

ROBERT EHLEN INNIS, Colonel, U.S. Army (Ret.)
Pioneer physicist at American Optical

WESTBOROUGH- Robert Ehlen Innis, 85, of Westborough, a retired Colonel with the United States Army Reserves and a pioneer optical physicist, died on Thursday, July 2, 2009, at Hearthstone at Golden Pond in Hopkinton. He was the husband of Barbara Hudson Innis.

Born in Everett, MA, he was the son of the late Frederick and Catherine (Ehlen) Innis. He was a graduate of Mechanic Arts High School and earned his bachelor of science degree at Tufts University, his master of science in physics at the University of Delaware and a certificate of Gerontology at Worcester State College. Col. Innis was also a graduate and instructor for the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Ft. Leavenworth, KS.

During WW II he served with the U.S. Army in North Africa, France and Germany and remained an active U.S. Army reservist, retiring in 1981.

Col. Innis was employed as an optical physicist for American Optical in Southbridge and Framingham, retiring in 1984. As a member of AO's research department, his work concerned the improvement of glass and plastic lenses, the use of innovative glass fiber bundles to allow medical imagery of the heart valves and the fetus in utero without surgery. Col. Innis was instrumental in an experimental method for developing a trans-illumination of the ventricular septum in open heart surgery and the development of intraocular lenses now routinely used in cataract surgery.

An active community member of Westborough since 1969, previously living in Southbridge, Col. Innis was a member of the Evangelical Congregational Church, the American Legion, the New England Army Retiree Council and the Retired Officers Association. He was also a member of Siloam Lodge AF & AM, past Worthy Grand Patron O.E.S. and a former Boy Scout Leader. Upon his retirement, Col. Innis became a counselor for HOME (Housing Options for MA Elders) and was an accomplished photographer and woodworker.

Col. Innis was preceded in death by his wife Winifred (Papoojian) Innis and is survived by their children, Cathy E. Innis of San Francisco, CA, Bruce L. Innis of Haverford, PA, Mary R. Innis of Shrewsbury and David L. Innis of Barrington, RI. He is also survived by his step daughter, Sara E. Hudson of New York City and six grandchildren, Evan, Meredith, Madeline, Amelia, Hilary and Eleanor Innis. He was the brother of the late F. Lamont Innis, Walter Innis and Enid Peterson.

A Celebration of Life Service with military honors will be held on Saturday, July 11, at 11:00 a.m. in the Evangelical Congregational Church, West Main St., Westborough. Burial will be private. Calling hours at the Rand-Harper-Pickering Westborough Funeral Home, 62 West Main St., are Friday, July 10, 5 to 8 p.m. Masonic service will be conducted at 7:45 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Winifred Innis Memorial Scholarship, c/o Matt Desjardins, Westborough High School, 90 West Main Street, Westborough, MA or to the American Legacy Scholarship, The American Legion, PO Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.