

Deborah Sampson – Revolutionary War Soldier

It is not known how many women disguised themselves as soldiers and fought in the Revolutionary War, but one who did was Deborah Sampson.

Deborah Sampson was born on December 17, 1760, in Plympton, Massachusetts. Five years later, at age 10, young Deborah was bound out as an indentured servant to Deacon Benjamin Thomas, a farmer in Middleborough with a large family. At age 18, with her indenture completed, Sampson, who was self-educated, worked as a teacher during summer sessions in 1779 and 1780 and as a weaver in winter.

In 1782, as the Revolutionary War raged on, the patriotic Sampson disguised herself as a man named Robert Shurtleff and joined the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment. At West Point, New York, she was assigned to Captain George Webb's Company of Light Infantry. She was given the dangerous task of scouting neutral territory to assess British buildup of men and materiel in Manhattan, which General George Washington contemplated attacking. In June of 1782, Sampson and two sergeants led about 30 infantrymen on an expedition that ended with a confrontation—often one-on-one—with Tories. She led a raid on a Tory home that resulted in the capture of 15 men. At the siege of Yorktown,

she dug trenches, helped storm a British redoubt, and endured cannon fire.

For over two years, Sampson's true gender had escaped detection despite close calls. When she received a gash in her forehead from a sword and was shot in her left thigh, she extracted the pistol ball herself. She was ultimately discovered a year and a half into her service—in Philadelphia, when she became ill during an epidemic, was taken to a hospital, and lost consciousness.

Receiving an honorable discharge on October 23, 1783, Sampson returned to Massachusetts. On April 7, 1785, she married Benjamin Gannet from Sharon, and they had three children, Earl, Mary, and Patience. The story of her life was written in 1797 by Herman Mann, entitled *The Female Review: or Memoirs of an American Young Lady*. She received a military pension from the state of Massachusetts.