisted living. And so when soldiers got old and really couldn't earn a living anymore, they went to live at the soldiers home. So Albert, veteran of the Union Army absolutely gets to live in the soldiers home. However the state senator's like, "what happens if the doctors and the nurses find out about Albert's biological sex?" But he's a state senator and he's got connections. So really if anyone was gonna hit Albert with a car it's probably good that it was him. So the superintendent of the home knows what's up and basically tells the doctors and nurses, "you know what? None of our business, he's a soldier. Let him live." So Albert moves in soldiers home. Albert is happy in the soldiers home from everything we can tell. He's with his buds and he's in a place where he doesn't have to work anymore. He doesn't have to worry about where his next meal is coming from. And he's just this old man in his assisted living with his friends. So, great.

Well I suppose at this point there were too many people that knew that Albert, in their mind, was a woman living as a man. I think we would definitely say today that there's a strong likelihood that Albert was just a trans man and not a woman passing as a man, which is what I used to think. And now I think he's probably trans. And I will say in 2002, I don't think I even knew what trans was and that's on me. But I'm more enlightened now and I understand a lot more. Was it Maya Angelou who said "when you know better, you do better"? So I

recently wrote an article about Cashier for another publication and I basically say “I think I was wrong. I think Albert Cashier was trans.” Now, will we ever know for sure? Well no, because Albert himself never remarked on any of this. But what happened, which is so sad, is that somebody finally talked. And I'm guessing it was a nurse or a physician at the soldiers home told somebody who told somebody and it made the newspapers. And then it was in newspapers from coast-to-coast. Once the Chicago Tribune picked it up, “woman lived as man!” and “woman passed as man!” and all this. And so now the whole world is reading about Albert Cashier, who's a woman who's pretended to be a man for her whole life. And then newspaper reporters show up at the soldiers home. And Albert suddenly finds out that the whole world knows his business and that must have been awful. The Pension Bureau in Washington launches an investigation to see if they were defrauded because as a veteran of the Civil War Albert's been drawing a pension since 1890. Now the only good thing about the Pension Bureau being that way is that we Albert Cashier's pension file, which is at the National Archives is *huge*. It's huge. That's how we know Albert's birthday, that's how we know a lot of these things and that's how we know what a good soldier Albert was, because his pension file is full of depositions from men who served with him, men who attest to their friend Albert, their comrade Albert. And that the old man in the soldiers home is the same guy they went to war with. This is no fraud, Albert is Albert.

But yeah because of this story because Albert spent his entire adult life living as a man is why I tend to think now that he was probably trans. Whereas before, when I didn't really have a differing frame of reference, when I was looking for women soldiers, everything looks like a nail if all you have is a hammer. I'm looking for women, looking for women and of course “women” is a bigger construct than just our DNA or our outward biology, something I didn't really know in 1990. I just did it. But I viewed Albert through the lens of so many other working-class under-educated women, which was “well of course you want to live your life as a man because it's better.” You have more rights - Albert voted in elections, Albert didn't need a cosigner on his bank account, Albert could own his own property without a man because he was a man. And so I viewed Albert through that lens, that here's a working-class immigrant who's gonna make the best life for herself by living as a man. But but when you look at the other women who went to war or went to the factory as men in the 19th century, almost all of them at some point go back to a female identity, either through choice or coercion. And Albert doesn't. So that's how my thinking has changed on on Albert Cashier specifically. I'm not sure that there are other women in my book that I've changed my my thinking on too much. So I think that's also significant, that Albert's the one that keeps coming around. I like to tell Albert story but I feel that in the book I may not have done him justice. But there's now a musical about Albert Cashier. It debuted in Chicago and it's Albert Cashier the Musical and I thought, “I've got to go see that!” I hope that they do him justice. One of the downsides to being history nerds like us is that we're not always fun to watch movies with. My son is like, “no I'm not gonna watch that movie with you, Mom, because you'll just complain through the whole thing.” And I'm like, “Am I that bad?” And he's like, “yeah, you are.” (laughter)

AT: And anyone who wants to know more about the intricacies of trans history I have a whole other episode on that if you'd like to listen to that after this one. But sort of the opposite of what we've been talking about is that there are many wars where women presenting as women were able to be incredibly effective spies. So a lot of folks will have heard about this in World War II occupied France in particular is a popular one that folks like to tell those stories. But we also saw this in the US Civil War. Some of the greatest spies on both sides were women. So you've got Elizabeth Van Lew and Mary Bowser, who was African-American Harriet Tubman as we mentioned also did spy work. And then on the Confederate side you've got Belle Boyd and Rose O'Neal Greenhow. So it's sort of funny that their femininity, the fact that they were women and being perceived as women made them more effective spies compared to their counterparts who were disguising that femininity in order to blend in in a completely different capacity.

DB: Right. In the case of Elizabeth Van Lew, who's amazing, she is so awesome. I grew up only about an hour from Richmond, she's a hero of mine.

