

The Clerk's Black History Series



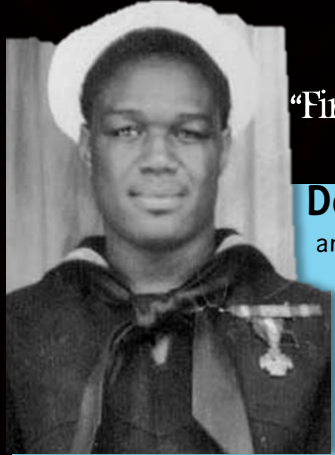
Debra DeBerry
Clerk of Superior Court
DeKalb County



Doris "Dorie" Miller

October 12, 1919 – November 24, 1943

"First African-American to have U.S. Navy Aircraft Carrier Named in his Honor"
"First African-American Recipient of the Navy Cross"



Doris "Dorie" Miller was born October 12, 1919, in Waco, Texas, to sharecroppers Connerly and Henrietta Miller. Along with his siblings, Doris worked to support the family farm and became an excellent marksman, hunting for small game. Doris used his height and large frame to his advantage, making a name for himself playing fullback on his high school football team. But after dropping out of high school, Doris enlisted in the United States Navy in 1939 at the age of 20. Due to the limited areas of service for Black people in the military at this time, Doris was assigned as a Mess Attendant. However, he quickly advanced up the ranks and was promoted to Cook, Third Class. Immediately following his training, he was assigned to the U.S.S. West Virginia.

The U.S.S. West Virginia was moored in Battleship Row when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7th 1941, bringing the United States into World War II. Doris was serving breakfast when the first of nine torpedoes hit the ship and destroyed the anti-aircraft battery magazine, midship. Doris, responding to the call of "battle stations," headed toward the quarterdeck where he began retrieving injured shipmates and moving them to safety. He attempted to move the ship's injured



Captain, Mervyn Bennion to safety, but the Captain refused to leave his post. Doris assisted another sailor in pulling the Captain to a sheltered location and headed toward the ship's anti-aircraft machine guns. As the attack continued, and with no combat training, Doris began firing the Browning .50 Caliber Anti-Aircraft Machine Gun towards the dive-bombing Japanese planes. He courageously returned fire until he was out of ammunition. Japanese aircraft eventually dropped two armor-piercing bombs, destroying the deck of the battleship, and launched five 18-inch (460 mm) aircraft torpedoes into her port side. When the attack subsided, Doris returned to Captain Bennion, who had succumbed to his injuries. Doris bravely continued pulling injured sailors to safety amid the burning oil, smoke and mortally wounded. The ship was heavily damaged by the attack, but the crew prevented her from capsizing by counter-flooding a number of compartments. Instead, U.S.S. West Virginia sank to the harbor bottom as her surviving crew, including Doris Miller, fled to safety. The ship was later refloated and rebuilt by 1944.

Doris' valiant actions during the attack earned him commendations from the Secretary of the Navy. He became the first black recipient of the prestigious Navy Cross Award. Many petitioned for Doris to receive the Medal of Honor - and although he never received the award - he was awarded the Purple Heart Medal, the American Defense Service Medal, Fleet Clasp, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal.



On May 15, 1943, Doris reported to Puget Sound Navy Yard to the escort carrier, Liscome Bay. After training in Hawaii, the Liscome Bay headed toward the Battle of Makin during the Pacific campaign of World War II, beginning November 20, 1943. Just four days later, the Liscome Bay was struck in the stern by a torpedo from a Japanese submarine causing the ship to sink in just 23 minutes. There were 272 survivors from the crew of over 900, but Miller was among the crew listed as "presumed dead". His parents were informed that he was missing in action on December 7, 1943. Exactly two years after his heroic actions at Pearl Harbor.



On January 20th, 2020 - on the holiday marking the birthday of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. - the United States Navy officially named its newest aircraft carrier, the U.S.S. Doris Miller (CVN 81). The Gerald R. Ford-class carrier, is the first of its kind to be named after an African-American and will be deployed in major combat operations, crisis response, and humanitarian relief.

