

Eileen Collins: The First Woman to Pilot and Command a Space Shuttle

When Eileen Marie Collins was growing up, she wondered whether her family would be able to afford to send her to college; little did she know just how far she would go. Not only did Collins receive an undergraduate education, but she went on to master piloting not only planes, but space shuttles, and made history as the first woman to pilot and command a shuttle.



Born in 1956, Collins developed an interest in flying as a young girl. She participated in the Air Force ROTC program at Syracuse University, where she earned her undergraduate degree, and used her flight experience, a recommendation from a supervisor in the ROTC program, and her exceptional grades to earn admission into the Air Force Undergraduate Pilot Training program at Vance Air Force Base in Oklahoma.

Upon graduating from the training program in 1979, Collins served as a flight instructor at various locations until 1985. She returned to school for one year at the Air Force Institute of Technology, served as an assistant professor of math and a pilot instructor at the U.S. Air Force Academy from 1986 until 1989, and then attended the Air Force Test Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base in California. During her tenure at the school, NASA selected Collins for its astronaut program.

In February of 1995, Collins became the first female space shuttle pilot. She made history again in July of 1999 by becoming the first woman to command a space shuttle. Thus far in her ongoing career, Collins has logged more than 5,000 hours in thirty different kinds of aircraft and more than 537 hours in space.

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Air Force Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization

From multiple sources