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# *The GUARDSMAN FLYER*

SUFFOLK COUNTY AIRPORT. WESTHAMPTON BEACH. N.~ 11978

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## Black History Month



Several members of the 106th ARRG were on hand during the February drill weekend to explain displays and posters celebrating and honoring Black History Month. Seated are SSgt Denise Cambra and Social Actions Officer Major Philip Franzese. Standing (l) **Franklin Spencer** and Captain Roy F. Pitter.

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## Black History Month

Blacks in the military have a long history of courage. Black men and women have fought bravely against America's foes since 1652. Both free and enslaved blacks fought in the colonial wars. They died assisting the birth of the American nation -- more than 5,000 blacks served in the Continental Army. Blacks shed their blood in the War of 1812, assuring the results of the Revolution.

According to President Abraham Lincoln, Afro-American participation in the Civil War insured Northern victory and preservation of the Union. More than 186,000 blacks served in the Union Army. Two black cavalry regiments -- the 9th and 10th -- played a large role in the "winning of the West" during the quarter century after Appomattox. These four regiments later fought in Cuba during the Spanish-American War.

In "the war to make the world safe for democracy" more than 40,000 of the 200,000 black American soldiers sent overseas served in combat. One of the leading Americans was the 369th Regiment which fought so well with the French it was awarded the *CROIX DE GUERRE*. Two black divisions also saw action during World War I. These two divisions, along with many other black combat units, also saw action in the Second World War. But, ironically, most of these black men and women were denied the very freedom, equality and citizenship they believed they were fighting for. Their contributions to the nation were generally unrecognized and unappreciated. Even in

wartime, blacks faced the same inequalities they found in civilian life. Not until the early stages of the Korean War (1950-53) did the black soldier fight in other than a segregated status. The 24th Infantry would be the last all black combat unit.

Equality in the armed forces took steps toward reality in 1948 when desegregation was ordered throughout the services by President Harry Truman. During the last 37 years, a policy of integration has expanded to one of equal opportunity in all aspects of military life. Race relations, education, and training programs are designed to foster the active support and participation of all service people.

The 106th observed Black History Month with heritage foods, a special display of photographs, films and books on black achievements. Black History Month is an annual observance to recognize the contributions made by Black Americans to the nation and to the world.



The Afro-American Family:  
Historical Strengths for the New Century

February - Black History Month

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
Major John L. Sullivan

MANAGING EDITOR - MSgt Joe. Ricker  
SSgt Robert Mazzochi

LAYOUT EDITOR - MSgt Christian Foerster  
\*\* PHOTOGRAPHERS \*\*  
SSgt Dwayne Davis

SSgt Vincent Ciano

GRAPHICS  
AMN James Palace

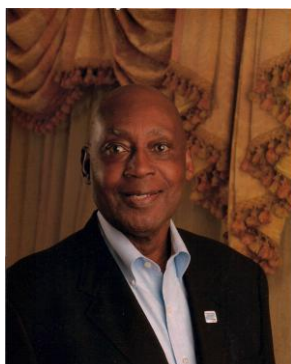
Westhampton Beach, New York. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the United States Air Force, The National Guard Bureau or the New York Air National Guard. All submissions are subject to edit. ~\*\*\*\*\*106TH AEROSPACE RESCUE & RECOVERY GROUP COMMANDER  
(Information reprinted above was found in a newsletter, *The Guardsman Flyer*, (Volume XI, Feb 85, Number 108) published by the 106th Aerospace Rescue & Recovery Group, Suffolk County Airport, Westhampton Beach, NY 11978.)



## HIS STORY + HER STORY = OUR HISTORY...



“Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some stay for awhile and leave footprints on our hearts. And we are never, ever the same.”



**Frank Spencer**, as we have come to know him, began his very prolific life on a cotton farm in Scranton, North Carolina. Franklin D., his given name, was the ninth of nine children of Oney and Robena Spencer. As a child, his life was full of love in a very close knit family. His job on the farm was to work the soil and feed the animals and, of course, to go to school and attend church. Most of the black people in Scranton did not attend school regularly because their families were sharecroppers and they could only attend school when the white farm owner did not need them to work. Fortunately, Frank attended school regularly because his family owned their farm. During his elementary years, he had to walk four miles to school because the black children were not allowed to ride the school buses. By the time he reached high school, things had changed somewhat and he could ride the bus. In fact, he became the bus driver at age sixteen. When Frank graduated from Hyde County O. A. Peay High School in May 1951, his brother, Oney, gave him a trip to New York, as a graduation present.

The Korean War had begun in 1950 and that event was engraved in his mind. So, in November 1951 following his graduation from high school, Frank enlisted in the Air Force, took basic training at Samson Air Force Base in New York and was assigned to New Castle County Airport in Wilmington, Delaware. Then barely nineteen years old, he was given a two year tour of duty in Germany at the Ramstein Air Force Base. As Frank was on his way to Germany in 1953, the Korean War was ending. Yet, he looked with some trepidation to what lay ahead. The Air Force had been integrated for a short time and there was still discrimination and prejudice. Frank decided that he needed more than a high school diploma to really compete in any setting. Thus, as he completed his Germany tour, he applied from abroad and was admitted to college in the United States.