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She was protected by her social status and her money. She came from old Richmond money and society and that did protect her. But she knew that. She is a remarkable example of someone using their privilege for good. She recognized her privilege and knew that she could get away with stuff that other people probably couldn't. But she not only was a spy, she had a whole ring. She had a whole spy ring around Richmond and she made use of African-American individuals who had worked for her family. She was already a little looked askance at in Richmond society because she had freed the enslaved people that worked for her family. She'd already done that. So Van Lew had freed the enslaved people that she inherited but they still worked for her. And so she can send them out all over town on "errands" and she in fact places Mary Bowser as a servant in the Confederate White House. So Mary Bowser, who can read and write, is cleaning Jefferson Davis's house and reading everything and also just listening because they talked freely in front of enslaved people and servants. Because these racist dumbasses would talk freely in front of Mary Bowser and others, because they believed that Black people were inferior and they believed that Black people weren't intelligent. But how they could never conceive that Black people might want to fight for their own freedom, they were just delusional as well.

AT: I feel like we're coming back to that whole "bigots are dumb!" (laughter) (DB: Well yeah, they can be.) Not all of them but a lot of them really seem to be dumb.

DB: They do seem to be dumb and this is a total aside but I think it's by design. I grew up in a working-class family in Virginia and what I figured out was a lot of these things, for the oligarchs to succeed they need people that are dumb. And they need people that are bigoted because you don't want all the poor people to gang up on you because there's more of them. And racism is a great way to divide people and that's partly why it has its resurgences. We're seeing an appalling resurgence right now. But it's very useful to the people in charge to perpetuate bigotry and racism because they don't want a French Revolution.

But anyway I totally digress. Rose O'Neal Greenhow, who was a Confederate, she was another society woman. She was wealthy, she used her privilege. And in her case, because she had lived in Washington DC and she was rich and she was pretty and she had the best parties, all sorts of government and military people that she'd known for years were coming to her parties and just running their mouth. And much like the racist dumbasses in Richmond in DC, it's the sexist dumbasses who, it never occurred to them that these women who are from the South might be paying attention. And Greenhow would fawn over them and go, "tell me about the troops!" And they would! (AT: Bless their hearts.) Bless their hearts. She's sending drawings to Stonewall Jackson and the South may not have won the first Battle of Manassas without Rose Greenhow because she she sent Stonewall, she told him how many troops and all of this and Greenhow was something and again with a lot of the women spies, they tended to be middle to upper class. So they were they were ladies and they basically used the patriarchy against itself by just playing the dumb woman.

But they were literate, they had resources. The women who went to war who actually went out onto the field, these were women without resources. And in some cases, the Union Army paid \$13 a month, which apparently was very good wages. So there were women who who went into the army just because it was the best paying job that they could see. There were some women who went to war with their husbands, which I think is fun. And then of course there's the women who served as nurses, and again they didn't have to hide their gender. They tended to be older a lot of them were women whose own children were grown. And so they went into the hospitals to nurse and I thought, "well of course they did," because in the 19th century, women were always the nurses. Anyone in the family gets sick, that's who's taking care of them. Women generation to generation would pass down their healing remedies, everything they knew. Most people lived in rural communities and they weren't gonna make it to a doctor. So mom couldn't patch them up, they were probably gonna die. So these women, I think we forget too in the 19th century I think your average person had more contact with accidents and illness than we do today. I think every mother was gonna know how to fix a broken arm a broken limb because they were farmers and you'd be lucky if a doctor could get to you. And since doctors weren't trained that great, you might have been better off with the medical knowledge that had gone

down from generation to generation in a lot of ways.

AT: And just to be clear as well you know when we're talking about nurses like you were saying, it is very much the knowledge that has been passed down, which I am not trying to dismiss in any way. But it's also interesting to note that 1860, so right around the same time, is when Florence Nightingale opened her nursing school and started to sort of formalize it as a "real" profession.

DB: So yes, and because of the Civil War, because of the Crimean War that was when women as nurses could move out of the home. Women had always been nurses in their homes. They were the family caregiver in every facet. So it was a natural step for them to move out and start nursing these wounded soldiers because they already knew how to bandage a wound. But because of the Civil War and because of Florence Nightingale and the Crimean War, nursing then finally became a profession that women could enter. And so after the Civil War in the US, nursing schools opened and women flocked to them. They're like "well I'm already doing this for free, I may as well go get a certificate." And by the time the Spanish-American War rolls around there's tons of nurses and the War Department was like "yeah, let's bring these women in." Of course, during the Spanish-American War, all the women were contractors. The Army Nurse Corps wasn't established until the 20th century, when women could enlist as nurses in the US Army.

AT: I find it intriguing that when we talk about World War I and World War II, one of the things that comes up is how these conflicts and women's role in them contributed to women's rights. But I don't know that I've ever heard that lens applied to the US Civil War, in the sense of this was actually a major step in creating another profession in addition to, basically teaching, I think was more or less the only one, another profession that women were socially allowed to pursue. And I think you could also see that as a precursor to women becoming doctors as well.

