

Harriet Tubman: Civil War Spy

By *Christina Pappas*

Harriet Tubman is well known for making her life as a “conductor” in the Underground Railroad, which led escaped slaves to freedom in the North. But did you know that the former slave also served as a spy for the Union during the Civil War and was the first woman in American history to lead a military expedition?

During a time when women were usually restricted to traditional roles like cooking and nursing, she did her share of those jobs. But she also worked side-by-side with men, even as her Tom Alden, who tells her cooking story in the *National Geographic* book *Harriet Tubman: Secret Agent*.

Tubman decided to help the Union Army because she wanted freedom for all of the people who were enslaved, not just the few she could help by herself. And she convinced many other brave African Americans to join her as spies, even at the risk of being caught if they were caught.

Because of her most dramatic and dangerous roles, Tubman helped Colonel James Montgomery plan a raid to free slaves from plantations along the Charleston (South Carolina) coast in the morning of June 1, 1862. Three gunboats carrying several hundred Union soldiers, along with Harriet Tubman, set out on that mission. Tubman had gathered key information from her visits about the Confederates' positions. She knew where they were hiding along the shore. She also found out where they had placed batteries or towers that with gunpowder in the water. For the early morning they (that is some of the South's most important regulations), the Union expedition had the waters and the buildings and destroyed bridges, so they couldn't be used by the Confederate Army. They also freed about 700 slaves—men, women, children, and babies—and did not lose one soldier in the effort.

