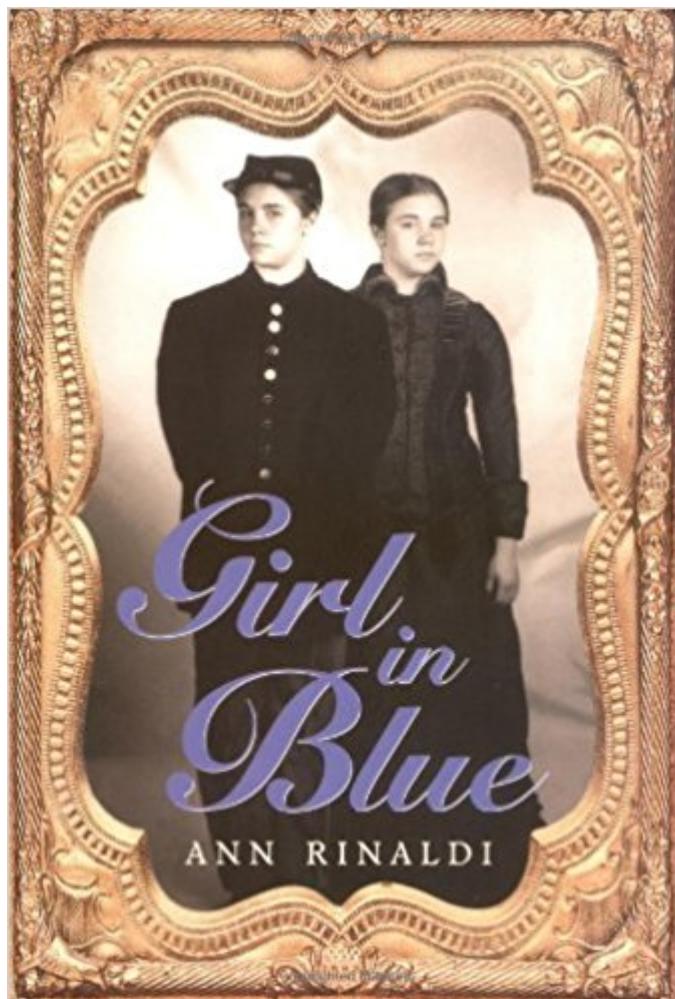


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Girl In Blue



Synopsis

As an adolescent, Sarah Louisa Wheelock vowed never to let a man control her. With this unshakable conviction, she abandoned her life on a Michigan farm and disguised herself as a boy so she could fight in the Civil War. Ann Rinaldi's well-researched and superbly wrought narrative illuminates the courage and audacity of this colorful historical figure.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Rinaldi (Coffin Quilt; Wolf by the Ears) delivers another fast-paced Civil War adventure, this time about a Michigan girl who masquerades as a Union soldier and then becomes a Pinkerton spy. Readers will immediately like 16-year-old Sarah, introduced just as she is planning to shoot at the lecherous widower whom her abusive father intends for her to marry. Before long, Sarah has enlisted in the Second Michigan under the alias Neddy Compton. Rinaldi rather quickly describes Sarah's efforts to conceal her identity (she cuts her hair and avoids the latrine), and more exacting readers may also wonder how she hides menstruation and breasts. On the other hand, the rapid narrative doesn't leave the audience too much time to question Rinaldi's devices. Sarah works for a Union doctor, enters into battle and shoots her first Rebel, then carries out a dying man's poignant last request. When her secret is at last discovered, she is pressed into service as a spy and thrust undercover as a maid for a notorious Confederate socialite and spy. There Sarah craftily deduces how her Mata Hari mistress ferrets messages behind enemy lines, and there, too, Sarah falls in love with the rakish Lieutenant Sheldon, who may or may not be a traitor. The relationships between the characters do not seem as strong as the narrative claims, however; fortunately, Sarah's force of

