



CASEMATE MUSEUM FOUNDATION NEWS



Who Was Barbara Jean Sanford?

Colonel Barbara Sanford was born in New Jersey in 1926 but grew up in Portsmouth, Virginia. Both of her parents instilled the importance of service and education in her through their work. In 1947, Sanford graduated from Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina, an all-women's college founded through the efforts of freedpeople following the American Civil War. In the 1950 census, she is listed as a social welfare investigator and is mentioned in several newspaper articles as a "visiting teacher" experimenting with educational techniques for the I.C. Norcom High School, the first high school for Black students in Portsmouth. In 1955, she graduated with her master's degree in education sociology from New York University.

In 1960, she joined the Women's Army Corps (WAC), and with her advanced degrees, was sent to Officer Candidate School. She completed the Officer Basic Course at Fort McClellan, Alabama in 1961. Sanford was promoted to the rank of Major in 1967 while attending the Student Officer Career Course at Fort McClellan. During her service, she spent two tours in Germany and one in Korea. In the mid-1970s, she was named director of combat developments for the Army's Military Police School at Fort McClellan. By 1978, she was a Lieutenant Colonel, assigned to Fort Monroe as the director of personnel and community activities. The WAC company at Fort Monroe had been inactivated in 1974 and the Women's Army Corps had been disestablished in 1978. Sanford came to Fort Monroe, not as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Women's Army Corps, but simply as a Lieutenant Colonel in a gender-integrated Army. On January 2, 1979, she was made acting deputy post commander of Fort Monroe. She retired from the Army as a Colonel in 1980, having served twenty years. Colonel Sanford passed away in 1992 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.



In a January 9, 1979 article in the Daily Press, Sanford is referred to as a "double minority," being both a woman and Black serving in a leadership position in the Army. Sanford responded "I really think it's great...but I do feel I have to try a little harder and be a little better." For many Black Americans, this need to be infallible continues to weigh heavily on their shoulders. Sanford's exemplary education and career show that she was constantly striving for perfection.

The Story in the Stitches

INTERPRETING THE FIGURES

What are they wearing and why?
It's a common question we hear. Join us for this special Community Forum as we explore in detail the design of The Figures, the first sculpture of the African Landing Memorial at Fort Monroe. We will share the extensive research, multi-institutional collaboration, and community care that went in to dressing The Figures, including how the selected clothing illuminates the lived experience of the wearer.

Event Information

Wednesday, August 26th, 2026
6pm - 7pm in the Visitor Center
30 Ingalls Road, Fort Monroe
FREE - Registration Required
Livestreaming on Youtube - Fort Monroe



Scan QR Code
To Register



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