

NANCY LEFTENANT-COLON, TRAILBLAZING ARMY NURSE AND AIR FORCE VETERAN, DIES AT 104

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Nancy Leftenant-Colon, the first Black woman to join the U.S. Army Nurse Corps after the military was desegregated in the 1940s, has died at the age of 104. She passed away earlier this month at a nursing home in New York. Known for quietly breaking barriers during her remarkable military career, Leftenant-Colon enjoyed a legacy of resilience, excellence, and service.

Born on September 29, 1920, in Goose Creek, South Carolina, to James and Eunice Leftenant, she graduated from Amityville High School in New York in 1939. Despite facing racial discrimination, Leftenant-Colon pursued her passion for nursing, graduating from Lincoln School of Nursing in 1941. According to her biography posted on [Tuskegeeairmen.org](https://tuskegeeairmen.org), when she initially sought to join the Armed Forces, she was denied due to her race. Undeterred, she persisted and was accepted as a reservist into the Army Nurse Corps in January 1945, becoming a Second Lieutenant and serving at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, treating wounded soldiers from World War II.

In 1948, after President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981 abolishing segregation in the military, Leftenant-Colon became the first Black woman integrated into the Regular Army Nurse Corps. Her career continued to flourish as she transitioned to the newly established U.S. Air Force, where she supported missions during the Korean and Vietnam Wars, serving in various locations, including Germany, Japan, Alaska, and Vietnam. As a Flight Nurse with the 6481st Medical Air Evacuation Group, she evacuated wounded soldiers from active war zones and was credited with saving countless lives.

Her groundbreaking service extended beyond the battlefield. In 1989, she became the first woman elected as National President of the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., where she held multiple leadership roles. Honored with numerous accolades, Leftenant-Colon received honorary doctorates from Tuskegee University and Mount Saint Vincent College and was inducted into the Long Island Air and Space Hall of Fame.

After retiring as Chief Nurse at McGuire Air Force Base in 1965, Leftenant-Colon continued to serve her community as a school nurse at her alma mater, Amityville High School, until 1984. In 2018, the school honored her with a new media center named in her memory.

"She was just an awesome person," her nephew Chris Leftenant told The Associated Press. "She never created waves when she was doing all this first this, first that. She never made a big thing of it. It was just happening."

There are no comments yet.