

Eileen Collins

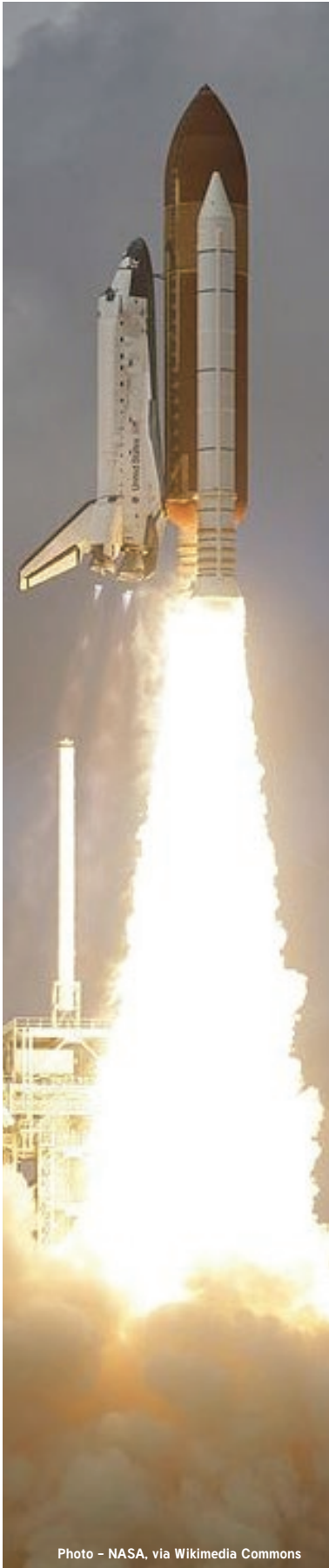


Photo - NASA, via Wikimedia Commons

Eileen Collins was born on November 19th, 1956 in Elmira, New York. From an early age, she dreamt about space and read all she could about it. Eileen's heroes include the female pilots who flew in World War II. As a youngster, Eileen's parents would often take her to the airport to watch the planes take off and land. She was a very conscientious student and particularly enjoyed science and maths.



Photograph by NASA ROBERT MARKOWITZ via Wikimedia Commons

At 19, Collins had different part-time jobs to pay for her flying lessons. She graduated with a degree in maths and economics in 1978 before becoming one of four women accepted for the U.S Air Force's undergraduate pilot training. Whilst studying at the base, female astronauts were doing parachute training which inspired her to follow her dream of becoming an astronaut.

In 1979, Collins became the Air Force's first female flight instructor and she continued to do this job for 11 years. Eileen became one of the first females to attend Air Force Test Pilot School; she graduated in 1990. Here, the Air Force's top pilots learn how to test experimental aircraft, which can be highly dangerous. Eileen was selected to train to be an astronaut. It takes hundreds of hours of training before astronauts are ready to fly into space. They must learn about space technology, science, medical skills and how the International Space Station works. Astronauts practise the feeling of being in space by scuba diving underwater.

Did You Know?

Eileen has flown more than 30 different types of aircraft during her career.

After successfully completing her training, Collins made history on February 2nd, 1995 when she became the first woman to pilot a space shuttle. The space shuttle was called Discovery and it travelled to the Russian space station, Mir. In 1997, Eileen piloted another space shuttle which took equipment and supplies to the same space station.

In 1999, Eileen made history once again when Colombia became the first shuttle to be commanded by a female. Colombia's mission was to deploy a very special telescope called the Chandra X-ray Observatory. It can pick up emissions from very hot parts of the universe, including exploded stars. Chandra has gathered impressive data and continues to do so.

In July 2005, Collins commanded Discovery which transported supplies to the International Space Station. Before the space shuttle docked, Eileen guided Discovery in a somersault type manoeuvre – another first. This enabled the ISS crew to take photographs of its underside for any damage.

Did You Know?

In June 1963, Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman to travel into space. She spent three days orbiting the Earth 48 times!



