

VFW Recognizes Col. Eileen Collins

Collins became the first woman commander of a U.S. Spacecraft with shuttle mission STS-93 in July 1999

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Today, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) recognizes U.S. Air Force Col. Eileen Collins.

After graduating from Syracuse University, Collins was one of four women chosen for Undergraduate Pilot Training at Vance Air Force Base, Oklahoma, where she earned her pilot wings and stayed there as a T-38 Talon instructor. She then transitioned to the C-141 Starlifter at Travis Air Force Base, California.



U.S. Air Force Col. Eileen Collins

From 1986 to 1989, Collins served as an assistant professor in mathematics at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado. In 1989, she was selected to attend the U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School. Shortly thereafter, Collins received word of her selection for the

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astronaut program in 1990.

Collins became the first woman shuttle pilot in 1995 aboard the STS-63, which involved a rendezvous between Shuttle Discovery and the Russian space station Mir. She received the Harmon Trophy for outstanding achievement during this mission.

Collins became the first woman commander of a U.S. Spacecraft with Shuttle mission STS-93 in July 1999, which deployed the Chandra X-Ray Observatory. In 2005, she became the first astronaut to fly the space shuttle through a complete 360-degree pitch maneuver. This was necessary so astronauts aboard the International Space Station could take photos of the shuttle's belly to ensure there was no threat from debris prior to reentry.

Collins departed NASA in 2006 to spend more time with her family and pursue other interests. She still remains a big part of shuttle launches as she occasionally appears on CNN as an analyst.

This is the first feature in a series of VFW articles to be published throughout March 2020, highlighting women veterans who have made outstanding contributions to our military and society.