

BIOGRAPHY OF COL SUELLYN WRIGHT NOVAK USAF, RETIRED

Col Suellyn Wright Novak, USAF, Ret. was born June 4, 1951, in Sharon, Pennsylvania and raised on an orchard/ranch outside nearby Greenville, Pennsylvania. She graduated, with honors, from Reynolds High School in 1969 and then attended Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania. She graduated May 19, 1973 with a major in biology and a minor in secondary education. She was also commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in the US Air Force on the same date; fulfilling a dream from the third grade! Suellyn also had the distinction of being the first woman commissioned from Grove City's ROTC Detachment. Her first duty station, as a personnel officer (the first of her three careers in the Air Force) was at Richards-Gebauer AFB in Kansas City, Missouri. The next assignment was overseas to Incirlik Common Defense Installation in the Republic of Turkey for a short tour (15 months). She then transferred to the Biomedical Sciences Corps (her second career) and went to Internship Training at Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington DC (she would serve three tours and spend a total of 11 years at Andrews). Next it was on to Grand Forks AFB, ND as Chief, Laboratory Services. The next tour was back to Andrews AFB as Chief, Immunohematology (hematology and blood banking). Here she met and married her soul mate, Maj John E. Novak and they were the Air Force's first married lab officer couple. Next they transferred to Texas with John going to Brooks AFB and Suellyn going to Lackland AFB (on opposite sides of town). John then retired just before Suellyn received orders to Armed Forces Staff College at Norfolk, Virginia. John had a second heart attack on the trip from Texas to Virginia and was air-evaced back to Lackland for bypass surgery. Suellyn took a leave of absence and returned to Texas. She completed school in June 1987 and took up the reins of the US Air Force Blood Program at Headquarters Air Force, Surgeon General's Office at Bolling AFB, DC. She is the longest serving Chief of the Blood Program, being there 6 years. John passed away; he was #1 on the East Coast for a heart transplant, while Suellyn was on this tour. Next, in June 1993, it was off to Alaska to fill another childhood dream (and also to fill the last dream as she became a full colonel squadron commander in Alaska on this tour). She served as Chief, Laboratory Services and Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) Laboratory and Blood Program Consultant and took a yearly inspection tour of all PACAF sites as well as Army and Navy blood program elements. Her foresight, drive and determination allowed frozen blood to be prepositioned where it would be most needed. In 1994, she assumed command of the 3rd Medical Support Squadron at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska (starting her third career) and was then, on 1 Apr 1995, promoted to full colonel. She left, kicking and screaming bloody murder, for Andrews AFB in July 1997. Suellyn's retirement ceremony was at Bolling AFB, DC on July 30, 2003 and was attended by almost 300 people. Since retirement and after a year's traveling Suellyn returned to her home in Eagle River, Alaska and has 26 volunteer jobs, with her church and veterans organizations. The most important of which is Executive Director of the all-volunteer Alaska Veterans Museum. Suellyn also presents 12 different living history programs for audiences ranging from 2nd graders to adults.