



Nellie Yocum Riley

June 12, 1949 - October 21, 2022

Nellie Mitchell Yocum Riley

Nellie Mitchell Yocum Riley, age 73 of Florence, passed away October 21, 2022.

Nellie's Story

One can sum-up Nellie's life with one word, "Service", whether as a teacher, social worker, loving wife, mother, widow, mentor, sister, friend, or as an officer in the United States Air Force at a time when the number of women in the Air Force was minimal at best. Moreover, she was a true pioneer—who else do you know who built her own house from the ground up, which is still standing today. All these traits are the foundation of what contributed to Nellie's highly successful military career.

Right off the bat, she was tested...she was placed as the Administrated Officer in an all-male flying squadron. Did that phase her? No. She quickly earned their respect and admiration. She so impressed the Base Commander, she was selected to be his Executive Officer as a Lieutenant, a position usually reserved for a higher-ranking officer. She excelled at managing his daily and long-range work and early on showed her expertise for strategic and logical thinking. Nellie's leadership, here and throughout her career, brought

people together to work the most challenging issues to reach long-lasting solutions.

Over the course of her career, Nellie served in positions at base-level, Major Command, the Air Force Personnel Center, and the Air Staff. She also was sent to Guam as a Commander with responsibility for cleaning up issues revolving around military personnel, as well as Department of Defense Schools. She was lauded for her team-building and diplomatic interface with the local populace. She was considered a rising star from the start, a hard worker, a strategic thinker and the “go-to” person on many complex issues with far-reaching impact. In addition, she was competitively selected for and attended Senior Service School in Montgomery, AL. She was right at home. You could take Nellie out of Alabama, but you couldn’t take Alabama out of Nellie, and you didn’t dare bother her while Alabama has a game on TV……. "ROLL TIDE".

Within the Personnel community she quickly earned a reputation for her “git’r done” approach, dynamic leadership, superb communication skills, stupendous work ethic and making the right things happen where others had struggled or failed. She was a people person who brought groups together to develop and form lasting results. These qualities brought her to the attention of leadership at the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC), where young officers were hand-selected, and “tested” to see if they possessed the guts, tenacity and diplomacy to serve at higher demanding jobs through-out the Air Force.

Nellie’s stellar reputation and many successes put her on the “short list” kept by many General Officers who were always looking for young talent. This put her on course for a number of high-powered, high-risk jobs where failure is not an option, and the stakes are high, the first was in the Pentagon.

Nellie served more than one tour of duty in the Pentagon, within the

Directorate of Personnel, working for 2- and 3-star bosses. She built briefings for three and four-star generals involving short and long-term personnel policies and strategic objectives. She and her team developed and coordinated plans and built cradle-to-grave sustainment programs for military officers and enlisted personnel issues, which also included readiness and joint issues. She interfaced daily with the Air Force Personnel Center, Personnel Air Staff, the Air Force Secretariat, the Joint Staff, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and Congressional staffers. Not only could she see the way ahead, but she mentored and trained the next generation of future leaders. Nellie received many awards and commendations for her achievements.

Nellie retired after 27 years of service to her country and the United States Air Force. Throughout her life, she never lost touch with her beginnings and the importance of service to country and others. Nellie never stopped caring, never stopped working with people, and never stopped learning—even earning her PhD after retiring. She loved her country, loved Alabama, and loved her family and many friends. Her sisters- and brothers-in arms will sorely miss her. May Big Al be with her in her place of rest. Roll Tide!

She is survived by her brother, Charles Mitchell (Helen); sister in law, Peggy May; nephews, Steven Benefield, Brandon Charles Mitchell (Emily); nieces, Sherry Isbell (Jeff), Tammy Benefield; several great nieces and nephews; special friends Rick & Fran Martin, if one was in trouble the other was holding her hand; also, a host of cousins and Air Force friends that will miss her dearly.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Ernest and Ruth Mitchell; husband, Jerry Dewayne Yocum; son, Timothy Dewayne Yocum and sister,

Norma Mitchell Benefield and her beloved four-legged companions, Allie and Tillie.

Visitation will take place on Tuesday, October 25, 2022 at Pinkard Funeral Home of Russellville Chapel, from 12noon-2pm with the funeral service following at 2pm. Interment will be at Oak Grove Cemetery.

Pinkard Funeral Home of Russellville assisted the family.

Cemetery Details

Oak Grove Cemetery

Russellville, AL

Previous Events

Visitation

OCT **25**. 12:00 PM - 2:00 PM (CT)

Pinkard Funeral Home - Russellville
27305 Hwy 24 East
P.O. Box 502
Russellville, AL 35653
(256) 332-7772
info@pinkardfh.com
<https://www.pinkardfh.com>

Funeral Service

OCT **25**. 2:00 PM (CT)

Pinkard Funeral Home
27305 Hwy 24 East
P.O. Box 502
Russellville, AL 35653
(256) 332-7772
[http://www.pinkard fh.com](http://www.pinkardfh.com)

Tribute Wall



“ *Pinkard Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Nellie Yocum Riley*



Pinkard Funeral Home - October 24, 2022 at 06:07 PM

BC

“ *I'm so sad to hear the news! I worked with Col Riley both as an Intern and during my time at AFPC in Field Activities. She was truly a mentor and an AF icon! She taught me so many things that I carry in my heart and mind today. The epitome of a professional, she will forever hold a special place in my heart! Rest in Peace Colonel!*



Bill Conley - November 02, 2022 at 03:04 PM

JA

“ *Nellie was a special person and I am grateful to have worked with her in the AF. Smart as a whip, sarcastic as all get out and just plain fun.*

Jan - October 30, 2022 at 11:14 PM



“ 56 files added to the album LifeTributes



Pinkard Funeral Home - October 24, 2022 at 06:00 PM



“ 13 files added to the tribute wall



Sherry Isbell - October 22, 2022 at 08:16 PM