personality is enough to hold readers. Ages 9-14. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Gr 6-9-Inspired by the war fever of 1861, and tired of her father's mistreatment, 15-year-old Sarah Wheelock determines to run away and join the Union forces to fight the Confederacy. The last straw comes when her father promises her hand in marriage to a man who is twice her age and has the manners of a bear. After she cuts her hair, changes clothes, and lowers her voice, Sarah has few problems passing as a boy: years of hard farm labor have toughened her physically, and she has a natural talent for impersonation. Soon, young Private "Neddy Compton" is on the road to Washington, DC, with the 2nd Michigan Infantry. Despite being a model enlisted "man," Sarah is unmasked, and is transferred into the Secret Service, part of Allan Pinkerton's network of spies. Her acting skills are tested in a new and dangerous disguise, as a servant to notorious Rose Greenhow and other Southern sympathizers who are being held under house arrest. Here, the young woman's patriotism, loyalty, and intelligence will be tested beyond anything she experienced as a soldier. While Sarah and the other characters lack depth, Rinaldi's novel offers an exciting plot based on solid historical research.-Starr E. Smith, Fairfax County Public Library, VA
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I saw this book at the Lincoln homestead national park in Springfield, IL. It's a young adult novel, the story of a teenager who decides she is not going to be married off to a creepy neighboring farmer, and so runs away to join the Union Army in the Civil War. The historical perspective is good - here is a self-reliant young woman, who is able to provide for her family, for instance - although I wish there had been more details about the world around her, such as clothing details, etc. The story is solid and I enjoyed the read.

I was in need of this book for my daughters reading project. I found a copy online and was very happy when I received the book in great condition and in a timely manner.

Thank you for the book. The book arrived on schedule.

Good

It is 1861 and Sarah Louisa Wheelock, age fifteen, lives on a farm near Casey's Mill, MI, with her

father, mother, sister Betsy, and brother Ben. Her older sister Clarice is married. She has learned to hunt and ride better than any boy. Their abusive father, who beats both Sarah and her mother, plans to wed Sarah to their odious neighbor, Ezekiel Kunkle, who is a widower with two children. So she runs away, dresses as a boy named Neddie Compton, and joins the Union Army. As Neddy Sarah is sent to Washington, DC, but after the first Battle of Bull Run she is discovered. However, obviously being good at disguising herself and acting a part, she is recruited by Allan Pinkerton to serve as a maid in the home of the notorious Southern spy Rose Greenhow to help with surveillance and see if she can find out how Rose is sending messages. She begins to fall in love with Lt. Sheldon, head of the surveillance team, but then has reason to believe that he might be a traitor. Will her position be compromised so that she is found out again? And what should she do about Sheldon? How weird is this! I obtain different books from different sources at different times and in different places and then put them in different piles to be read on different occasions. So the books that I am reading at any particular point are the result of happenstance. Back in 2011, I picked up some young people's Civil War fiction books while visiting in Gettysburg, one of which, *No Girls Allowed* by Alan Kay, is a completely fictional account of a girl who dresses as a boy to fight in the Union Army. I just recently started reading it, but before I finished it, I began another book entitled *A Soldier's Secret* by Marissa Moss which had been sent to me early in 2012 by the publisher for review and is a fictionalized account of the life of Sarah Edmonds who dressed as a boy to fight in the Union Army. Then before I finished that, I began reading Rinaldi's book which I had actually first seen in a 2006 Scholastic Book catalogue and then bought later in 2012 at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Park near Springfield, MO. Rinaldi writes, "While Sarah Wheelock is a character of my own invention, I have based her somewhat on 'Franklin Thompson,' the male alias for Sarah Emma Edmonds, one of the most famous male soldier impersonators in the Civil War." There is enough similarity so that having read *A Soldier's Secret* I was immediately able to recognize the resemblances, but Rinaldi's story is much more fictionalized, with changed names and many plot differences. *Girl in Blue* is well written and easy to read. It has fewer objectionable elements than Moss's book, omitting the euphemistic sexual references to male anatomy. However, while it is listed for ages eight and above, the "d" and "h" words are both used occasionally, the terms "God" and "Lord" are sometimes found as interjections, there are several instances of drinking beer, whiskey, and wine, and a few of the fighting scenes are a little intense with some gory detail. Therefore, I would recommend it for ages twelve and above. Rinaldi writes concerning the real Sarah Edmonds, "Her tenure in the army was longer than my Sarah's, and she never served with the Pinkerton detective agency," and said, "I have invented all the rest of the characters, with the

exception of Abraham Lincoln, General McClellan, Doctor Hammond, Allan Pinkerton and his operatives, and Rose Greenhow and the women spies incarcerated with her at Fort Greenhow." While a couple of reader reviewers felt that the novel doesn't measure up to other Ann Rinaldi books and is not her best work, they still agreed that it is a suspenseful historical fiction story with a bit of adventure and a dash of romance. *Amelia's War* is another Civil War historical by Rinaldi.

