

Deborah Sampson, The Disguised “Man”

There's not many women remembered in the American Revolution. Deborah Sampson was one of these hidden gems who's bravest feat was disguising herself as a man in a time women weren't allowed to fight.

Deborah Sampson was born in 1760 in Massachusetts into a poor family. She became an indentured servant due to her poverty and when freed, self educated herself to be a teacher.

In 1782, at age 21, Deborah Sampson joined the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment as Robert Shurtleff, after wanting to help fight in the war. Her task was scouting neutral territory to observe British buildup of men and materials, which General George Washington wanted to attack. Along with two other sergeants and 30 infantrymen, they had a confrontation with some people loyal to the British Crown.

Her leadership led to the capture of 15 followers of the British Crown. Sampson also helped dig trenches and storm a British fort while dealing with canon and musket fire. She acquired a slash to the head with a sword and was shot in the thigh, which led to her being treated for the head injury, but ultimately having to take out the bullet herself to hide her identity. Despite many close calls she was able to help fight without detection. Deborah Sampson was only able to serve a year and a half before becoming ill and her gender was discovered.

Sampson ended up getting sick during an epidemic and ended up losing consciousness. Her physician, Dr. Barnabas Binney kept her true identity from almost everyone except General Paterson. She was honorably discharged soon after for her service on Oct 23rd, 1783. She was given a full military pension by Massachusetts, being the only woman to do so during the war.

Sampson was the first woman to go on a national lecture tour regarding her experiences. Herman Mann wrote her life story in the book “The Female Review: or, Memoirs of an American Young Lady.” Her courage led to the unintentionally name of the legislation the “Deborah Sampson Act” which addressed the gender gap at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). One of her most known quotes, “I am indeed willing to acknowledge what I have done, an error and presumption. I will call it an error and presumption because I swerved from the accustomed flowery paths of female delicacy. As I was born to be unfortunate, my sun soon clouded.” This quote highlights how she knew what she did was not legal, but it was important to her.

Deborah Sampson was a powerful force to be reckoned with. Her risk to go against what was allowed of her gender, allowed her to serve her country while showing the importance of freedom for all, just like the United States intended.

(459 words)

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