Molly Pitcher: hero of American Revolutionary War

By Master Sgt. Leon Q. Murray
437 AW Military Equal Opportunity

As Women's History Month continues, we'll look at Mary Hayes McCauley's efforts, also known as Molly Pitcher.

Mary Ludwig was born on October 13, 1754. Her actions during the battle of Monmouth became legendary. Monmouth was as hot as Valley Forge was cold. Someone had to cool the hot guns and bathe parched throats of the soldiers with water.

The most notable scenes derived on the battle of Monmouth June 28, 1778. Across that bullet-swept ground, a striped skirt fluttered. Mary Hays McCauley earned her nickname "Molly Pitcher" by bringing pitcher after pitcher of cool spring water to the exhausted and thirsty men. She also tended to the wounded and once, heaving a crippled Continental soldier up on her strong young back, carried him out of reach of hard-charging British. On her next trip with water, she found her husband back with the guns again, replacing a casualty. While she watched, her husband fell wounded. Molly made her husband comfortable. Then, without hesitation, stepped forward and took the rammer staff from her fallen husband's hands. For the second time on an American battlefield, a woman manned a gun. (The first was Margaret Corbin during the defense of Fort Washington in 1776.) Molly stayed at her post in the face of heavy enemy fire, acting as a matross (gunner) until the British retreated into the night.

For her heroic role, Gen. George Washington personally thanked her and recommended to Congress that she be rewarded. Congress accepted the recommendation, commissioned her as a sergeant and gave her half pay for the rest of her life. A flagstaff and cannon stand at her gravesite at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. A sculpture on the battle monument commemorates her courageous deed.

After seeing her husband fall wounded in battle, Molly Pitcher took his place at a cannon until the British retreated from the battlefield. She was personally thanked by Gen. George Washington.

Space and beyond: Air Force astronaut Eileen Collins encourages women to fly

By Staff Sgt. Jeff Thorson
Special to the American Forces Press Service

MEMPHIS -- Lending her story to the history and future of female aviators, Air Force Col. Eileen Collins told a group of nearly 3,000 aerospace professionals about her recent mission as commander of space shuttle STS-93 Columbia.

Collins spoke to the 11th Annual Women in Aviation International Conference here March 10.

Collins became the first female space shuttle commander when the Columbia blasted off July 22. During that mission, the Columbia launched the Chandra X-Ray Observatory, which allows scientists to study phenomena such as exploding stars, quasars and black holes.

Collins launched her career in the Air Force in 1979 and has been flying high ever since.

"I learned the discipline pilots need in the military," she said. "The Air Force gave me my first big flying break."

In the service, Collins excelled in flying, and became a T-41 instructor and later a test pilot. In 1990, NASA selected her for the astronaut program. She has since logged more than 537 hours in space.

"I love aviation, love flying, and love going into space," Collins said. "Space travel is an extension of aviation. I feel privileged and lucky to have a mission in aviation and space."

Collins and Kathie Olsen, NASA's chief scientist, unveiled the first Women in Aerospace poster at the conference. The poster depicts famous women in the aviation and aerospace industry. It encourages the advancement of people in science, engineering and technology — asking girls in particular to consider careers in aerospace.

The Women in Aviation organization draws its more than 4,900 worldwide members from general, corporate and commercial aviation, education, government, and the military. Participants recognize the need for more women in the industry and for a support group to serve as mentors, advisors, and interested colleagues.

Staff Sgt. Jeff Thorson

Air Force Col. Eileen Collins and NASA's chief scientist, Kathie Olsen, autograph Women in Aerospace posters during the Women in Aviation conference in Memphis, March 10. Olsen, Peggy Baty, president of Women in Aviation, and Col. Collins unveiled the Women in Aerospace poster during the 11th Annual Women in Aviation International Conference in Memphis March 10.

Women's Airforce Service Pilots flew the B-29

In the summer of 1944, 25-year-old U.S. Lt. Col. Paul W. Tibbets had a problem. He was in charge of training pilots on the Army Air Forces' newest, biggest and most complicated bomber yet, and the task was turning out to be much more onerous than he'd anticipated.

Tibbets' men were putting up unprecedented resistance. In point of fact, the pilots had every reason to be wary. The B-29 was not only much larger and heavier than any bomber the U.S. had flown before, it also hadn't gone through the years of operational testing to which Boeing had subjected its predecessor the B-17. Initially engine fires were one of the major problems. The planes' Wright engines were often called the "Wrong" engines. Part of the trouble could be traced to the engine cowlings that were too tight and often caused fires even before the planes had taken off. Although engine improvements were made over time, fires remained a problem.

Tibbets decided that the way to convince the men to fly the plane was to show that women could do it. The young Colonel recruited Dora Dougherty and Dorothea Moorman to be his demo pilots. Dougherty remembers that at that point, she had never even been in a four-engine plane before. Tibbets did not warn his new recruits of the engine fire problem. Instead he trained them to take off without the standard power checks. After three days, the colonel decided his women pilots were ready for their demonstration.

For several days, Dougherty and Johnson ferried pilots, crew chiefs and navigators from the very-heavy-bomber base at Alamogordo, New Mexico across the state. Tibbets' plan was a terrific success: After watching the women fly the four-engine bomber, the men stopped complaining about the plane.

Air Staff Major General Barney Giles brought the demonstrations to an abrupt halt after just a few days, telling Tibbets that the women were "putting the big football players to shame."