

## Rose O'Neal Greenhow

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On October 1, 1864, the English blockade runner *Condor* was being pursued by a US Navy ship and ran aground at the mouth of the Cape Fear River near Wilmington, North Carolina. Some of the passengers on the *Condor* feared capture by the Union and attempted to make it to shore in a rowboat. Unfortunately, the rowboat capsized in the rough waters. One of the passengers, weighed down by \$2,000 worth of gold sewn into her clothing, was drowned. The victim was the famous Confederate spy Rose O'Neal Greenhow.

Rose Greenhow was the widow of a prominent physician and a leading socialite in Washington, D.C. when the Civil War began. Known to be a strong Southern sympathizer, she was recruited to be a spy. She was recruited in the spring of 1861 by US Army Captain Thomas Jordan, who was organizing a spy ring based in the nation's capital. In May of 1861, Jordan resigned from the US Army to join the Confederacy and handed the operation of the spy ring off to Mrs. Greenhow. As a member of the Confederate Secret Service, Jordan would act as Greenhow's liaison for passing intelligence to the South.

In early to mid-July 1861, Greenhow passed along two messages that revealed the plans of Union General Irvin McDowell in what would be the First Battle of Bull Run. Confederate President Jefferson Davis said that the information passed across the lines by Rose Greenhow was critical in what would be a resounding and unexpected Confederate victory on July 21, 1861.

Despite her efforts to keep her espionage hidden, she was widely suspected of being a spy and Allen Pinkerton, head of the newly formed United States Secret Service, had her placed under house arrest. In searching her house, Pinkerton's agents found love letters from Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson, a member of the Military Affairs Committee. There has been speculation that Senator Wilson might have been the source of Greenhow's information regarding the battle.

Due to public pressure that she was being treated too leniently, in January 1862 she was imprisoned in the Old Capitol Prison. In May of that year, having never been convicted, she was released and sent to the Confederacy. She was greeted in Richmond as a heroine.

Making use of her social stature, Jefferson Davis sent her through the blockade to Europe where she advocated for the Confederate cause among the aristocrats of England and France. In late 1863 she published her memoir entitled "My Imprisonment and the First Year of Abolition Rule in Washington". It became a best seller in England. She also argued successfully with Charles Francis Adams, U.S. Minister to France for the release of young lieutenant Joseph Wilson. Wilson was captured after the battle between the U.S.S. *Kearsarge* and C.S.S. *Alabama* and was suffering from mental duress in captivity.

Greenhow left Europe for the Confederacy on August 19, 1864, carrying important dispatches and the gold she had earned from her memoir. Unfortunately, the grounding of the *Condor* and the weight of her book profits would lead to her demise in the Atlantic waters. Her life and efforts on behalf of the Confederate cause were honored in a military funeral held for her in Wilmington.