

Spies for the Union

By Mary Lynn Bushong



- ¹ Do you like James Bond movies or stories? It's fun to think about those dashing, romantic adventures he's had over the years. Spies can help a country avoid a war or win it more quickly. During the Civil War, both sides used spies to try to gain an advantage. It was rarely romantic though, and if caught, a spy usually died.
- ² When the Civil War started, there was no spy network in place as there is now. On the Union side, there wasn't even the start of any organization until the summer of 1861. It was then that Allan Pinkerton, the detective, began trying to establish a network of spies using many of his own investigators. He was a better investigator than spy, but he did manage to do a lot of traveling behind enemy lines. He worked under General McClellan, and when the general moved to Washington, Pinkerton did too. It was there that he was able to break up the Confederate spy ring of Rose O'Neal Greenhow.
- ³ Just as a spy can help the war effort, he can also hinder it. In 1862, Pinkerton passed along some bad information. It involved troop movements and numbers, and it hindered the Union response on the battlefield.
- ⁴ Pinkerton was a civilian spy, as were many others, but there were also spies who served in the military. One spy master was Brigadier General Lafayette Baker. He was known to be a hard man and needed only to be suspicious of someone before bringing them in for interrogation and imprisonment. Even his co-workers were afraid of him.
- ⁵ Another well known spy in the military was Maj. Henry Young. He had 58 men under him who served as scouts and spies during the final months of the war, especially at Appomattox. It was their job to climb the telegraph poles and misdirect the trains that might have supplied Gen. Lee's army.
- ⁶ It was not just men who served in the war. It is known that at least 400 women managed to disguise themselves and serve in the army. One of those women was Sarah Emma Edmonds. She enlisted as Frank Thompson, and eventually earned a name for herself as a spy. Employed as an army (male) nurse, she first crossed the lines disguised as a black slave. After gathering information in Richmond for a few days, she returned north with what she learned. The next time, she went as an Irish peddler. Still another time she was disguised as a black washerwoman. She was washing an officer's uniform when a packet of papers fell from the pocket. It was too good to leave, so she took the papers back to General McClellan. Eventually, Emma left the army and even received a pension for all she did to help her government.
- ⁷ Another well known woman who worked for the Union side was Elizabeth Van Lew. She has been raised in Richmond, Virginia but was against slavery and supported the Union. Known as "Crazy Bett," because she visited the military prisons, she ran the largest,

best-organized spy ring in any of the cities. Her spies included former slaves to her family who chose to stay with her. She was even able to put one of her servants in the Confederate White House as a spy.

⁸ However, Elizabeth's love for her country had a high price. She spent almost her money on her war efforts. When her former friends learned of her activities, they turned their backs on her. When she died 35 years later, no one in Richmond attended her funeral. This was because of the part she played in the war.

⁹ Some spies like Spencer Kellogg Brown were not clever enough to avoid detection. He was arrested as a spy and hanged in September 1863.

¹⁰ George Curtis was a more clever spy. He was chosen to get information from Richmond. He pretended to be a merchant selling contraband goods. After crossing enemy lines, he was interviewed by Gen. A. P. Hill. He was given a pass to go to Richmond. He was also asked to carry some army dispatches as well, which he, of course, agreed to do. Eventually, he was given a pass to move freely in and out of Richmond, often carrying dispatches. Before reaching their destination, however, another agent would copy the dispatches before Curtis delivered them. He was never suspected or arrested, and spent the entire war doing his work.

¹¹ While some spies were looking for personal glory, most were doing what they saw as their patriotic duty. Their love for their country was so great, they were willing to do anything, even die, to preserve it.

Name _____

Date _____
(Key 1 - Answer ID # 10960319)

<p>1. This soldier was a spy and master of disguise.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Spencer Brown</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B George Curtis</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Pvt. Frank Thompson</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Major Henry Young</p>	<p>2. Why would it be difficult for a detective to become a spy? Please list differences in the two professions.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>3. This spy was shunned socially for taking part in the war.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A Elizabeth Van Lew</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B George Curtis</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C Emma Edmonds</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D Rose O'Neal Greenhow</p>	<p>4. Some men were able to spy through the entire war without being caught.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A False</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B True</p>
<p>5. What would happen if a spy passed along bad information?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>6. Why was Elizabeth Van Lew known as "Crazy Bett?"</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A She pretended to be an Irish peddler.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B She ran a spy ring.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> C She freed her slaves.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> D She visited men in prison.</p>
<p>7. Why was spying during the Civil War so necessary?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>8. Women did not serve in the army.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A False</p> <p><input type="radio"/> B True</p>