

Annie Lee Lawrence

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Lt. Colonel Annie Lee Lawrence was born Aug. 27, 1929, to the late Horace and Mary Lillie Brinkley Lawrence in Chadbourn, N.C. She was the fifth of 15 children. She peacefully entered into eternal rest on Sunday, June 7, 2020, at Cape Fear Valley Medical Center in Fayetteville.

“The Colonel,” as she was so affectionately called, was reared on a farm with her mother, father and siblings, nine of whom preceded her in death. Her love for people grew from the relationships she shared with her sisters, brothers, the community, and the example by which her parents lived. As was the legacy of her family, Ann joined First Missionary Baptist Church in Chadbourn at an early age, attended until she left home, and visited when she came back to Chadbourn.

Upon graduation from Westside High School, Ann moved to New York and worked in a toy factory to earn her tuition for nursing school.



Fulfilling her lifelong dream, she graduated from the Kate B. Reynolds School of Nursing, Winston-Salem. Wanting to be a Chief Nurse and to attain more than her RN certification, Ann joined the U.S. Air Force in 1956 and ultimately received her B.S. degree in Nursing from the University of Omaha in Nebraska and her Master's degree in Public Administration from the University of Ohio. Pursuing the heights of excellence, Ann completed 36 hours of graduate studies toward a doctorate in Public Health Administration.

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“The Colonel” went all over the world in dedicated service to God and her country. After joining the Air Force, Ann’s first assignment as a nurse was at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. From there, she went to Japan, then Andrews Air Force Base, in Washington, D.C. She was named Head Nurse/Surgical Services at Wheelus Air Force Base in Libya, North Africa and then back to Ohio as Head Nurse-Female Ward at Lockbourne Air Force Base. Ann became an administrator/supervisor of the “26th Aeromedical Staging Flight and the Drug Detoxification Unit” in Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. As her dedication would have it, she was the last female nurse to leave the hospital at Cam Rah Bay. Her next home base was in the Phillipines at another “26th Aeromedical Staging Facility” which was the last stop before coming back to the U.S. to perform duties for wounded soldiers, which included POWs. In May, 1976, Ann was assigned to Shepherd Air Force Base near Wichita Falls, Texas as a supervisor of “Nurses Management Training.” At age 46, “The Colonel” was the second highest ranking Black woman in the United States Air Force. As she stated so many times in the humblest manner possible and it is so true, “I paid my dues.”

When she retired, Ann made her home in Fort Washington, Maryland, where she continued to serve by teaching Geriatric classes to future nurses at the local community college. In 1970, she became a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, Epsilon Epsilon Omega Chapter, Champayne, Illinois and became a Golden member in 2020, denoting 50 years of service to the sorority.

Other than God, family, and close friends, what Ann loved the most was The Westside Alumni Association; a cause very dear to her heart. She implemented and supported many fundraisers and programs in order to see the Westside Alumni Building come to fruition. It is

standing today, serving the Chadbourn and surrounding communities, in large part, because Annie Lawrence would not give up on the dream to see it built.

Even though she did not have children of her own, "The Colonel" instilled in her nieces, nephews, and young people in the community that education is one of the most important attainments in life and invested time and money for their educational pursuits.

She often "tested" the nieces and nephews to make sure they were on their "A" game. An inspiration and role model to anyone who knew her, not only did she have a passion for young people and education, Ann loved the elderly and would make sure that any she knew were "okay." If not, she did what was necessary to make it right.

Ann received many honors and awards during her lifetime, but none could have been more rewarding than being chosen as the guest of honor and luncheon speaker for her hometown, Chadbourn's 44th Annual Strawberry Festival and the first Black Marshall of the May, 1976 44th Annual Strawberry Festival Parade.

An article in *The News Reporter* dated May, 20, 1976 reflected: "She has spent much of her life proving that drive, determination, and courage to dream the impossible can be the recipe for a success worth savoring." In that same article, reflecting on her career, "The Colonel" was quoted as saying, "When that door of opportunity opened, I wanted to have my bags packed and ready to go. You know, that's a rewarding thing to write out your objectives for your life and meet them. To God Be the Glory!"

A celebration of life service for Lieutenant Colonel Annie Lee Lawrence will be held at 11 a.m. Saturday, June 13, at Belvue Cemetery, 1055 Clarendon-Chadbourn Rd., Chadbourn, with Rev. Virgil H. Reaves officiating. D&A Funeral Home of Chadbourn is serving the family.

Ann will be lovingly remembered by two sisters, Mary J. Flowers and Evangeline McBride both of Chadbourn and a sister like a daughter, Clara Dunn (Wayne) of Whiteville; two brothers, Roosevelt Lawrence of Chadbourn and Walter Lawrence (Shirley) of Durham; two sisters-in-law, Queen Lawrence and Gracie Lawrence, both of Durham; very dear friends, Lt. Colonel Minnie and Colonel Chester Beverly Jr., Ms. Elaine Casey, Mrs. Doris Dees, Mrs. Joyce Davila, Major Verlyn Baker, Mr. Ron Wallace, Mrs. Bertha Thomas and Mrs. Edith Patterson,; and many other cherished nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends.