

Belle Boyd

One of the Civil War's more colorful characters was Belle Boyd, a young woman from the Valley whose activities as a spy for the Confederate cause earned her praise and notoriety. In the spring of 1863, after traveling throughout the South, she headed back to Virginia, hoping to return to her family in Martinsburg. At that time the town was in Union hands and Belle did not dare go there, but hearing that Confederate forces were advancing north towards Winchester, she decided to follow at the rear of the army.

In Woodstock she met up with an acquaintance, Major Harry Gilmor, who had been ordered on a scouting expedition to Winchester, and begged to go along. Gilmor was not happy at the prospect of Belle Boyd tagging along and stalled, saying he would need his General's permission. Hoping to get away early the next morning without her, he rose before sunrise to discover both his saber and pistols missing. As he frantically searched for them, Belle approached, dressed in a riding habit and with Gilmor's two pistols in her holster, her way of insuring he wouldn't leave her behind.

They proceeded to the quarters of General Jenkins and Gilmor later wrote the following: "We found him sitting before his tent, and after dispatching my business Miss Belle presented her request. I fixed myself rather behind her, that I might give a signal to the general not to consent. The fact is, I did not care to be accompanied by a woman on so perilous an enterprise; for though she was a splendid and reckless rider, of unflinching courage, and her whole soul bound up in the Southern cause, yet she was a little - mark you only a LITTLE - headstrong and wilful, and I thought it best, both for her sake and mine, that she should not go. I hope Miss Belle will forgive this little ruse. The general, of course, refused, which made her furious, but he was firm, and I rode off without her."

By June 14 the attack on Winchester began. Belle had made her way north and observed the fighting from a nearby hill. The Confederates recaptured both Winchester and Martinsburg, so Belle was able to return home.

Our source for this account was Ruth Scarborough, from her book, *Belle Boyd, Siren of the South*.