In June 1778, the British army left Philadelphia and moved through New Jersey towards their base in New York City. Washington's army followed, departing Valley Forge with the intent to strike a blow at the retreating British. On June 28, at Monmouth Courthouse, halfway between Philadelphia and New York, they got their chance. On this 100-degree-day, the two sides clashed in one of the most intense battles of the war.

Accompanying the Revolutionary forces were hundreds of women, the “camp followers” who did laundry, nursed the sick, and sold provisions to the soldiers. Among them was Mary Hays, the wife of a soldier named William Hays, a member of Proctor's Artillery Regiment. At the height of the battle, with William taken down by the heat or a wound, Mary Hays stepped in, helping to load and fire one of the regiment's cannons. In this scene, we see Hays dressed in a green gown, passing a cannon cartridge to the muzzle of a gun. Other soldiers stand ready to ram it down and fire the bronze-barreled cannon. Soldiers are collapsed on the ground nearby and another cannon has just gone off in the background.

This heroic action was soon immortalized with a new nickname for Mary Hays: Molly Pitcher. In 1822, Pennsylvania’s governor awarded her a lifetime pension, making her one of only three women to secure pensions for services rendered in the Revolutionary War. She died in 1832.