

A black and white portrait of a man in a military uniform, standing and holding a rifle. The portrait is set within an ornate, oval-shaped frame. The man is wearing a dark uniform with two large circular medals on his chest and a peaked cap. The background of the portrait is a plain, light-colored wall.

ALBERT CASHIER

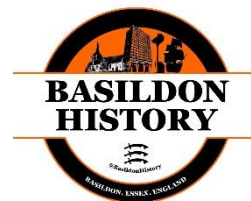
A SOLDIER'S REMARKABLE JOURNEY

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SOURCES

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A Veteran's Enduring Spirit

The annals of American history are filled with tales of courage and perseverance, particularly from the tumultuous years of the Civil War. Among these countless narratives, some stand out not just for the bravery displayed on the battlefield, but for the quiet, lifelong determination of individuals who lived their truth in remarkable ways. One such figure is Albert Cashier, a Union Army veteran whose journey through war and peace was as unique as it was inspiring.

Born far from the battlefields of America, Albert Cashier embarked on a life that defied conventional expectations. He served with distinction, endured the brutal realities of conflict, and returned to a civilian life that, on the surface, seemed ordinary. Yet, beneath the unassuming exterior of this veteran lay a story of profound personal fortitude and an unwavering commitment to an identity he embraced fully.

As we delve into the chapters of Albert Cashier's life, we'll uncover the remarkable journey of a soldier whose spirit endured long after the final shots were fired, leaving behind a legacy far richer and more complex than initially met the eye. His story is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the many forms courage can take.

Enlisting for the Union

The mid-19th century was a time of vast change and opportunity in the United States, drawing countless immigrants from across the globe. Among them was a young man from Clogherhead, Ireland, known as Albert Cashier. While details of his earliest years are somewhat shrouded in time, it's understood that he arrived in America, eventually finding his way to Illinois. The nation, however, was on the brink of an unprecedented internal conflict that would forever reshape its destiny. The rumblings of secession had grown into the roar of war, and a call to arms echoed across the Union.



Albert Cashier, 1864

For many, the decision to enlist was driven by patriotism, a desire to preserve the Union, or simply the need for work and purpose in uncertain times. Albert Cashier, presenting himself as a young man eager to serve, answered that call. On 6 August 1862, he formally enlisted in the Union Army at Belvidere, Illinois, joining Company G of the 95th Illinois Infantry Regiment.

The initial days of military life would have been a stark transition: the drill grounds replacing civilian routines, the camaraderie of fellow recruits forging new bonds, and the ever-present understanding that they were preparing for the grim realities of battle. Albert, determined and resolute, embraced this new path, ready to commit himself fully to the Union. His journey as a soldier had truly begun.

Service and Valor in the 95th Illinois Infantry

Albert Cashier's commitment to the Union cause was soon tested on the demanding battlefields of the American Civil War. As a member of Company G, 95th Illinois Infantry, he was thrust into some of the most pivotal and brutal campaigns of the conflict. His regiment, formed in the summer of 1862, quickly found itself in the Western Theatre, where key strategic objectives like control of the Mississippi River were fiercely contested.



One of their most significant engagements was the Siege of Vicksburg in Mississippi, a gruelling campaign that lasted from May to July 1863. Vicksburg, a Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi River, was crucial for controlling the waterway. The 95th Illinois participated in the prolonged siege operations, facing constant danger from Confederate fire, disease, and the harsh conditions of trench warfare. Albert Cashier endured these trials alongside his

comrades, proving his mettle under fire.

Following Vicksburg, the 95th Illinois was involved in other notable actions, including the Red River Campaign in Louisiana in 1864, a complex and ultimately unsuccessful Union offensive. Later that year, they were part of the forces that confronted Confederate General John Bell Hood's army in Tennessee. Albert Cashier and his regiment fought in the Battle of Nashville in December 1864, a decisive Union victory that effectively crippled Hood's Army of Tennessee. Throughout these campaigns, Albert shared in the hardships and dangers with his comrades.

Life as a Civil War soldier was a constant challenge, marked by long marches, meagre rations, and the ever-present threat of disease, which often claimed more lives than battle itself. Albert Cashier, like his fellow soldiers, experienced the monotony of camp life interspersed with moments of intense combat. He performed his duties as a regular infantryman, participating in skirmishes, picketing, and fatigue details. His ability to blend seamlessly into the ranks and endure the rigours of soldiering earned him the respect of those around him, who knew him simply as "Albert Cashier," a brave and reliable Union soldier.

The Civilian Life of a Union Veteran

With the close of the Civil War, Albert Cashier, like countless other Union soldiers, transitioned from the harsh realities of military life back into civilian society. Albert firmly settled in the small farming community of Saunemin, Illinois. Here, he began to forge a new life, building a reputation as a hardworking and unassuming man.

Albert took on a variety of roles to earn his living, demonstrating a quiet industriousness. He worked as a farmhand, contributing to the agricultural backbone of the region. Later, he served the community directly as a street lamplighter, a common and essential job in towns of that era, ensuring the streets were lit after dusk. He was also known to take on odd jobs as a handyman, further cementing his place as a reliable and useful member of Saunemin.



Albert Cashier's house, Saunemin

His integration into the social fabric of Saunemin was complete and he was accepted and respected as a Union veteran, a status that carried significant weight and honour in post-war America. Albert often participated in Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) events, a prominent fraternal organisation for Union Civil War veterans, attending reunions and parades. This involvement further reinforced his identity within the community, as he marched and socialised alongside former comrades.

