

Officer Spotlight

CAPT John C. Eason



Category: Sanitarian/Environmental Health Officer

Education: Virginia Union University

Hometown: Richmond, Virginia

Agency: Office of International Health



John C. Eason Jr., the first African American to be commissioned in the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps, was born in Richmond, Virginia on New Year's Day 1914. He completed a bachelor's degree at Virginia Union University in 1934 and moved to Washington, D.C., where he earned a master's degree in chemistry from Howard University in 1936. In 1943 the USPHS Commissioned Corps established the Sanitarian Category, and LTJG Eason became the sixth officer in the new category and the first African American Public Health Service officer.

Initially assigned to the Baltimore City Health Department, he later transferred to Louisville, Kentucky, with both the Louisville-Jefferson County and the Kentucky State Health Department and then to the Chicago, Illinois Board of Health. In 1945, CAPT Eason was selected to serve as Liaison Officer to the U.S. Mission to Liberia, one of the first officers to be assigned to the Office of International Health (OIH).

Highlights from his career include:

- Chief, Foreign Mission Section, supervising and supporting health missions to Liberia, Greece, Turkey, Iran, Jordan, Peru, Lebanon, and Paraguay;
- Principal Program Officer and Chief, Program Development Branch, where he planned and designed programs and projects for health assistance to countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East;
- Coordinator, Special Foreign Currency Program, where he managed the allocation of \$25 million in annual funding;
- Associate Director for Management and Coordination of international health programs except those such as the malaria control and smallpox eradication programs; and
- Executive Associate Director, OIH

After 30 years of service, CAPT Eason retired in 1974. He continued to serve in the field of public health for several years as the Executive Assistant to the Director of the Division of International Health Programs of the American Public Health Association.

CAPT Eason's legacy is honored within the Environmental Health category, and his accomplishments go beyond the confines of the category:

- The Black Commissioned Officer Advisory Group John C. Eason Responder of the Year Award recognizes accomplishments and outstanding contributions to the USPHS Commissioned Corps in responding to critical public health events either domestically or internationally. The most recent winner was CDR Valerie Marshall.
- The Environmental Health Officer (EHO) Professional Advisory Committee John C. Eason Award recognizes the accomplishments of a talented junior EHOs in the field of environmental health.
- The most recent awardee is LT Richard Dillahunt, an EHO detailed to the United States Coast Guard.
- Camp Eason, site of the Monrovia Medical Unit (MMU), was named to honor CAPT Eason. The 25-bed field hospital near Harbel, Liberia was constructed to provide high level care specifically for all healthcare responders who became infected with the Ebola virus disease.