



Mary Lacy posing as William Chandler. An illustration on page 159 in "Female Tars: Women Aboard Ships in the Age of Sail," written by Suzanne J. Stark, Naval Institute Press, 1996.

There are many documented cases from the 18th and 19th centuries of women who disguised themselves as men so they could work aboard naval and merchant ships.

One such young woman was Mary Lacy, alias William Chandler. We don't know why she decided, at nineteen, to run away from home, dressed in clothes from her brother's room. Perhaps she was tired of being a servant, a job she held for seven years.

In 1759 Mary, now William Chandler, joined the British Royal Navy. She served on board naval ships and spent seven years as an apprentice at Portsmouth Dockyard. She finally earned a certificate, proclaiming her a fully qualified shipwright.

Several years later she was forced to resign because of ill health. Lacy's true identity was later revealed but she was eventually successful in gaining a pension from the Royal Navy.