

Elizabeth Van Lew did not have the sinister appearance of a spy. She was a tiny, angular, birdlike creature with a sharp, peckish nose, bright blue eyes of “*unearthly brilliance*,” and hair done in ringlets. Born in New York and educated in Philadelphia, she lived in Richmond, Virginia most of her life. While in Philadelphia, Elizabeth became an ardent abolitionist. “*Slave power*,” she wrote in her diary, “*is arrogant, is jealous and intrusive, is cruel, is despotic*.” When war came in 1861, she began carrying on a charade of a simple Good Samaritan by toting baskets of food, medicine, and books to the Federal prisoners inside Libby Prison. She was sometimes seen walking the streets of Richmond mumbling to herself, often assuming a vacant expression, while wearing the shabbiest of clothing. Her erratic behavior soon earned Elizabeth the nickname “*Crazy Bet*.”

Behind that bizarre façade, however, Elizabeth was a shrewd and cunning woman. While inside the prison, “*Crazy Bet*” gleaned tidbits of information from the prisoners which she secretly passed on to the Federal authorities. Eventually her operation became more sophisticated with secret ciphers, a courier system, and classified details from Confederate officers. Of the city’s provost marshal, John Henry Winder, she wrote, “*I can flatter almost anything out of old Winder, his personal vanity is so great*.”

Federal officers soon came to realize “*Crazy Bet’s*” value. While at Fort Monroe, General Ben Butler referred to her as “*my correspondent in Richmond*.” Colonel George H. Sharpe, head of U.S. Army Intelligence, stated: “*For a long, long time, she represented all that was left of the power of the U.S. government in Richmond*.” Near the war’s end, Ulysses S. Grant wrote to her: “*You have sent me the most valuable information received from Richmond during the war*.” When Grant’s army finally entered Richmond, Elizabeth personally raised the Union flag above her home—the first U.S. flag to fly over Richmond in four years. When Grant himself entered the Confederate capital, one of his first acts was to visit the Van Lew home to sip tea with his favorite spy.

After the war Elizabeth Van Lew continued to live in her Richmond home, reviled by the citizens. By the time she died in 1900, Elizabeth was poverty stricken. After her death her own cipher was found folded in the back of her watch where she had carried it for nearly forty years. Some of her New England friends placed an inscribed monument on her gravesite:

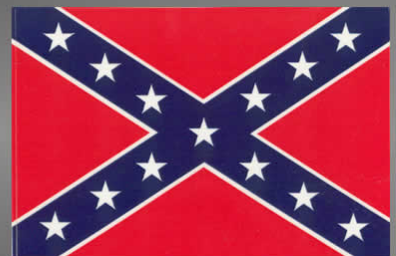
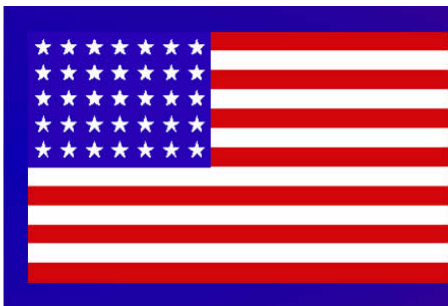
She risked everything that is dear to men—friends, fortune, comfort, health, life itself, all for one absorbing desire of her heart—that slavery might be abolished and the Union preserved.

The MRRT is fortunate to have Liz Stringer as our guest speaker this month. Liz will present “**Crazy Bet: Union Spy, Elizabeth Van Lew**.” Liz has been a member of the Abraham Lincoln Round Table for ten years, serving as President for the last seven. She received a BA in social work at Oakland University. Her initial inspiration for the Civil War came from reading *Little Women*, a gift from her father. Liz is a dynamic and entertaining speaker whose sense of humor enlivens each performance. You won’t want to miss this one—it’s guaranteed to be a lively evening.

Mark those calendars now—**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24.**

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Last month we had the honor of hearing **Dr. Weldon Petz’s** presentation, “*Musical Note in Lincoln’s Life*”—a program he first presented to the MRRT on March 21, 1975. Weldon has led off our Januarys for the past six years, and we hope he will consider starting us out next year as well. Weldon is truly a national treasure.



