



Nurse and Spy in the Union Army: Comprising the Adventures and Experiences of a Woman in Hospitals, Camps, and Battle-Fields

S. Emma E. Edmonds

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In her 1865 autobiography, Canadian-born Sarah Emma Evelyn Edmonds recounts her awe-inspiring life on the front lines of the American Civil War. As a young woman, Emma Edmonds ran away from home, escaping an abusive father and an enforced prearranged marriage. To avoid being discovered, she dressed in men's clothes and cut her hair and, eventually, assumed the full-time identity of a man, taking the name Franklin "Frank" Thompson. Frank worked for a time as a Bible salesman, but in 1865 joined the Second Michigan Volunteers as a nurse. Frank, already a master of disguise, eventually volunteered to be a spy and penetrated the enemy lines multiple times in various forms: as a slave, with silver nitrate painted skin to appear Black and, curiously, as a woman. Anticipating being discovered after convalescing from falling off a horse, Frank eventually deserted the army, and Sarah Emma Edmonds returned, enlisting in the army as a nurse. In 1867, Emma Edmonds married Mr. L. H. Seeye, a fellow Canadian, and eventually the two settled in La Porte, Texas, where they raised three children. In 1884, she attended a regimental reunion, as herself, without her disguise as Frank. Urged by her fellow soldiers, she filed for a full army pension. In 1885, she was awarded a pension from the army for both of her identities.

Sarah Emma Evelyn Edmonds was the only recognized woman in the Grand Army of the Republic. This is her incredible story.

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