

VELÁZQUEZ, LORETA JANETA (1842-?)

Loreta Janeta Velázquez' claim to fame was that she fought in several major battles of the Civil War, including the first Bull Run and Shiloh, disguised as a young lieutenant named Harry T. Buford. Velázquez, wrote a memoir about her experiences during the Civil War, *The Woman in Battle: (A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velázquez Otherwise Known as Lieutenant Harry T. Buford, Confederate States of America)* published in 1867. She was born in Cuba into a landed elite family in 1842. As a child she fantasized about a life of adventure, acknowledging early on that traditional gender roles privileged males over females in such pursuits. Grounded in a social ambience that elevated wealth, whiteness, heritage, and male authority, Velázquez devoured literature where daring female protagonists, such as Joan of Arc, or Catalina de Eraso, the Basque nun-lieutenant who, disguised as a man, joined an expedition to the New World, flaunted tradition. At the age of eight Velázquez moved to New Orleans to embark on an appropriate convent education, indispensable preparation for a suitable marriage. At fifteen Velázquez eloped with an American officer, formerly affianced to a classmate. Before her twentieth birthday, she had raised the Arkansas Grays, her own militia of 246 men, and presented them to her flabbergasted husband in Pensacola, Florida, shortly before his own death on the battlefield. Wounded in battle, her masquerade unveiled, Velázquez herself engaged in espionage following her ouster from the army. She joined a group of ex-Confederate officers who hoped to establish a colony in Venezuela following their defeat at the hands of the Union Army.