In 1955, as an Airman Second Class, Frank remained in the Air Force by joining the Air Force Reserve while attending A & T University in Greensboro, NC from which he graduated in 1959 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology. Always advancing his knowledge base, now Senior Master Sergeant Spencer earned a Master of Science Degree in Education from Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York and completed postgraduate studies at C. W. Post, Howard University, and Air University of the United States Air Force, complementing his diverse talents with other skills in family counseling, educational law, and instructional techniques. Years later, as a member of the 106<sup>th</sup> Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Group, Frank served as the Superintendent of Medical Services. After a total of more than 30 years in the military, SMSgt Spencer had all his paper work in order to retire in 1993. When Desert Storm erupted, his retirement orders were rescinded and he was ordered to report for duty. However, since he had already made plans to attend the New York NAACP State Conference, he was allowed to go and showed up in his uniform. With sentiment in his favor, his retirement orders were restored a month later.

Putting into practice what he had acquired, Mr. Spencer began his civilian career as a high school biology teacher in the Brentwood School District in 1960 and taught zealously the subject he loved until 1974 when he became Supervising Attendance Teacher with the same district. With his military training and higher education experiences, he was a perfect fit to deal with the problems of youth related to their school attendance and performance. The opportunity to counsel students and their parents presented him with new insights regarding family and community factors affecting our youth and their school achievement, as well as their future success as productive citizens, and was the impetus for his “dropout prevention program,” formulated with the assistance of the New York State Attendance Teachers Association. These new responsibilities prompted Mr. Spencer to join local civic organizations with an expressed interest in improving the quality of life for all who were distressed with and underserved by our schools and government agencies.

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## HIS STORY + HER STORY = OUR HISTORY

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Senior Master Sergeant Spencer became a charter member of the Brentwood Youth Development Corporation, was very active in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) during the sixties, and became a life member of the Islip Town NAACP, serving for many years as its Education Chairman and effectively obtaining numerous positive results for students and parents in local school districts whose educational rights had been violated or denied. In this position, Mr. Spencer also had continuous dialogues with local superintendents, school board trustees, community organizations, Family Court attorneys, and government agencies, such as Suffolk Housing Services which helped people in need secure adequate housing in Suffolk County. He also represented NAACP on the Town of Islip Economic Development Zone Board and its Anti Bias Task Force. In addition, Mr. Spencer was elected to the Board of Directors of the Suffolk County Teachers Federal Credit Union and continues to serve on that board of trustees today, as Chair of the Marketing Committee and a member of the Personnel Committee.

Having received too many awards and honors to mention in this story, an excerpt from a rather lengthy resume gives an idea of his dedication to whatever the endeavor and the appreciation of those who benefitted from it: "A 1969 Senior Edition of the school paper was dedicated 'to Mr. Spencer in grateful recognition of his work on the Human Relations Council.' and Letters of appreciation from the president of New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) for planning and conducting a 'PEOPLE to PEOPLE' Conference for 1,300 teachers and administrators in the Brentwood School District, May 1977." Mr. Spencer was also a winner of the 1995 New York State United Teachers Community Service Award, as well as the recipient of an award presented in 1990 by the Brentwood Board of Education president, Mr. Anthony Felicio, for "outstanding achievement as an educator and humanitarian."

Among the personal attributes of Mr. Spencer is his deep, compassionate concern and love for all mankind. This honorable quality is so aptly expressed in the following excerpt written about him:

"As an Air Evacuation Medical Technician, [Frank Spencer] flew many live missions in the USA, Europe, and Japan. He experienced great pleasure in giving comfort and assurance to medical patients during Air Evacuation Flights. His most memorable experience occurred during the late sixties when he spent three of his Annual Training tours evacuating Vietnam casualties from Japan to the United States."

Yet, Frank Spencer's most treasured honor is the love of his life, his dear wife, the former Vernell Andrews, to whom he had been married since 1959 and their son, Wayne, who presently is on contract with the government in Saudia Arabia. The Spencer Family has been an asset to the Suffolk County community and their legacy continues to grow and will live on as a shining example of lives well lived.

Respectfully submitted,

*Daphne Somerville*, ITBNAACP Historian

(The information reported in this article was learned from conversations with Senior Master Sergeant Frank Spencer, correspondences he shared with me, newspaper articles, and ITBNAACP records.)

**Islip Town Branch NAACP is hosting a "Unity Reception & Black History Month Celebration"**

**on**

**Wednesday, February 15, 2011**

**7:00 PM – 9:00 PM**

**Brentwood Public Library Auditorium**

Come celebrate UNITY with a culturally diverse group of community members that are making a difference. Join us as we come together to recognize those individuals in our community that embody the spirit of unity.