

CAPTAIN MOLLY
OF FORT WASHINGTON, NEW YORK

Tradition, fiction and romance became so thoroughly interwoven that they combine to crowd simple truth aside. Margaret Cochran, born November 12, 1751, in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, and the only daughter of Robert Cochran, who was killed by the Indians in 1756; his wife was also taken in captivity by the Indians. Their daughter Margaret Cochran at that time was visiting her uncle, a brother to her mother. Margaret made her home with her uncle until 1772, when she married John Corbin, of Virginia, and who enlisted in the Pennsylvania Artillery Regiment under Francis Proctor. Margaret Corbin followed her husband to the war and offered her services as a nurse and aid in camp life.

Her husband, John Corbin, was killed at Fort Washington on the upper end of Manhattan Island, November 16, 1776. Then Margaret Corbin took her husband's place at the gun until she was struck by three grape-shot which nearly severed her arm and a part of her breast. At the surrender she was paroled to Greens, across the river at Fort Lee, and was carried with other sick and wounded to Philadelphia. Later she was formally enrolled as a member of the Invalid Regiment. In 1779, a regular pension was granted her of \$30. In April, 1783, the Invalid Regiment was mustered out.

Margaret Corbin having no home to go to, no hospital to receive her, returned to her army acquaintances back in Hudson Valley, settling at a place known as Swimtown (where she became a domestic). It was the name for one of the pioneer settlers of that locality, and in 1805 it was known as Buttermilk Falls, and later it was given the name of Highland Falls, and so it is today. Margaret Corbin was an Irish woman with a characteristically sharp tongue and quick temper; not always particular of her dress or person, commanding and haughty; among those who had incurred her displeasure she was invariably saluted as Captain Molly when face to face. The wounds she received while in battle at Fort Washington on Manhattan Island, November 16, 1776, not having the proper care, developed into a gangrenous nature, which caused her death about 1800, and which appears to identify as her place of burial an unmarked grave on private property in a little hamlet called Swimtown, near West Point, New York. History states that Margaret was buried in a private cemetery. It was the custom in these times for the people to bury their dead on their farms in space known as private or family plots.

It's said that her grave had never been marked otherwise than by a cedar tree which grew beside it, and which in recent years had been cut down, the stump, however, yet remains. Later the grave had been marked with a small wooden stave on which had been engraved the letters "M. P." There she lay for the next 126 years, then her bones were taken up and placed in the Post Cemetery at West Point, New York, and where the D. A. R. have placed a marker to her memory. Should you go to Highland Falls and make inquiry you will be told that Captain Margaret Corbin lived and died there, but her bones now rest in the Post Cemetery at West Point. Now travel to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, you will be shown the grave of Mary Ludwig, known as Molly Pitcher, of Monmouth, New Jersey. A monument was erected to her memory at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, June 28, 1916.

The mix-up in the two stories came about through the fact that Captain Molly, of Fort Washington, New York, and Molly Pitcher, of Monmouth, New Jersey, both were born in Pennsylvania. Their husbands were both John, and both served as gunners; one was wounded and other was killed, and the wives of both received pensions from the Government. A story once told and repeated for a hundred years allows variations to creep in, and it is then hard to change it to conform to the actual facts.

Molly Pitcher

OF

MONMOUTH COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

AND

Captain Molly

OF

FORT WASHINGTON, NEW YORK

1776—1937



By WILLIAM DAVISON PERRINE

PRINCETON JUNCTION, NEW JERSEY

1937

Copy 2