

Lt. Col. May O'Hara Awe
Dates of Service: 1960 - 1980
(Extracted from "50 Years of AF Dietitics")

Born in Charlotte, North Carolina Lt Col May O'Hara Awe served as an Air Force Dietitian from 1960 to 1980. She was also a founding member of RAFDA and led the organization as President for 8 years.

May Awe's first memory of dealing with food in large quantities was at the age of 15 where she helped her mother wrap 1/4 lb sticks of butter and package them into one pound boxes at the Foremost Dairy and Creamery in Americus, Georgia. Her mother worked at the creamery, so after school she would go there and work until she was ready to go home.



May Awe often told the story of how she joined the Air Force. The very first Air Force Dietitian she met was then Capt Filomena Manor when they were both graduate students at Ohio State University. Fil was AFIT sponsored who had traveled extensively as an Air Force Officer, and May was a civilian student. She learned a great deal about the military lifestyle from social and academic association with Fil Manor during and after graduate school. In addition, "Captain Manor's fur coat, her Karmen Ghia, her full salary as a graduate student along with her own apartment and her own furniture made the Air Force look pretty good!"

May joined the AF and entered active duty on 1 Sept 1960 after completing her Master of Science degree. May's early career was also greatly influenced by Col Fran Ballentine, her first boss at Wright-Patterson AFB, According to May's official biography, her most memorable AF Experience was her assignment as Research Dietitian, School of Aerospace Medicine, from 1965 to 1972, at Brooks AFB, San Antonio, Texas. Her duties included research and development of space food...the food which would be used to feed astronauts during the long, manned space flights. She helped to develop the first space food-in-a-tube. As part of her research, she made several flights in an F-100 aircraft to test the possibility of eating regular food out of pop-top cans in the environment of zero gravity aboard the F-100 test plane. The airplane would fly a parabola or arc to achieve weightlessness for short periods of time. Study subjects were filmed as they

consumed food during the weightless portion of the flight to determine if food would float off the utensil. That F-100 is now a permanent aircraft display at the front gate of Brooks AFB. This research supported the Manned Orbiting Laboratory Program and resulted in the trays with the round food compartments that NASA uses in its flights today. The compartments can be either heated or kept cool depending on the desire of the space traveler. In the course of her research, May also made many TDY trips to the Manned Orbiting Laboratory, Los Angeles Air Station, California. Later, the California laboratory was moved and is now a part of NASA.

As part of developing a new way of preserving and packaging food for space flight, part of her duties was to develop and maintain contacts with civilian food industry manufacturers. She spoke at many meetings, conventions, and conferences, telling the story of the Space Food Research Program. Her most memorable speaking engagement was at the Food Manufacturers of America convention in New York City. As one of their guest speakers she was privileged to have lunch with Joan Crawford, the famous actress, who was also attending the convention in her capacity as a member of the Board of Directors for Frito-Lay. All aspects of her duties at Brooks were professionally challenging and very much out in front of anything that was happening in civilian dietetics at the time. According to May, "At Brooks we were really 'blazing the trail!'"

In 2007 Lt Col Awe was honored at the annual Brooks AFB Company Grade Officers (CGOs) Dining Out as one of six distinguished guests who each had made significant contributions to the Air Force while stationed at Brooks. May later wrote about the Brooks dining out experience in an article in the RAFDA Newsletter. Each of the honorees was given a Thank You medallion and a Brooks City-Base medallion as mementoes of the special evening.

Another memorable experience was May's final AF assignment at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, and subsequent post-retirement job. She retired in Alaska, became President of the Alaska Dietetic Association, and took an interesting job with the North Pacific Rim Corporation as a nutritionist. She worked with the Native American Indians living in that area of Alaska giving food demonstrations and teaching basic nutrition and health using native foods as she traveled from village to village.

In retirement May was an avid golfer, enjoyed theatre, reading, and entertaining her many friends. Also known as a superb cook, annual dinners with May and

Robert were the highlight of the holiday seasons. Her friends say she was especially good at preparing elegant, delectable desserts.

She also volunteered for her church working several days/week as Co-Chair of the Bargain Boutique, a consignment shop. She was also President of the San Antonio District Dietetic Association in 1972. After 8 years as RAFDA President, she continued her involvement with friends and associates from AF days as RAFDA Newsletter Editor.

Lt. Colonel May O'Hara Awe is survived by her husband, Robert W. Awe, twin brother William Revill O'Hara and his family. Internment was at the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, San Antonio, Texas.