



Montgomery County *Commission for Women*

Lillian Elaine Fishburne

(1949 -)



First African-American woman to be promoted to Rear Admiral in the U.S. Navy

Rear Admiral Lillian Elaine Fishburne was born in 1949 in Patuxent River, Maryland, into a navy family. Her active duty father never questioned his daughter's military career ambitions. Raised in Rockville, Maryland, in Montgomery County, she attended [Richard Montgomery High School](#). Fishburne graduated from [Lincoln University](#) in Oxford, Pennsylvania, in 1971 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology. She received a Master of Arts in Management from [Webster College](#), St. Louis, Missouri in 1980, and in 1982, she was awarded a Master of Science degree in Telecommunications Systems Management from the [Naval Postgraduate School](#), Monterey, California. In addition, Fishburne is a 1993 graduate of the [Industrial College of the Armed Forces](#), Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. Fishburne was commissioned an Ensign upon completion of Women Officers School at Newport, Rhode Island in February 1973.

Her first duty assignment was Personnel and Legal Officer at the Naval Air Test Facility, Lakehurst, New Jersey. In August 1974, she was assigned to Miami, Florida as an Officer Programs recruiter until November 1977. From November 1977 to August 1980, Fishburne was the Officer in Charge of the Naval Telecommunications Center, Great Lakes, Illinois. She then spent two years as a student at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. Upon completion of postgraduate school, she reported to the Command, Control, Communications Directorate, Chief of Naval Operations (OP-940). There, she served as the Assistant Head in the Joint Allied Command and Control Matters Branch until December 1984.

Fishburne's next assignment was Executive Officer at the Naval Communication Station, Yokosuka, Japan. In February 1987, she was assigned to the Command, Control, and Communications Directorate, Chief of Naval Operations (OP-942) as a Special Projects Officer. Her next duty assignment was Commanding Officer, Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station, Key West, Florida from July 1990 to July 1992. Following this tour, Fishburne studied at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces until 1993. Upon graduation, she was assigned to the Command, Control, Communications and

Computer Systems Directorate, The Joint Staff, Washington, D.C., assuming the position as Chief, Command and Control Systems Support Division (J6C) in December 1994.

Fishburne assumed command of Naval Computer and Telecommunications Area Master Station, Easter Pacific, Wahiawa, Hawaii on August 25, 1995. Fishburne was promoted to Rear Admiral on February 1, 1998. She is the first African-American woman to earn this rank. Before retiring in February 2001, Fishburne was assigned as the Director of the Information Transfer Division for the Space, Information Warfare, Command and Control Directorate, Chief of Naval Operations, Washington, D.C.

Fishburne is part of a group of women who have opened doors for other women in the military forces. The same year that Fishburne was promoted to the position of Rear Admiral, former [Secretary of Defense](#), William Cohen, referred to her as "a woman whose story helps us to understand the truth that women are an indispensable part of today's military."

Fishburne attributes her success over the past 25 years to being focused in her commitment to doing all her jobs well. "Every promotion and job assignment I get makes me more confident and draws upon my strengths and wisdom to do it correctly," she stated. Fishburne has received several awards and decorations, including the Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Meritorious Service Medal (two awards), Navy Commendation Medal (two awards) and the Navy Achievement Medal. Fishburne and her husband, Albert J. Sullivan of Daytona Beach, Florida have one daughter, Cherese.