DB: Yeah there were very few medical schools before the Civil War that would let women in. But there were a few: Dr. Walker, Elizabeth Blackwell, (AT: Emily Blackwell.) Yes. I think medical schools opened up a little bit more after the Civil War but it still wasn't great. But I've known some historians that have said that the Civil War if anything put the brakes on the march for Women's Rights, because there'd been the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 and women had been, I always hate that word women "agitated" for the vote. It's like, no women advocated for equal rights. But women were very, very involved and in leadership roles in the abolition movement and prior to the Civil War, women who had the means to to join societies, meaning upper middle class and wealthy white women mostly, they were working for abolition but they were also working for suffrage. And then the Civil War comes and then in the wake of the Civil War, there's so much devastation. The South is just a mess. It's flattened. It's under military control. And then this is something I didn't think about for the longest time but it seems obvious to me now that in the post-war years, we have a whole nation with PTSD. We have these soldiers who came home, the ones who made it home, even if they made it home in one piece and they didn't all, they're a mess. And a lot of them are addicted to morphine because morphine was the great breakthrough in medicine. They could saw off a leg without the person feeling it. But they had no idea about dosage, so soldiers came home addicted. Soldiers came home with PTSD. Then you've got people on the home front who have lost their brothers, their husbands, widows raising children. I think we had a whole country of people with with unaddressed PTSD. It wasn't just the soldiers. We expect them to not be okay, but then there's the civilians. In the South, there's people who watched their farm burn down and then all over the country, there's widows having to raise children with very little resources. So I suspect that everybody knew they weren't okay, but they didn't necessarily have a frame with which to publicly talk about it. I'm not sure that means they might not have privately talked about it. We know the Victorians understood melancholy, which is what we today would call depression, they called it melancholy. They talked a little bit about that. But I've thought about, I was like "okay so there's a war and then there's Reconstruction and

then there's the rise of Jim Crow." But after such a traumatic event it's not surprising to me that it took women a good 10 years to get back into the groove of trying to get the vote, because it was such a devastating time that everybody had to regroup. But by the 1870s women are trying again to get the right to vote and in the awesome territory of Wyoming and later in the state of Wyoming, they gave women the right to vote in 1868. But the rest of the country didn't follow Wyoming's sterling example until 1920. It's just absurd. I do think it took women's contributions in World War I to finally push the country to give women the right to vote. It's really shocking how deeply that bias against women was ingrained in American culture.

AT: Well, speaking of biases deeply ingrained against women in American culture, let's talk about how this is relevant in the US today where we're in Trump 2.0 and he appointed a secretary of defense who publicly said he didn't think women belong in combat. And basically immediately Linda L Fagan, the highest ranking woman in US military history was fired. I think it's particularly important to recognize not just that many women and trans people and non-binary folks have been serving in the US military in recent years but as you said, the men who served alongside these soldiers, they weren't the ones saying that they shouldn't be recognized. They weren't the ones bad-mouthing and dismissing and downplaying their contributions. (DB: Right.) So what do you hope that people will take away from stories like those in your book?

DB: When I first started writing the book, it was because I had stumbled across a file at the National Archives about a couple of women soldiers in the Civil War and my mind was blown. And I went, "what?!? What is this?" And I just stopped what I was doing and I just stood there in stacks and I read it. And I had never heard of that and I thought, "I am a woman's historian and I've just been presented with something that I know nothing about." So being the geek that I am, I immediately went to the library to see what I could find, because now I wanted to read everything I could about these women, and how did I not know about them? And I get to the library and I can't find anything. To make a long story short, I had to write the book that I wanted to read because someone else hadn't done it yet. And as I went through the research, a lot of it was just, "oh wow oh wow oh wow! Look at what these women did! Look at what these women did!" So part of my book, part of what the point of my book is to add to the bookshelf of representation because representation matters and telling the history of *everybody* matters. I'm an old lady now, but I was in elementary and high school in the 1970s and we were taught dead white male history. I think when we did the Civil War in whatever year, I'm not even sure they told us about Clara Barton. The history I grew up with was just, "this is what men did, this is what government did." I went to Catholic school which was supposed to be better than public school and the only world history we learned was Western European. It was a Catholic school, so there was going to be way too much of Rome in it, I get that. But most of the fun history I've learned, I've learned as an adult because someone finally started writing books that weren't about white Western European history. But I remember as a little kid when the teacher said Columbus discovered America, and I was like "no he didn't. There was people already here!" and the teacher just looked at me and almost said "well that doesn't count." That's the kind of history I was taught and then fortunately as a grown-up I found better things to read. But my point is I wanted to add to women's history and while this is a very small slice, what was compelling to me is, look at these women doing everything society told them not to do and doing it for their own reasons. No one was making them do this. They did it because they decided to do it. They decided to flaunt society and that really appealed to me. So if people read the book and they find it interesting and it makes them look at the Civil War differently, if it makes them look at women's history differently, that makes me happy. That's why I wrote the book and that's why I was happy to write a new article about Albert Cashier.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast, and remember well-behaved women rarely make history.