

# Celebrating Lou Covington's 100th Birthday and Her Service in the U.S. Navy

News Sections: Guest Posts

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Margaret Lucille Covington, known by her friends as Lou, was born in 1919 in Rockingham City, North Carolina. She attended high school in Rockingham and upon graduating, she pursued a career in nursing. Her nursing career led her to enlist with the United States Navy where she became one of the first to enlist with the Navy Nurse Corps as it expanded its ranks in preparation for U.S. involvement in World War II.

For her first assignment, Lou was stationed in Guam. There, she served as a flight nurse on one of the Douglas C-47 hospital aircraft. Lou served with several Navy corpsmen and flew missions between Guam and the island of Okinawa, located 1,500 miles east, transporting supplies into Okinawa and evacuating wounded soldiers.

Lou was in Okinawa from the beginning of the U.S. campaign, landing on the beaches with U.S. forces on the day of the invasion. She recalled climbing stacks of stretchers full of wounded men to administer penicillin during the first days of combat. The intensity of working as a flight nurse in the

Pacific stayed with Lou over the years. Landing in an active combat zone not only meant dealing with a high number of casualties, but also facing enemy fire. In addition, the C-47 was not pressurized, forcing Lou and her crew to fly the 8-hour journey in low altitudes with high turbulence, causing both motion sickness and risk to some of the more severely wounded. Despite these difficulties, Lou and her fellow flight nurses persevered, and played an essential role in saving the lives of many wounded U.S. service members.

After spending a year stationed in Guam, Lou was sent back to the United States to attend nursing school at the University of Colorado. There, she earned a bachelor's degree in nursing before returning to work with the Navy.

Lou spent the remainder of the war stationed stateside, spending two tours in Charleston, South Carolina and one in Oakland, California where she treated wounded soldiers returning from the European and Pacific theaters. After the war, Lou began serving as a hospital supervisor. During this time, she played an instrumental role in building and establishing new Naval hospitals in both Puerto Rico and Guantanamo Bay. After her time serving as a hospital supervisor, Lou began work as a Navy recruitment officer. She held this position throughout the 50s and into the early 60s.

In Oct. 1962, Lou was at home in Rockingham City with her mother when the events which became known as the Cuban Missile Crisis began. Concerned of the possibility of a large conflict with Cuba, Lou rushed back to the Naval hospital in Puerto Rico in the event she would be needed to treat casualties. Luckily, that day never came. Following the resolution of the crisis, Lou returned to the states and continued her work as a Navy recruiter for the remainder of her Naval career.

After 22 years of service, Lou retired at the rank of commander, an uncommon accomplishment for women at that time. Though she had been up for promotion to captain, Lou

chose to end her service with the Navy in order to continue her work in nursing. She returned to her home state of North Carolina and began working as a teacher at Richmond Community College and later Sandhills Community College, ultimately serving as chair of the nursing department.

Even after retiring, Lou continued to serve her community. She participated in the Meals on Wheels program well into her 80s and maintained active involvement in her church and community. Today she resides in Laurinburg, North Carolina, where she celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on Jan. 7, 2019.

Thank you for your service, Lou!

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Graphic by Emma Catlett. Emma is a sophomore at Baylor University and is studying Political Science with a French minor and Pre-Law concentration.