



Female Warriors (Volume 2 of 2) : Memorials of Female Valour and Heroism, from the Mythological Ages to the Present Era

Ellen C. Clayton

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During the eighteenth century there were to be found in nearly every European army, one or more female soldiers. They sometimes held commissions as officers, but more frequently served as non-commissioned officers or privates. Those women and girls who enlisted in the British Army were generally wives or sweethearts of soldiers whose regiments had been ordered abroad, and the women, preferring to encounter the dangers and hardships of a foreign campaign rather than the miseries of separation, disguised themselves in male attire and enlisted in some battalion which was embarking for the seat of war. Sometimes, indeed, women, deserted by their husbands, resolved to follow their unfaithful spouses all over the world: and, unable to afford travelling expenses, enlisted at the first recruiting depôt, and trusted to chance for meeting with or hearing of the object of their search. As no personal examination of recruits took place in those days, either in Great Britain or elsewhere, there was no way of finding out the imposture until afterwards, more especially as the female soldiers behaved themselves quite as manly as their comrades.

Of course in every country there have been local celebrities whose names even are unknown beyond the frontiers, for a man or woman must perform very great deeds to become famous in foreign lands. Thus it happens, while we are familiar with the names of many an English female soldier, we know of only two or three women who served during the last century in the armies of France. Yet the world well knows that Frenchwomen are second to none^[3] in warlike esprit. One of these Gallic warriors was Captain Bodeaux, an officer holding a commission as lieutenant in one of the regiments which went over to Ireland under the command of St. Ruth, to assist James the Second. This gallant officer distinguished herself at the battle of the Boyne, July 1st, 1690, where she met with Mr. Cavanaugh, father of Christian Davies. She stopped at the house of that gentleman (who was also fighting for King James) till about three in the morning, when, being alarmed, they fled together precipitately. Christian Davies describes this officer as "a very handsome young French gentleman," though the real sex of Bodeaux was not unknown to her. At the siege of Limerick, June, 1691, she held Thomond bridge, over the Shannon, with a small body of troops, against the English, till at last she fell, covered with wounds. Such was the bravery of this young French officer that her death was lamented even by the foe. Great was their astonishment when they found their valiant antagonist was a woman.

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