

Van Lew supervised an extensive spy network that may have included Mary Elizabeth Bowser, believed to be Van Lew's former black servant who gained a maid position in the Confederate White House and sent information back to Van Lew. Some doubt exists about her identity and relationship to Van Lew, but the extent and success of the Union underground led by Van Lew, including the 1864 escape of 103 prisoners from Libby Prison, makes the story plausible.

By 1864, Van Lew began to work as chief correspondent of the Unionist spy network, sending information to Generals George H. Sharpe (chief of the Secret Service), Benjamin F. Butler (Army of the James), George G. Meade (Army of the Potomac), and Ulysses S. Grant (overall Union commander). The information coming from Unionists in Richmond led to a failed raid by General Judson Kilpatrick and Colonel Ulrich Dahlgren to free more prisoners and to the successful final Union assault by Grant's forces on Richmond. Gratitude for her services during the war eventually led to a government payment of \$5,000 in 1867 and her appointment as postmaster of Richmond by President Ulysses Grant in 1869, a post she held for eight years. Community resentment toward Van Lew continued for the remainder of her life due to her Republican politics, her advocacy for African American equality, and her perpetual association with Southern disloyalty and the conquering Union.

Elizabeth Van Lew died September 25, 1900, in Richmond, Virginia.

Kristen L. Streater

See also Bowser, Mary Elizabeth (ca. 1839–n.d.); Female Spies; Nurses; Southern Women.

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Velazquez, Loreta Janeta [Harry T. Buford] (1842–1897)

Cuban-born Loreta Janeta Velazquez recounted the cross-dressed experiences of a Confederate woman soldier in her 1876 memoirs, *The Woman in Battle*. Velazquez followed her husband to the Confederate army and, after his death, joined the ranks as Harry T. Buford. She served as both a soldier and a spy.

Born into wealth in Havana in 1842, the seven-year-old Velazquez was sent to live with a relative in New Orleans where she would complete her education. At fourteen, she refused an arranged marriage and instead eloped with an American officer named William. By 1860, Velazquez had two toddlers and a third child on the way. As she settled into her traditional role as wife and mother, a series of events drastically altered the direction of Velazquez's life. That spring, her third baby died shortly after birth. That fall, her two remaining children died of fever. When war broke out a few months later, William resigned his Federal Army post to join the Confederacy, and Loreta decided to follow him.

William headed to Pensacola to train Confederate recruits, but, while drilling his men, his carbine exploded in his hands, killing him almost instantly. Desperate with grief and loss and emotionally fragile, Velazquez headed to the front lines disguised as a male officer, Harry T. Buford. She fought as a self-appointed officer and served the Confederacy as a secret agent. Velazquez's wartime activities took her all over the South, from Arkansas, where she recruited soldiers, to the battlefields of First Bull Run, Ball's Bluff, Fort Donelson, and Shiloh. Although in her memoirs she bragged about her bravery in the heat of battle, she also revealed her understanding of the sober realities of battlefield violence. Wounded at Shiloh, Velazquez spent time recovering in an Atlanta hospital. She was arrested twice during the war: once in Richmond for impersonating a male officer and once in New Orleans on suspicion of being a spy. However, she emerged from both incidents with relatively minor consequences.

Velazquez told her version of her story in her memoir, written ten years after the close of the war. At the time, she was living in Texas, separated from



Loreta Janeta Velazquez served as a Confederate spy and soldier under the name of Harry T. Buford (1842–n.d.). (Velazquez, Loreta Janeta, *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez*, 1876)

her last husband and raising a son on her own. A literate and well educated Latina, fluent in Spanish, French, and English, Velazquez revealed herself as a brash, quick-witted, and unconventional person, who clearly chafed against the race and gender restrictions of her time. Published in 1876, her book titillated and shocked audiences with its descriptions of her love affairs with women and men. Unlike many other postwar Confederate memoirs that glorified the Confederacy, *A Woman in Battle* criticized it. Prominent Confederate General Jubal Early began a public campaign to discredit Velazquez as a liar and prostitute. Based almost exclusively on his testimony, her work and wartime experiences were considered a hoax for over a century.

Contemporary researchers have discovered newspaper articles about Velazquez's soldiering and arrests during the war, documents in the National Archives that refer to her, and two of her handwritten letters, which now reside in the Richmond Museum of the Confederacy. The existence of the

men who staked their reputations to vouch for her in public has been substantiated, and many of her detailed descriptions of camp life and events have been corroborated. Postwar evidence of Velazquez shows her leading a failed expedition of exiled Confederates to Venezuela and, in 1878, meeting with Jubal Early to argue she was indeed a soldier in disguise. A speech signed in her name was presented to Congress. In addition, articles in various newspapers dating as late as 1884 detail Madame L. J. Velasquez's continuing political involvement in New York and the capital, this time using antislavery arguments to push for American involvement in liberating Cuba from Spain. However, she subsequently disappeared from the historical record, leaving many questions for future generations. Historians continue to debate the details of her life.

María Agui Carter

See also Bull Run/Manassas, First Battle of (July 21, 1861); Confederate Homefront; Domesticity; Female Combatants; Female Spies; Hispanic Women; Immigrant Women; Separate Spheres; Shiloh, Battle of (April 6–7, 1862); Southern Women; Vicksburg, Siege of (May 18–July 4, 1863); Wartime Literature.

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Victor, Metta Victoria Fuller (1831–1885)

One of the most prolific and popular of the dime novelists, Metta Victoria Fuller Victor was well known as a writer and magazine editor before the Civil War. During the war, she and husband Orville