Girl in Blue is an excellent book. In this book, set in the times of the Civil War, Sarah Louisa is being harshly mistreated by her father and betrothed to an awful man who tries to touch her at every opportunity. Sarah knows she won't stand for it. She won't marry a man who she knows will beat her. So she disguises as a boy and runs away to join the army and fight for the Union. While entertaining people in the hospital, Mr. Pinkerton notices she has skill in mimicry. When her true sex is discovered, she is offered to become a spy. So she works in a suspected spy for the Confederacy's house as a 'maid.' She learns to adapt to life in a world where she can trust no one. She also learns the true meaning of loyalty to one's country.

Sixteen year old Sarah has lived at the mercies of an abusive and overbearing father her entire life, but she refuses to be handed off like property to a neighbor twice her age just so that he can help out on the farm and she can raise his three motherless children. She's determined to get away, and to serve her country as she knows she has the skill to do-as a soldier. Sarah is an accomplished marksman, she's brave, and she has no interest or intentions towards men other than serving beside them. Her biggest issue isn't even that she's a girl, it's that she's sixteen. Sarah perfects the art of mimicry and lying in order to make her way into the ranks, where she distinguishes herself and finds unique employment with the nation's first detective agency. I don't know if it's my recent disappointment in *Fever 1793*, my childhood love of Ann Rinaldi, or my tendency to adore stories about girls who dress as boys, but I devoured *Girl in Blue*, and enjoyed every second of it. Ann Rinaldi was probably my favorite author when I was about ten years old, and then somehow I completely forgot about her until one day she was mentioned in a Twitter conversation with Tara (Hobbitsies) and Amy (Tripping Over Books). I knew immediately that I must read something by her as an adult to see if my enjoyment of her stood up. So I wandered into the Tween shelving at my library to see which of her books they had, and when I saw *Girl in Blue*, the story of a girl running off to fight as a soldier in the Civil War, I knew I'd found my match. Ann Rinaldi writes fantastic historical fiction for middle grade and young adult readers that is not only well researched and accurate to history, it is full of rich characters and stories that will transport any reader to another time. To my

knowledge, all of her books feature strong female characters (if anyone's read one of her's with a male lead, let me know), and the bulk of those I read as a child took place during or around the Revolutionary War. I did note that she's departed from this more in the years that I neglected her work, and I was excited to pick up something that took place during the Civil War. I learned from Girl in Blue that there were, in fact, at least 100 known women who fought as men during the Civil War. The character Sarah was based on one such young woman, Sarah Emma Edmonds, though their actual stories varied greatly. The detective agency that Sarah becomes involved with also actually existed, as the first such agency in the country. I loved that Girl in Blue was packed with excitement and intrigue, all of which touched on actual people and events-the best type of historical fiction there is!Sarah is precisely the type of girl we all love to read about. She's independent, strong, and brave. Sarah's only known men to treat her unkindly, so she's certainly not one to moon over them, and yet she's open to serving beside them with honor. The story of Girl in Blue is unexpected and in constant motion, unpredictable and never dull. Ann Rinaldi manages to show the blurred lines between two sides of a conflict, and paint with accuracy the intensity of feelings and loyalties during the Civil War. In addition, Girl in Blue reflects the important rolls that women played, not only as soldiers, but as nurses, spies, informants, and general support. My only complaint about the story, was that the ending seemed a little off. It was somewhat rushed, and required a greater suspension of disbelief than the rest of the story, which I was unable to muster. Regardless of this, Girl in Blue is highly recommended.

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