

## **Women in Combat**

Historians say that “Molly Pitcher” is a fictional woman who represented the many women working on the battlefields. Yet, there is historical evidence that Mary Ludwig Hays was the real “Molly Pitcher.” Mary Ludwig Hays was born on October 13, 1754. Historians argue over where she was born, but she was either born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania or New Jersey. When she was in her early twenties, she married a barber named William Hays. Hays decided to enlist in the 4th Pennsylvania Artillery and served in the Continental Army when the American Revolutionary War began. It was very common for soldiers’ wives to follow their husbands when they enlisted in the army. Mary Hays decided to join her husband at the Continental Army camp where she often washed clothes and cared for the sick. Historians note that this is where the nickname “Molly Pitcher” could have originated from. “Molly” was a common nickname given to women that were named Mary. “Pitcher” represented the buckets women would carry for cleaning.

On June 28, 1778, Mary Hays enlisted to serve with Captain Francis Proctor's company in the Pennsylvania Artillery. She gained popularity among the troops because of her hard work under fire and her bravery.

During the Battle of Monmouth on June 28, 1778, Hays allegedly solidified her legacy as an American hero. Historians report that

about fifty soldiers died of thirst and dehydration that day. This meant that as many men died from heat exhaustion as they did from gunfire. Hays went back and forth into the battle to bring water to thirsty soldiers from a nearby spring. She stayed on the battlefield bringing water and caring for wounded soldiers until her own husband got hurt.

When her husband was wounded during this battle, she made the decision to take his place at the cannon and began firing. After the battle, legend has it that George Washington asked about the courageous woman who was on the battlefield and promoted her to a non-commissioned officer. For this reason, Hays carried the nickname “Sergeant Molly.”