



0. Harriet Tubman - The Soldier - Story Preface

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By the time the Civil War began, Harriet Tubman was in her early 40s. Her reputation was known and the Union Army requested her help. She joined the Army as a scout and a nurse, but her role would eventually expand (to include work as a Union spy).

Confederate soldiers never suspected that the actual role which Harriet played was anything other than what she appeared to be. Instead, she actually worked with Union military officials on plans to traverse trails with which she was very familiar.

Sometimes Harriet worked fourteen hours, in army hospitals, then worked at night to bake pies (earning money to buy groceries). The Union Army had no system in place for paying a woman, so she was on her own to survive.

After the war was over, Harriet received a small amount of money for her Civil-War work. She was paid just \$200 for her three years of service to the Union Army. The problem—as it happened—was that her work, for the Union, was undocumented.

In 1890, Congress passed a law which granted widows of veterans the right to receive \$8 a month. Harriet's second husband, Nelson Davis, had served with Company G, Eighth United States Colored Infantry, from 25 September 1863 to 10 November 1865. Davis' service qualified Harriet to receive a government check under the new law.

For the first time in her life, Harriet was receiving a regular (although minimal) paycheck.

This monthly pay, however, was not for the services which Harriet had *personally* rendered to the Union during the war.

Finally—in 1899—after decades of effort, and the help of many influential friends, Congress passed the following Act on February 28. Note that it does not pay Harriet for the work she personally did on behalf of the Union—it only reflects her status as a Union widow:

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that the Secretary of Interior be authorized and directed to place on the pension roll, subject to the provisions and limitations of the pension laws, the name of Harriet Tubman Davis, widow of Nelson Davis [Harriet's second husband], late private in Company G, Eighth United States Colored Infantry and pay her a pension at the rate of twenty dollars per month in lieu of what she is now receiving [\$8 a month].

Harriet was 79 years old at the time she was granted this pension of \$240 a year. It had taken 34 years of effort to provide her with this minimal amount of income.

Harriet spent the rest of her life struggling to pay a mortgage and to keep food on the table. She never turned a person away who needed a place to stay or required something to eat. She never lost her faith in God and, when she was able, attended church on Sundays.

Tubman lived a long life, dying at nearly 100 years of age. Although she was personally unable to fulfill her dream of building a home for ill-and-elderly people—that came later, after her death, when others honored her memory by building such a place—she housed many such individuals in her own home.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Harriet-Tubman-The-Soldier-Harriet-Tubman-Freedom-Fighter>

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Becoming Harriet Tubman

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