



Colonel Geraldine Pratt May

Colonel Geraldine Pratt May was born on 21 April 1895 in Albany, New York. She attended high school in Tacoma, Washington and Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania and graduated from the University of California at Berkeley. A social worker and Camp Fire Girls executive, she married in 1928 in Sacramento, California and moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma.

After her husband died, she joined the newly formed Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) in July 1942. She graduated with Class # 1 of the WAAC Officer Candidate School at Fort Des Moines, Iowa and was commissioned on August 29, 1942.

Colonel May was among the first women officers assigned to the Army Air Forces in March 1943. A month short of her 48th birthday she became the WAC Staff Director of Air Transport Command, which included 6,000 enlisted women and officers. In this capacity, she visited air bases throughout the U.S. and overseas to inspect and advise commanders on policies and assignments of Army women.

At the end of World War II, she was assigned to the War Department General Staff and served as the Army Ground Forces WAC Staff Director. In January 1948, May was transferred to Army Headquarters to formulate plans in the post-war military.

With the enactment of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act in June 1948, May received a Reserve commission in the newly created Air Force. She was appointed as the first Director of Women in the Air Force (WAF) and became the first woman Colonel in the Air Force. The newly created Air Force played a vital role in welcoming women into military service with many non-pilot women filling the higher ranks of leadership.

Colonel Mays, as the top Air Force woman, advised the Chief of Staff, Air Staff, and commanders on plans and policies for integrating women into the regular and reserve forces. Each service maintained a women's branch after the signing of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act.

In her book, "*Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*," retired Air Force Major General Jeanne Holm described May as a "tiny, soft-spoken woman," but "her low-key demeanor disguised a strong will and an iron determination" and as one "not given to compromise on matters of principle."

Although May left active duty in 1951 and went on to other government posts, Holm said the colonel "will forever be remembered by those with whom she served as a true pioneer of women in the military and an example of professionalism and grace as an Air Force officer."

In 1967 President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Public Law 90-130, lifting grade restrictions and strength limitations on women in the military.

Colonel May's military awards include the Legion of Merit, Army Commendation Medal, Women's Army Corps Service Medal, American Campaign Medal and the World War II Victory Medal.

Colonel May died on November 2, 1997 at age 102. She is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.