

Hi everyone, welcome to Infinite Women. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today we're talking about La Pola.

Policarpa Salavarrieta was a revolutionary spy in what is now Colombia. For almost a decade after the Colombian declaration of independence in 1810, freedom fighters battled the Spanish in what was then referred to as "new Grenada". As a seamstress, she offered her services to the wives and daughters of royalists and officers, and in their homes, she overheard conversations, collected maps and intelligence on the enemy's plans and activities, identified major royalists and found out who the royalists suspected of being revolutionaries. She also secretly recruited young men to the Revolutionary cause, supplying soldiers that were desperately needed. In Bogotá, she lived with and ostensibly worked for Andrea Ricaurte y Lozano, whose home was actually a centre of the resistance and a hub of intelligence gathering.

Although the independence forces would eventually succeed, forming the Republic of Gran Colombia in 1819, La Pola did not live to see it. She was arrested by the Spanish after her lover was captured with information she provided, and she was executed in 1817. She did not accept her fate meekly, cursing the Spaniards relentlessly the night before. When she and several other prisoners were taken to be killed by firing squad, she refused to kneel, yelling "I have more than enough courage to suffer this death and a thousand more. Do not forget my example." Although soldiers forced the prisoners to face away from their killers, when the squad began shooting, Policarpa turned around to face them.

Remembered as a heroine of the fight for independence, she has been commemorated in stamps and on money, and in 1967, the Colombian congress passes a law declaring that 14 November would be the "Day of the Colombian Woman" in honour of the anniversary of the death of "Our heroine, Policarpa Salavarrieta". She even has a tarantula named after her.

Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast and remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.