Photo by Alexander Mokletsov, RIA Novosti archive, via Wikimedia Commons

Eileen's missions were certainly hazardous. When asked about the risks involved in her job, she commented, 'You have the people who 500 years ago got on these old ships and sailed across the Atlantic Ocean or they sailed across the Pacific Ocean, looking for something new, looking for a better life. Whatever they were looking for, they were explorers. And we still have people today that like to do that. For me, it's almost a need to explore.'

Collins has inspired other women who dream of becoming astronauts. She once said, "Whether your commander is a man or a woman doesn't really matter when it comes to getting your mission done."

By 2006, she had retired from both the U.S Air Force and NASA to spend more time with her family. Collins was selected as one of the top 300 women in history who have changed the world. She was also inducted into the U.S Astronaut Hall of Fame in 2013. When asked about the future of space flight, Eileen said that she'd like to see more people travelling into space as it is such an incredible experience.

1. List four topics which astronauts learn about during their training.

2. How long was Collins a flight instructor with the U.S Air Force?

9 years ☐

10 years ☐

11 years ☐

12 years ☐

3. What helped to inspire Collins to become an astronaut whilst she was in the US Air Force?

4. Find and copy the word in the text which is closest in meaning to 'hardworking' and 'dedicated'?

5. In 1999, what was the purpose of Colombia's mission?

6. What is the name of the Russian space station mentioned in the text?

7. Match up the statements correctly:

In 1956, she graduated from Air Force Test Pilot School.

In 1978, Collins was born.

In 1979, Collins became the first woman to pilot a space shuttle.

In 1990, she graduated with a degree.

In 1995, she became the U.S Air Force's first female flight instructor.

8. How would you describe Eileen in three words? Give reasons for your choices.

9. What life event do you think influenced Eileen the most in her career?
Explain your answer as fully as possible.

10. Eileen Collins was credited as one of the top 300 women who have changed the world. In your opinion, did she deserve this recognition? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Answers

Eileen Collins

1. List four topics which astronauts learn about during their training.
In training, astronauts learn about space technology, science, medical skills and how the International Space Station works. Also accept that they learn about the feeling of being in space by scuba diving.
2. How long was Collins a flight instructor with the U.S Air Force?
Answer - 11 years
3. What helped to inspire Collins to become an astronaut whilst she was in the US airforce?
Whilst on the U.S Air Force's undergraduate pilot training scheme, she saw female astronauts doing parachute training.
4. Find and copy the word in the text is closest in meaning to 'hardworking' and 'dedicated'?
Conscientious
5. In 1999, what was the purpose of Colombia's mission?
In 1999, Colombia's mission was to deploy a very special telescope called the Chandra X-ray Observatory to collect data.
6. What is the name of the Russian space station mentioned in the text?
Mir
7. Match up the statements correctly:

In 1956,	Collins was born.
In 1978,	she graduated with a degree.
In 1979,	she became the U.S Air Force's first female flight instructor.
In 1990,	she graduated from Air Force Test Pilot School.
In 1995,	Collins became the first woman to pilot a space shuttle.
8. How would you describe Eileen in three words? Give reasons for your choices.
Children's answers may include: brave, intelligent, adventurous, inspiring. They must support their word choice with evidence from the text. For example: I would describe Eileen as 'inspirational' because she was the first woman ever to command a space shuttle mission.

9. What life event do you think influenced Eileen the most in her career? Explain your answer as fully as possible.

Children's answers may vary but must be fully explained. For example, I think that visiting the air field as a young child would have influenced Eileen the most because she would have seen the planes and this would have motivated her to work hard so that she could fly them one day.

10. Eileen Collins was credited as one of the top 300 women who have changed the world. In your opinion, did she deserve this recognition? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Children's answers will vary but they must support their opinion with evidence from the text. For example: I think she did deserve the recognition because she completed so many dangerous missions and she was the first female shuttle commander in history.