

Beyond Mitch's

A guide to surviving your first years in the Air Force

By Lewis Carlyle

Most Air Force Academy graduates can reach back into their history as cadets and come up with a fond memory of good food and great friends at the Mitchell Hall dining facility. Granted, there were probably some tough days during Basic Cadet Training when the new doolies spent more time staring at the eagle emblem on their plates than actually eating; but, for the most part, the Academy is widely considered to have fed its students quite well, and this is what presents a minor problem in the lives of many freshly commissioned second lieutenants—when did anyone at USAFA ever have time to learn how to cook?

Let's face it, with barely enough time to march in formation, finish Aero homework, cram for tests and go toe-to-toe on the athletic fields, no cadet was ever afforded the time or resources to learn how to whisk up a fluffy batch of scrambled eggs or sauté a balsamic chicken stir-fry. Our fierce graduates—for all of their war fighting skills—are probably more terrified of an empty kitchen than any battlefield they could ever encounter. Fortunately, the Association of Graduates has a solution.

Beyond Mitch's is a cookbook designed specially for the beginner chef. Its culmination of recipes have been created by experienced culinary artists to be easy, fun and rewarding. Just to be clear though, we're not talking about peanut butter and jelly and hamburger helper. Although the book is written with the new cook in mind, there are still plenty of recipes that seasoned chefs will find well worth while. The book is the brainchild of Donna Rosa, who is the consultant for Cadet Social Decorum at the Academy. In her many interactions with cadets who were on the cusp of graduating, she identified a need that many new officers were coming up against upon receiving their commission. Rosa explains, "We had an Air Officer Commanding of one of our squadrons who had collected a couple of recipes the previous year to send along with her cadets. Students at the Air Force Academy have a unique experience here; they don't live off campus, they don't have cooking facilities, and everything is taken care of for them during their four years here. Then they're out the door and on their own. Beyond Mitch's is not a gourmet cook book. Instead, it focuses on how to get started."

Rosa and her colleagues conceived, created and produced Beyond Mitch's in just four short months. The project began in February of 2010, and was published and placed into the hands of the graduating class before they walked across the stage in Falcon Stadium in May. "It was a monumental project," Rosa recalls. "We collected recipes from permanent professors, staff and even family members of cadets." Beyond Mitch's was designed by Heather Buchman to have a fresh and youthful appearance. The layout is easy to navigate, with color-coded tabs to separate each chapter.

The book also offers guidance on cooking techniques by showcasing an easy to use index of terms, set to define the more advanced kitchen lingo. To name a few ...



Julienne: to cut or slice vegetables, fruits or cheeses into match-shaped slivers.

Au gratin: topped with crumbs and/or cheese and browned in an oven or broiler.

Meuniere: dredged with flour and sautéed in butter (this author's personal favorite).

The index of herbs and spices is also a fantastic resource for anyone who is looking educate him or herself about the culinary arts. Like any good cookbook, Mitch's provides the necessary alternative information for new kitchen creations to take place. Using the spice index, curious chefs can easily embellish the recipes in the book by adding their own flavors. Some favorites include ...

Saffron: an aromatic, slightly bitter tasting spice used to flavor and color dishes such as bouillabaisse, chicken soup, rice, paella, buns and cakes. And Coriander: a mild, sweet, orangey flavor which is available whole or ground. It is common in curry powders and pickling spice and is also used in chutney, meat dishes, casseroles and Greek style dishes.


In addition to the myriad of easy to make recipes, Mitch's goes beyond the kitchen and into the fundamentals of Air Force life. Some helpful hints include the importance of being on time, how to set up a formal receiving line for an honored guest, formal and informal activity decorum (how to dress for any dinner occasion), dining etiquette when at someone's home, and avoiding unsavory social faux pas. In other words, it's a great way to brush up on your manners, impress superior officers and always make a good impression through social etiquette.

Donna Rosa elaborates on the book's multi-faceted uses. "Beyond Mitch's was designed for active duty members and their spouses. For instance, the rank insignia glossary in the back of the book is common knowledge for our graduates, but it's very handy for non-military spouses."

Additionally, for anyone who struggles with the seemingly endless supply of Air Force acronyms, the book has a solution for this as well. These aren't just the basics either, Mitch's digs in deep for the esoteric terms and even slang that seasoned airmen and officers throw around in front of newbies. Some of our favorites include ... OCONUS: Outside the Continental United States. RNLTD: Report No Later Than Date. And finally, NKAWTG: Nobody Kicks Ass Without Tanker Gas.

Rosa concludes, "We've received a lot of thank-you notes from cadets who have used the cookbook." She fondly recalls a letter sent from a group of 2010 graduates attending pilot training who use recipes from the book to form a dinner club. "It's very reassuring to know that these kids are using the book and that they're having fun with it. It's also a great resource for young couples who are just getting started in the kitchen."

A new version of the cookbook is currently in the works, and will be available in 2012. Rosa has high hopes for the next edition and the role that it will play in the future generations of freshly commissioned officers. "We'll have a lot more time to plan," Rosa recounts, "and there will be some great new recipes to come. I'm definitely looking forward to the next evolution of the book."

As of 2010, Beyond Mitch's is being issued to every cadet who graduates from the Academy. For anyone else who would like to pick up a copy of the book, the Association of Graduates is happy to accommodate. They make great holiday gifts, especially for young people just starting out. Books can be ordered from the AOG's online store, but copies are limited, so don't wait until it's LSSO (Long Since Sold Out). 

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