

Volume 7

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**Civil War Women Spies - IV - Belle
Edmondson**

Lead: By June 1862 Civil War Memphis, Tennessee was occupied by the Union. Young Belle Edmondson began her life as a smuggler and Confederate spy.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Belle Edmondson was born in Pontotoc, Mississippi, in 1840, the youngest of eight children. At the onset of the Civil War in 1861, the Edmondsons were living on a farm just southeast of Memphis near the

Mississippi border. Although there were some strongholds of Union sentiment particularly in eastern Tennessee, the state had joined the Confederacy. The Edmondsons were staunch supporters of the southern cause. Two of Belle's brothers fought at Shiloh and Belle helped nurse the wounded from the battle.

In June 1862, Federal forces occupied Memphis, and the city became a vast supply depot. Belle Edmondson began slipping information and smuggled supplies to the Confederates. Belle kept a diary detailing her work as a spy. She would conceal cloth, boots and hats in the inside of her wide dress hoops and hid letters, brass buttons, and money

in her rather ample bosom. Belle successfully smuggled medicine and amputation tools through the Union lines, but in July 1864 Belle was forced to flee south to Mississippi. The Federals were on to her, had issued a warrant for her arrest and planned to ship her to prison in Alton, Illinois.

Few facts are known about her post-war life. Belle returned to the Memphis area and there befriended Jefferson Davis and his family when they were living there in the early 1870s. After announcing her engagement to a mysterious “Colonel H” she died in 1873 at the age of 33, probably due to one of the three epidemics that infested Memphis that

**year. According to family tradition
Colonel “H” was a Yankee officer!
Next time: A Union spy in Richmond
– Elizabeth Van Lew.**

**At the University of Richmond,
this is Dan Roberts.**

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