Emily Prior, who made a long career working for the federal government in the military feeding segment, died Sunday, Dec. 23, 2012. She was 72.

Prior worked her way through the ranks during 40 years of distinguished service as a civilian in the Army that culminated in 2002 when she retired as chief, Concepts and Systems Division, Army Center of Excellence (ACES) at Fort Lee, Va.

A Division Chief since 1989, she was recognized for dedication and performance of duty as a Distinguished Member of the Regiment by the Quartermaster Corps in May 2001, and she was awarded the Military Order of St. Martin by the Association of Quartermasters in 2002.

After retiring in 2002, Prior remained an influence on the meals made available to service members, whether in dining facilities or the field. She founded and was chief executive officer of Military Food Program Consultants, a consulting firm that provided timely assistance to industry for more than 10 years.

“My mother strived throughout her long career with the U.S. Army to ensure that each member of the service had a good, quality meal,” said Mark Prior, one of her two sons, in his eulogy. “She was one of the leaders that implemented a new product line to make the food ‘taste like home’ for her boys and girls in the Army. And that is how she referred to them: Her boys and girls. I am sure none of them will ever know they had another mother out there that wanted to make sure they ate right, from the dining facilities at bases across the country to the battlefield.”

Her other son, Adam, concurred with the idea that feeding the nation’s soldiers was his mother’s passion. “At its most pure, that was her love: Worrying about that individual soldier out in the field, fighting for our country; what was in his or her mind, and how could we serve them better,” he wrote in his eulogy.

“She was instrumental in implementing the in-

“My mother strived throughout her long career with the U.S. Army to ensure that each member of the service had a good, quality meal.”
— Mark Prior
“Introduction of name brand products into MREs,” he continued. “A satisfying hot meal or the simple joy of a Hershey bar. Anything to make home feel closer. It was the details. It’s always the details.”

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT

Prior also manifested her passion for the soldier through memberships in the Research and Development Associates for Military Food and Packaging Systems Inc. (R&DA), International Food Service Executives Association (IFSEA), Association of Quartermasters, Tyson Leadership Network, and the National Association of College and University Food Services (NACUFS).

“Emily Prior was a giant in the military feeding segment,” recalled Mitchell Hartson, president, Creative Business Ideas LLC. (Hartson was director of operations at ACES during Prior’s tenure there.) “She was instrumental in both developing staffing standards and helping Army foodservice managers to understand the rationale for their staffs and how to make their facilities most productive while at the same time providing quality meals for soldiers 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.”

A sign of her dedication to and influence on military feeding came in 1990 with activation of ACES at the Army Quartermaster School. Hartson considers Prior to be instrumental in its planning and execution.

Prior became the first chief of the Concepts and Systems Division, and her team had the lead Army responsibility for writing the regulatory guidance covering the food program.

“This was an enormous task, as both combat feeding and cafeteria feeding were in transition as well due to newly developed tactical feeding equipment and rations,” Hartson said. “Prior helped introduce a la carte feeding concepts into Army dining facilities, and for the first time soldiers could have the option of purchasing only those items they wanted and paying in a manner similar to a commercial cafeteria.”

Later, Hartson explained, Prior played a role in the development and fielding of the first food program management information system, the Army Food Management Information System (AFMIS), which greatly improved the ability of managers around the world to order food supplies, manage inventory and manage kitchen operations.

She also was an early supporter of the Subsistence Prime Vendor program and the significant savings it achieves by reducing the warehousing and personnel needed to manage inventory, as well as a factor in the successful introduction of the privatization of Army food distribution for garrison dining facilities.

While Prior’s influence is seen in many facets of the Army Food Program, she also is remembered for her personal legacy. “Prior was unmatched with her strong industry contacts, and she hosted literally hundreds of business representatives from companies large and small, all desiring to supply food to the Army’s finest patrons: its soldiers,” Hartson said. “Prior is widely known throughout the governmental foodservice community and private industry. Her contributions to the improvement of the health and welfare of soldiers, airmen, Marines, sailors and Coast Guardsmen will have a lasting impact for years to come.”

Born Feb. 13, 1940, in Henderson, N.C., to the late Horace Gill Fuller and Pattie Lou Faulkner Fuller, Prior is survived by her husband Stephen R. Prior, sons Stephen Mark Prior and Adam Edwin Prior and their families.

Throughout her long career with the U.S. Army, Prior made sure service members ate right whether in the dining facilities or on the battlefield.

A voice for those who were afraid to speak, Emily Prior was neither quiet nor reserved; she asked the questions everyone wanted answered—and she did so with dignity, and with respect (often built through long-time association) for those to whom she directed her queries.

She became, in doing so, an advocate not just for her soldiers, but for U.S. military forces of every stripe—doing her best to see that wherever in the world they served, they were fed, and fed well.

Loyal friend … trusted mentor … she will be greatly missed throughout this industry, and her touch will be felt in military dining halls for years to come.

— Jerry Thornton