Santa Rosa Republican Women Federated

**Americanism**

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Casting its beams upon the seas of history, the lighthouse Americanism finds a unique female Patriot upon the waters; let us go back to the Revolutionary War and salute a special soldier, and a pseudo-forerunner of the Pentagon’s “Don’t Ask/Don’t Tell” policy: Robert Shurtleff of the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment.

The self-educated “Shurtleff,” a former indentured servant and former teacher, was born **Deborah Sampson** in Plympton, Massachusetts in 1760. Early in 1782 she enlisted in the Continental Army, adopting the *nom de guerre* Robert Shurtleff. Most of her combat was against Tories in New York.

To be sure, the glass ceiling for women serving in the Continental Army was more formidable than any confronting women at any time since; then it was comparatively double-paned--with a layer of Plexiglass in between.

Sampson paid for her devotion to her country in the summer of 1782. Shot in the left thigh and taking a gash to the forehead from a sword, Sampson performed surgery on her leg and extracted most of the bullet—lest any physician discover her sex. Alas, two years into her hitch in the Army, she fell ill with fever; it was while she was unconscious and being treated at a hospital that her masquerade, and her sex, were finally revealed.

Sampson received an honorable discharge from the Army on 23 October 1783, and received a full pension, the first female soldier in the Army’s history to do so.

