

Albert D.J. Cashier was a member of Company G. of the 95th Illinois regiment from 1862-1865. He lived the typical life of a soldier of his day: long marches, sometimes poor food, less than ideal living conditions.

The twist on this story is that Albert Cashier was actually Jennie Hodgers, an Irish immigrant. Jennie Hodgers was born on Christmas Day, 1843 or 1844, in Clogherhead, Ireland in County Louth. She was the child of Sallie and Patrick Hodgers. Jennie and her family lived through the potato blight, which was between 1845 and 1852.

Jennie eventually came to America as a stowaway so she could to start a new life. By 1862, when the Civil War was escalating, Jennie was living in Belvidere, Illinois.

In July 1862, President Lincoln sent out a request for 300,000 men to join and serve in the Union Army. The call appealed to Jennie and she took matters into her own hands. Jennie cut her hair like a man's, dressed like a man, and stepped into the Belvidere recruiting office. She was mustered into service on September 4, 1862.

Jennie was about 19 years old, so she was of legal age to enlist. The only problem was that she was a woman, and women did not fight, at least under their own names. Being able to read and write were not mandatory for volunteers, which was lucky for Jennie since she could do neither. She simply signed an X on her enlistment papers and became Albert D.J. Cashier, a farmer prior to the war. Jennie (or Albert) became a Private First Class, Company G., of the 95th Illinois Infantry Volunteers.

Jennie was only five feet tall and about 110 pounds when she enlisted. She kept up on long marches and never shirked her duties. Her comrades helped her with duties that involved heavy lifting and she returned the favor by doing laundry, sewing and other such chores.

Company G. spent one month at Camp Fuller in Rockford, Illinois before being mustered into Federal service on September 4, 1862, receiving orders to leave for Columbus, Ohio, where they served under General Ulysses S. Grant. Over the next three years, Jennie and Company G. would travel somewhere around 10,000 miles in Dixie.

Some of the biggest battles and sieges they took part in were the campaign and siege of Vicksburg, the Meridan and Red River campaigns, Brice's Cross Roads, operations in Mississippi, the Battle of Nashville, and the Mobile campaign.

While skirmishing at Vicksburg, Jennie was captured by some Confederates. Jennie was apparently feisty, because she seized the gun from the guard, knocked him down and fled back to the Union camp, arriving safely.

Jennie was considered a good shot and was never suspected of being a petticoat soldier. When the war was over, Jennie was mustered out of service on August 16, 1865 with an honorable discharge. Jennie and her comrades were welcomed home as heroes and honored at a public reception.

Jennie settled in Saunemin, Illinois in 1869. There Jennie held many jobs for over 40 years, including janitor of the church, assisting families on their farms, town lamplighter, and handyman.

Jennie had survived the war without her true identity being discovered. She continued life as a man after the war, participating in veterans activities wearing the uniform of which she was so proud, voting when women couldn't vote, and yelling at boys who chanted, "Drummer boy, drummer boy," to which she would respond that she was a soldier. She even collected Albert's veteran's pension.

Finally though, her secret was discovered. In November of 1911, Jennie was working in the driveway at the home of Illinois State Senator I.M. Lish, picking up sticks. The Senator was backing his car down the drive, and unable to see tiny Jennie bent over her work, backed into Jennie, knocking her to the ground. An examination by Senator Lish's friend, Dr. Ross, revealed a broken leg and her secret. Jennie pleaded that the men keep her secret and they did, deciding there wasn't a good reason to make it public knowledge.

They decided that the aging little soldier needed care. They applied for Jennie's admission to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home in Quincy, Illinois. Dr. Ross certified that Jennie was experiencing "the disabilities and weaknesses of age, with weakened mental facilities." Dr. D.M. Landon, surgeon at the Home, verified the certification and Jennie was admitted to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home at the age of 68, under the name of Albert D.J. Cashier.

Jennie's mind weakened with what we call Alzheimer's, and a sanity hearing was called. This, coupled with an application for a pension increase, caught the attention of the news people but Jennie was so mentally weakened that she was never aware that her true sex had become known.

Jennie was deemed mentally unstable and authorities committed her to the Watertown State Hospital for the Insane in East Moline, Illinois in 1913. She was housed in the women's ward and, for the first time in more than 50 years, was forced to wear dresses.

Jennie passed away on October 10, 1915 at the Watertown State Hospital at the age of 71. She was dressed in the uniform that she had maintained all those years, her casket draped with the flag, and given a military funeral at the Angevine Funeral Home in East Moline on October 12. Her body was transported to Saunemin, where she was buried with full military honors in Sunny Slope Cemetery. Her grave was marked with a simple gravestone inscribed, "Albert D.J. Cashier, Co. G., 95 Ill. Inf."

Jennie has not been forgotten. Every Memorial Day flowers are placed on her grave, and on Memorial Day in 1977, a new, larger monument was erected beside the first to honor this brave little soldier.

I chose to write about Jennie because I enjoy Civil War history and I found her story fascinating.

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