



# BIOGRAPHY

## A DOCUMENTED ORIGINAL TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

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Tuskegee, AL 36083

### **Nancy Leftenant-Colon**



Nancy Leftenant, also known as “Lefty”, was born on 29 September 1920 to the late James and Eunice Leftenant in Goose Creek, South Carolina. She graduated from Amityville High School, Amityville, New York in 1939.

Nancy Leftenant graduated from New York’s Lincoln School of Nursing in 1941. She then tried to sign up for the Armed Forces but was informed that the military was not accepting Black nurses. Nancy persevered and in January 1945, she volunteered and was accepted into the Army Nurse Corps as a reservist. Nurses of Color were not permitted into the regular Army at that time. She was given the rank of Second Lieutenant and her first assignment was to Lowell General Hospital, Fort Devens, Massachusetts where she treated World War II wounded. She and other black nurses impressed the doctors due to their superior performance so they were promoted to First Lieutenant after only 11 months.

In 1946, Major Leftenant-Colon was assigned to the 332<sup>nd</sup> Station Medical Group, Lockbourne Army Air Base (now Rickenbacker Air Force Base), Ohio. She became the first black woman integrated into the regular Army Nurse Corps. She was assigned at Lockbourne Army Air Field when then President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981, abolishing segregation in the United States military. In 1948 she applied for and received Regular Army Nurse Corps status. One year later, in 1949, the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group was deactivated at Lockbourne Air Force Base, ending the Tuskegee Airmen Experience.

Once the Tuskegee Airmen were disbanded, Major Leftenant-Colon switched services, joining the newly formed United States Air Force. She moved on to other assignments in support of the Korean Conflict and the Vietnam War. She served in Germany, Tokyo (Japan), Alaska, Ohio, Alabama, Maryland, New York and New Jersey. From 1953-1955, Major Leftenant-Colon was a Flight Nurse with the 6481<sup>st</sup> Medical Air Evacuation Group, Tachikawa, Japan. During this time, she set up hospital wards in Japan and in active war zones. She was credited with saving many lives during the wars. She had to wait five years for her certification as a Flight Nurse. Major Leftenant-Colon went on to an assignment as a Flight Nurse, evacuating French Legionnaires from the Dien Bien Pu Province, Vietnam. She was aboard the first medical evacuation flight into the defeated French outpost in Dien Bien Phu. Her final assignment was to McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey where Major Leftenant-Colon retired as Chief Nurse in 1965. Upon her retirement, Major Leftenant-Colon returned to Amityville High School, Amityville, New York as the School Nurse. She held that position from 1971 – 1984. In 2018, Amityville High School authorities announced that a new Media Center was being constructed to commemorate the life and military service of Major Leftenant-Colon.

She was initially a member of the East Coast Chapter of the Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., having joined at its inception in 1973. However, she is currently a member of the Hannibal Cox Chapter. Major Leftenant-Colon held numerous positions in TAI at the National level including National Treasurer, First Vice-President and the first female President of the organization

In 1989, Major Leftenant-Colon was the first woman elected to the office of National President, Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. (TAI). She also served as National Treasurer and First Vice President of TAI. Major Leftenant-Colon holds honorary degrees from the Tuskegee University and Mount Saint Vincent College.

Major Leftenant-Colon’s military education includes: Flight Nurse Courses

Major Lieutenant-Colon's civilian education includes: Nursing Degree, Lincoln School of Nurses, Bronx, New York. An honorary Doctorate of Humanities from Tuskegee University, Tuskegee Alabama and an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Mount Saint Vincent College in Riverdale, New York.

Major Lieutenant-Colon's military awards include: Unknown

Major Lieutenant-Colon's civic awards and honors include: Nominated for women of distinction, 1987; Dr James C. Evans award for leadership, 1988; honored at the Martin Luther King celebration, 1991; appeared in "Essence Magazine", January 1991; Special Congressional honor granted by the Commemorative Committee for World War II and the Legislative Black Caucus, presented by President Clinton, 1995, inducted into the Long Island Air and Space Hall of Fame, 1995; the Intrepid Sea-Air Space Museum Foundation Leadership Award, 1999; the Nassau County Community Service Award, 100 Black Men Award; Nassau-Suffolk Counties Service Award; the Kappa ETA Chapter of the Chi ETA Phi Sorority Inc. Award; the Cradle of Aviation Museum Award and the Big Brothers-Big Sisters "Pass It On" Award.

Major Lieutenant-Colon married Air Force reserve Captain Bayard K. Colon after retirement. Unfortunately, he died of a heart attack in 1972 before departing for the war zone. She and five of her twelve siblings served in the military. Her younger brother, a Tuskegee Airman pilot, died in April 1945 and his remains have yet to be found and identified.