Albert Cashier lived in Saunemin for over 40 years, sharing a home with various families and becoming a familiar face to generations of residents. His neighbours and friends described him as quiet and reserved, but also as a kind, dependable, and somewhat eccentric bachelor. He was known for his love of tobacco and his distinctive, slightly stooped gait, but fundamentally, he was simply "Albert" – a local veteran who had seen the war and now lived a peaceful, if private, life among them.

A Quiet Life Continues

As the decades turned, Albert Cashier remained a fixture in the Saunemin community, a quiet, unassuming veteran living a life seemingly without major incident. He continued his various occupations, often working for long-time residents and remaining an independent figure. His daily routines and consistent presence only served to deepen the community's unquestioning acceptance of him as Albert Cashier, the Union soldier.

Albert was a man of small stature, a common enough sight among men of his era. His neighbours knew him for his stoic demeanour and a certain gruffness, characteristics often attributed to his time in military service. He preferred a private existence, keeping largely to himself outside of his work and community engagements.



Albert Cashier, 1914

Despite his private nature, Albert regularly participated in local veteran activities. He continued to collect his soldier's pension, a critical validation of his service. The pension board, after reviewing his military records, never raised any questions about his background, further solidifying Albert Cashier's official recognition as a veteran. This consistent, decades-long presence meant that by the early 20th century, all who knew him in Saunemin simply knew him as Albert.

Later Years and Unforeseen Circumstances

As Albert Cashier advanced into his later years, his quiet life in Saunemin, Illinois, continued much as it always had. He remained a respected figure in the community, a living link to the nation's defining conflict, the Civil War. However, time and infirmity eventually began to take their toll, leading to a series of events that would place him in situations beyond his control.

In 1910, an unfortunate accident occurred when Albert was working on a project for State Senator Ira Lish. He was struck by a vehicle, breaking his leg. This injury necessitated a visit from a doctor, and required medical attention that was, for Albert, an unprecedented intrusion into his private life. While the doctor attended to the injury, no public mention was made of anything unusual, and Albert returned to his life as before.

As his health continued its decline in the following years, Albert's ability to care for himself diminished. In 1913, circumstances led to his admission to the Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Home in Quincy, a facility specifically for ailing Civil War veterans. Within the structured environment of the Home, under the care of its medical staff, the particulars of Albert's history became known to some. Despite this, the Home's superintendent, acknowledging Albert's profound connection to his identity as a veteran, allowed him to continue living within the institution.

However, Albert's mental state eventually deteriorated, and in March 1914, his condition required a transfer to the Watertown State Hospital for the Insane in East Moline, Illinois. In this new, more stringent institutional setting, Albert faced further medical assessments and a loss of personal autonomy. The details that had been so carefully guarded throughout his life were now fully exposed to the authorities responsible for his care. This exposure brought about discussions, particularly concerning his veteran's pension, though ultimately his long and faithful service was honoured. He lived out his final years at the institution, continuing to present himself as he always had.

Albert Cashier passed away on 10 October 1915, at the age of 72 or 73. He was buried with full military honours in the Saunemin Cemetery, dressed in his Union Army uniform. His gravestone initially bore the inscription "Albert D. J. Cashier, Co. G, 95 Ill. Inf.," marking the resting place of a Union soldier. The full understanding of his remarkable journey would only truly unfold for the wider public in the years that followed, revealing the depths of his extraordinary life.

A Life Fully Lived

For decades, the life of Albert Cashier unfolded as that of a quiet, if somewhat enigmatic, Union veteran. He served his country with distinction, built a respected life in a small Illinois town, and was mourned as a man when he passed. Yet, the story of Albert Cashier holds an extraordinary secret, a truth so carefully guarded that it was only fully uncovered in the final years of his life and publicly acknowledged well after his death. The individual known to the world as Albert Cashier was, in fact, Jennie Rodgers, born a female in Ireland in 1843.

Jennie Rodgers, for reasons that remain a subject of historical speculation, chose to live her entire adult life as a man. Whether it was to gain independence, secure employment, or genuinely align with her internal sense of self in a restrictive 19th-century world, her decision led her to enlist in the Union Army as Albert Cashier. She fought alongside men, endured the brutal campaigns of the Civil War, and was never discovered during her military service—a feat of remarkable courage and cunning.

Her post-war life in Saunemin continued this profound commitment to her chosen identity. She worked, socialised, and lived for over 40 years as Albert, becoming a cherished member of the community. The revelation of her birth sex, forced by the necessities of old age and institutional care, sent shockwaves through those who knew her, but many of her former comrades and neighbours still insisted on referring to her as Albert, honouring the identity she had so consistently lived. In 1977, a new headstone was placed at her grave in Saunemin, bearing both names: "Albert D.J. Cashier / Jennie Rodgers."

The story of Albert Cashier, or Jennie Rodgers, transcends a simple biographical account. It speaks to universal themes of identity, resilience, and the courage to live authentically in the face of societal norms. In an era when gender roles were rigidly defined, Jennie Rodgers forged a path entirely her own, serving her country and living a full life on her own terms. Her legacy continues to resonate, not just as a unique figure in Civil War history, but as a powerful symbol of self-determination and the complexities of human experience that defy simple categorisation.