

Mary Ludwig Hays McCauley, aka 'Molly Pitcher', dies January 22, 1832

On this day in history, January 22, 1832, Mary Ludwig Hays McCauley, otherwise known as "Molly Pitcher," dies. The details of the Molly legend are somewhat uncertain. Molly Pitcher was actually a common name used for women who helped carry water to soldiers on the battlefield, so "Molly" is not necessarily referring to one person. Indeed, there are several "Mollies" that we know of.

One "Molly" that we do know a fair amount about is Mary Ludwig Hays McCauley. Mary was born in Pennsylvania to a poor family. She worked as a servant in a doctor's house for many years before she married William Hays of Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

William Hays joined the Continental Army in May, 1777 in Bucks County, New Jersey, during the British occupation of that state. Mary joined William as a "camp follower" during the winter at Valley Forge that year. Camp followers were women who would travel with the army and perform tasks such as washing clothes, preparing food and caring for sick or dying soldiers.

William was trained as an artilleryman during the winter of 1777-78 and Mary is known to have carried water to the trainees. When the winter ended, British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Henry Clinton received orders to evacuate Philadelphia, which was captured in 1777 and to concentrate his forces in New York instead. This was due to a reassessment of strategic needs due to France's entry into the war.

As Lt. Gen. Charles Cornwallis retreated from Philadelphia across New Jersey, George Washington attacked him at what is known as the Battle of Monmouth or the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse. During this battle, Mary's husband William manned the cannons. The temperature was over 100 degrees that day and many men fell or died from heat exhaustion. Mary carried water from a nearby spring for her

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husband's unit. The water was used by the men, but also to cool the cannon and the ramrod's rag, a rag on the end of a stick used to clean excess gunpowder from the cannon after each shot.

At some point in the battle, William collapsed, but did not die. He was carried off the field and Mary took his place. She continued cleaning the cannon between shots with her husband's ramrod and loading the cannon for the next shot. Mary was nearly injured when a musket ball went between her legs and tore off the bottom part of her dress. At some point, it is alleged that George Washington actually saw Mary on the field and issued her a warrant as a non-commissioned officer after the battle. After the war, Mary went by the name "Molly" for the rest of her life.

William Hays died in 1786, leaving Mary 200 acres of land he was awarded for his service in the war. She remarried to John McCauley in 1793 and continued doing domestic housework for the rest of her life. Around 1810, John McCauley tricked Mary into selling her land for a dirt cheap price and absconded with the money, leaving Mary penniless. In 1822, Mary was recognized by the Pennsylvania Government for her service in the war and awarded an annual veteran's pension of \$40 a year. She died at 88 and is buried in the Old Graveyard in Carlisle under the name "Molly McCauley."