ODDS & ENDS:

- The Ann Arbor Round Table proudly announces that its guest speaker for the March 10 meeting will be the celebrated Ed Bearss. Ed will present “*Michigan at Gettysburg.*” MRRT members are welcome.
- Elections of our new officers were postponed until this month’s meeting.

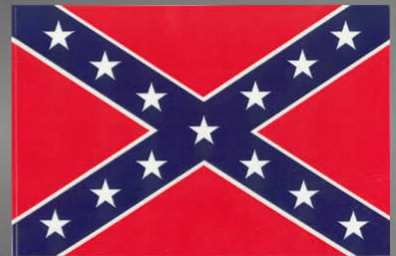
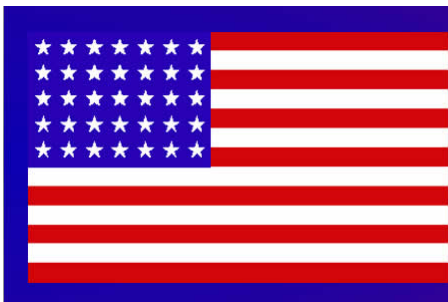
QUIZ: All questions pertain to SPIES and ESPIONAGE

1. In which town did Federal agent James J. Andrews steal a Confederate locomotive, and what was the engine called?
2. Which 3 engines did the Confederates use in chasing Andrews’ Raiders?
3. Which female spy gave PGT Beauregard valuable information which helped him defeat Union forces at First Bull Run? And, what was her final outcome?
4. Which Confederate courier/spy was a part of the Lincoln conspiracy as a kidnapper? And, after he escaped to Europe, what unusual job did he hold in Italy?
5. Which Confederate secret agent set off a powerful explosive aboard the *J.E. Kendrick*, a barge loaded to capacity with small-arms munitions, on August 9, 1864, killing 58 and injuring 126? And, where did this happen?
6. What method of deception did William Clarke Quantrill and his Bushwhackers often use to fool Federal troops? One raider, Marcellus Clark, who supposedly rode with Quantrill for a while, was captured and hanged. Because of his long hair and frail appearance what name did Northern newspapers give him?
7. Which 2 Federal officers raided Richmond in February 1864 in one of the war’s most controversial episodes?
8. One of these 2 men was killed in the raid. What did the orders in his pocket state?
9. Of whom did James Longstreet say, “[his] reports on Union troop movements are more accurate than a force of cavalry could have secured”? And, which Confederate scout/courier rode with Turner Ashby and Jeb Stuart, helped carry John Pelham’s mortally wounded body off the field, and wrote his memoirs entitled, *Four Years in the Saddle*?
10. What did Jonesville, Michigan man, C.G. Birbeck, suggest to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton as the ultimate weapon of the Civil War? And, what ingenious idea did New York City’s Charles Perley have for combat?

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One of Allan Pinkerton’s most extraordinary operatives was English-born Timothy Webster. He possessed all the necessary attributes for undercover work: intelligence, daring, good looks, and affability. Throughout the early part of the war, Webster took on numerous risky missions, including infiltrating pro-Southern cabals in Baltimore and traveling deep into the Confederacy to observe troop movements and other military activity.

Webster’s first assignment called for him to spy on Confederate army units in Kentucky and Tennessee. He gathered much vital information, largely by convincing Confederate officers in Memphis that he was a fire-breathing secessionist. “He *practically mesmerized you into thinking he was whatever he decided to be,*” noted a colleague. At one point in Humboldt, Tennessee, a Confederate counterspy, suspicious of Webster’s identity, made ready for an arrest. The quick-thinking Webster, however, jumped behind some baggage at a railroad depot and leaped on the train that took him safely to Ohio. His next mission took him to Baltimore to report on dangerous Southern sympathizers. One evening in a local saloon, a man named Zigler announced to the crowd that he had seen Webster entering Allan Pinkerton’s office in Washington. Webster, showing uncontrollable rage cried out, “*You are a liar and a scoundrel!*” Webster then struck Zigler “*with a force that would have felled an ox,*” knocking him under a table. This display of righteous anger further convinced the Rebels of Webster’s truthfulness.



