



Lauderdale: Beaufort County Marine leaves primer for America



A Marine hands the folded American flag to Lucinda Washington, wife of the late Rev. Frankie Washington, during his funeral at the Beaufort National Cemetery on Friday in Beaufort. Delayna Earley

By David Lauderdale

dlauderdale@islandpacket.com

Frankie Washington was the clear, unmistakable, unchallenged ruler of a northern Beaufort County family that numbered 14 children, 43 grandchildren, 63 great-grandchildren and nine great-great-grandchildren.

I list the numbers to stress his influence.

But when he was laid to rest Friday in the Beaufort National Cemetery, his national influence was on display.

Washington, 90, was a Montford Point Marine.

A prized keepsake in his home in Stuart Point is a replica of the Congressional Gold Medal he and all the African-Americans who integrated the Marine Corps received in 2012. The men of that blacks-only training camp outside Camp Lejeune, N.C., were cited “for outstanding perseverance and courage that inspired social change in the Marine Corps.”



In 2012, 63 years after the camp they trained at closed its doors, 368 surviving Montford Point Marines were recognized by Congress with the nation's highest civilian honor, the Congressional Gold Medal. Submitted





You had to have a purpose

But that was in 1942, when Washington was drafted from vegetable fields lapping against the Whale Branch River to serve four years as a private first class.

And this is today, when kids with much greater opportunity lack the core values of the old Marine, civil service worker, entrepreneur and soft-spoken pastor.

His ran his family like a drill instructor's sing-song cadence: School, church, back home, work; school, church, back home, work.

Straight back chair

Frankie Washington was from an influential family. His grandfather built the Second Gethsemane Baptist Church in Stuart Point. His mother was the region's midwife. His brother, Lawrence "Baby" Washington, was a wealthy entrepreneur and behind-the-scenes political powerhouse.

Frankie met Lucinda, the girl he would marry, as they walked together down Stuart Point Road to catch the bus to work at U.S. Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island. They were married in 1948, and it wasn't long before nurses at the hospital would tell them when the left with a new baby, "See you next year."

Frankie Washington worked more than 30 years in civil service as a truck driver and courier at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort. When he got home, he went to work in his own businesses, chopping wood or hauling dirt. He was a Sunday school teacher, a deacon and for 13 years the pastor at Second Gethsemane Baptist Church near his home.

You might fuss in your mind, but not out loud.

His children may have had rice bags for diapers back in that era, but they never went hungry, were never on welfare, and never — no, never — talked back.

I sat down in the living room with some of this children and grandchildren. His chair sat empty. It was no La-Z-Boy. It was a straight back chair by the side door, that only he used. And when he entered, everyone got quiet. And busy.

What his family told me should be known as the Primer for America.

Frankie Washington was a no-nonsense disciplinarian. He didn't yell or scream. There were some whippings, and he was known to say, "I'll set your hide on fire." But usually all it took was the look. "He would never tell you but once."

"Rebel?" said his fourth child, Peter Washington. "No, no, no. You couldn't do that."

He was the ruler of his castle, and everyone knew it. He once told a grandson to put his shirt on because he was the only man who could be without a shirt in his house.

He had structure. There was no idle time. No lying around the house watching television. He kept a 3-ton flatbed truck for private jobs. His 10 boys were his workforce, and if there wasn't a paying job, they cleaned cemeteries or cut a neighbor's grass.





He was big on clean, short fingernails — and clean ears. “He was hard on that,” said his youngest daughter, Connie Washington. “Probably from the Marine Corps.”

You had to make eye contact. That was huge for Frankie Washington.

And you had to say, “Good morning.” And when he said, “Good morning,” he expected a crisp “good morning” in return.

He didn’t allow the boys to put their hands in their pockets, and he demanded straightforward answers, not a bunch of shifting, shuffling and maybes.

He taught this to his granddaughter Kendra Washington in a way she’ll never forget. He was going in a store and asked her if she wanted anything. She said she didn’t care what he got her. He came back with a bottle of castor oil. “I learned you get what you ask for,” Kendra said.

He expected the grandchildren to work, but he paid them. They might get \$12 cash and a No. 1 extra value meal at McDonald’s. It was to teach them about work, spending and saving. Grandchildren remembered that “when it’s gone, it’s gone.”

‘A purpose’

He didn’t like foolishness or goofing around. “Stop showing your teeth so much,” he’d say. He’d walk by and ask, “What are you doing with yourself?”

“You had to have a purpose,” Connie Washington said.

We’re dealing with a whole generation that doesn’t show respect.

He didn’t tolerate kids fighting or arguing among themselves.

When his sons were grown, he told them to always keep \$100 on them for a rainy day.

When the school year started, his children got the pep talk. Behave. You’re not the teacher. You are to go there to learn. Pay attention.

He’d say, “I ain’t going to wake you up from your sleeping.” That was his way of telling them the world would quickly pass them by.

Report cards were to be placed on his bed or table. “You did not want a reaction,” his daughter said. Frankie Washington found his personal time in his john boat. It was calming, and it put food on the table: shrimp, crab, mullet. And it got idle hands busy heading shrimp when he got home on Saturday morning.

“You might fuss in your mind, but not out loud,” a grandchild said.

He kept chickens, hogs, mules and cows to help ends meet. He brought old food home in his 1983 red Dodge Ram pickup to feed the animals. That included dogs and cats. When he’d pull into the yard, cats would come pouring out of the woods.

“Everybody knew they could get a meal here — even the animals,” Connie Washington said.

Manners First

The family worked hard six days a week but shut it down on Sunday. Sunday school and church were a must. And no one was to work on the Lord’s Day. It’s one of the Ten Commandments.





Checkers, playing cards and marbles were always off limits. That was considered gambling. He always told his family, “God will provide.”

Clayton Washington, the baby of the 14 children, works in the public schools of Delaware. He says children are missing the main lessons of life.

“We were first taught that manners will take you farther than money by our grandmother,” he said. “It was a profound statement back then, and it definitely is still true today. We’re dealing with too many students from this generation who don’t show respect. I see too many students disrespecting teachers. They’re missing that piece — that you have to show respect, and that’s the part my family taught us.”

Clayton Washington started teaching it, and it has grown into a foundation he calls Manners First. “This is a discipline move,” he said.

Kind of like his father’s words when the Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort honored him for his Congressional Gold Medal.

“There isn’t anything better than Marines,” Frankie Washington told them. “Keep on working, be faithful to each other, be honest with each other, because when you get in the woods out there, you’re going to need all the help you can get.”