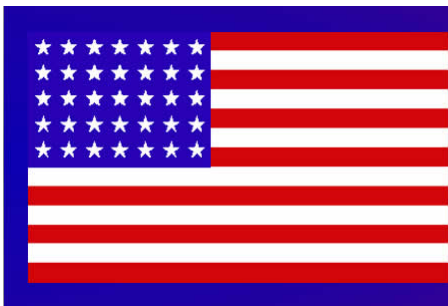
Later Webster joined a clandestine society called the Knights of Liberty, a noted group of secessionist plotters. Eventually Webster informed the Pinkerton detectives who immediately broke into a secret meeting and arrested the leaders. One perilous situation after another followed Webster, who seemed to enjoy a charmed life. Moving on to Richmond, Virginia, Webster once again worked his way into some elite circles. He even received a government passport allowing him to travel anywhere in the South. On one harrowing venture aboard a ship near Chesapeake Bay, the vessel struck a sand bar in a violent storm. Webster saved the lives of two Confederate women and their three children. This act of heroism only endeared him more so to the Southern people. Unfortunately, this episode caused Webster to suffer severely with rheumatism.

Eventually two of Pinkerton's lesser-skilled agents—John Scully and Pryce Lewis—proved to be Webster's undoing. When these two bunglers were arrested by Confederate agents, Scully, in an attempt to save his own hide, turned Webster over to the Richmond authorities. He was quickly arrested, tried, and sentenced to death. His execution date was set for April 28, 1862, at 8:00 A.M. in Richmond. Webster, an extremely sick man by this time, spent his last hours writing letters to his friends and family, stating, "*I can meet death with a brave heart and a clear conscience.*" A large crowd gathered at the Richmond fairgrounds to witness the execution which was grotesquely botched. Since no professional executioner was on hand, a Mr. Kapard, a local jailor, was employed for the task. Somehow the noose slipped and when the trap sprung, poor Webster fell to the ground below. He lay there, badly injured by the fall, yet struggling feebly with his arms and legs pinioned and a hood over his face. A group of men picked him up roughly and pushed him up the steps of the gallows. They held him upright as the amateur executioner, Kapard, put another noose around his neck and pulled it so tight that Webster gasped: "*I suffer a double death.*" His agony was unduly prolonged, as Kapard measured the rope and one of the officers below called up, "The rope's too short." But Kapard casually remarked, "*It'll do,*" and stepped back, releasing the trap. Mercifully, Webster died instantly.

The body was left dangling for thirty minutes, then cut down, and placed on a prison wagon, and rolled away. The noose and hangman's rope were cut up for souvenirs and handed out to the crowd. Webster's body was buried in the pauper's section of a Richmond cemetery in an unmarked grave. Allan Pinkerton vowed to find the burial spot and have the body brought back to the north for proper burial. After the war Webster was disinterred and reburied in the cemetery at Onarga, Illinois. "*He was a faithful, brave, and true-hearted man,*" wrote Pinkerton, "[for whom] fear was an element entirely unknown."

QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. Big Shanty, Georgia and "The General"
2. "Yonah," "William R. Smith," and "The Texas"
3. Rose O'Neal Greenhow and she drowned on October 1, 1864, when her lifeboat overturned in a storm. She was dragged down by \$2000 in gold carried on her person.
4. John Surratt and he was a Papal Zouave Guard for Pope Pius IX at the Vatican
5. John Maxwell and City Point, Virginia
6. Rode in Federal uniforms and Sue Mundy
7. Hugh Judson Kilpatrick and Ulric Dahlgren
8. Free Federal prisoners in Richmond, burn the city, kill Jefferson Davis and his cabinet
9. James Harrison and Harry Gilmore
10. Artillery shells filled with cayenne pepper which would descend upon Confederate forces like a "destroying angel" and dropping explosives from hot air balloons



Don't forget to circle this month's meeting date—**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24**—for Liz Stringer's program, "*Crazy Bet: Union Spy, Elizabeth Van Lew.*" It's one you'll want to be in attendance for. ALSO, REMEMBER OUR NEW STARTING TIME—6:30 P.M. And while you're at it, try our website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/>