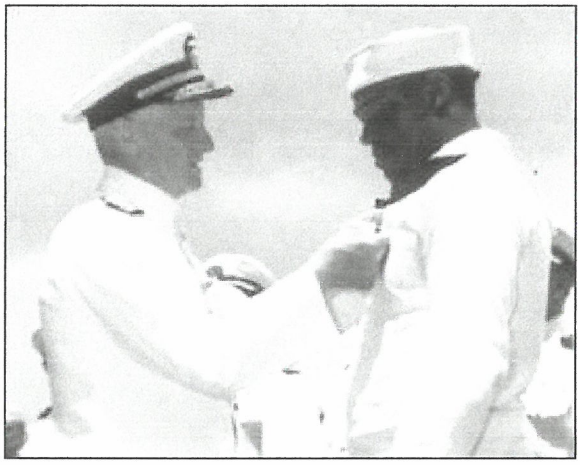
DORIS MILLER: MESSBOY, STEWARD, COOK, HERO

"LION OF THE SEA"

by

RADM Daniel W. McKinnon, Jr. SC USN ret





"The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Mess Attendant First Class Doris Miller (NSN:3561235) United States Navy, for exceptional courage, presence of mind, and devotion to duty and disregard for his personal safety while serving on board the Battleship USS WEST VIRGINIA (BB-48), during the Japanese attack on the United States Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii, on 7 December 1941. While at the side of his Captain on the bridge of the battleship USS West Virginia, Mess Attendant First Class Doris Miller, despite enemy strafing and bombing and in the face of a serious fire, assisted in moving his Captain, who had been mortally wounded, to a place of greater safety, and later manned and operated a machine gun directed at enemy Japanese attacking aircraft until ordered to

leave the bridge. The conduct of Mess Attendant First Class Doris Miller throughout this action reflects great credit upon himself, and was in keeping with the highest traditions of United States Naval Service."

Foreword

He was not a Cook. He was an Officer's Mess Attendant, a "Messboy", collecting wardroom linen in the ship's laundry, when fate took Dorie Miller to the signal bridge of a battleship and heroism on, "a day that will live in infamy."

In 2030, the *USS Doris Miller (CVN-81)* will be commissioned in his honor to make clear to all that, "One nation under God", is also, one people.

It was not always that way.

This essay is about Dorie Miller, a man whose life speaks for thousands.

This is his story; this is his song.



"Lion of the Sea"

It was on the battleship *USS West Virginia (BB-48)* tied up at Ford Island in Pearl Harbor that early morning when the Japanese attacked. At least five torpedoes hit *West Virginia* in the first few minutes. When Miller got to his battle station in the ammunition magazine for the amidships anti-aircraft battery, it had already been destroyed. As the ship was sinking, quick counter-flooding kept her from capsizing.

Miller rushed to a mid-ship location known as "Times Square" to make himself available for action. The ship's communications officer, Lieutenant Commander Doir C. Johnson, directed Miller to accompany him to the bridge to assist in moving West Virginia's commanding officer, Captain Mervyn Bennion, to a less exposed location. Miller, over six feet two and a champion ship's boxer, and another sailor moved Bennion behind the conning tower for better protection, but the captain insisted on remaining on the bridge.

Lieutenant Frederic H. White directed Miller to help Ensign Victor Delano load the unmanned two .50 caliber anti-aircraft machine guns. The ships in Pearl Harbor were at "Condition Baker", equivalent to Condition III readiness at sea. A quarter of the anti-aircraft guns in the harbor were manned and ready. White gave Miller, who had previous 5"/25 caliber gun training that summer at Secondary Battery Gunnery School on board *Nevada (BB-36)*, quick instructions. After momentary distraction, he turned to see Miller firing at Japanese aircraft. White fed the ammo to Miller and to Delano on the other gun. There are various accounts about the number of planes Miller may have shot down. "I just pulled the trigger and she worked fine. I had watched the others with these guns. I guess I fired her for about fifteen minutes. I think I got one of those Jap planes. They were diving pretty close to us."

There is no way of knowing. Anti-aircraft fire was so intense that it is not possible to determine exactly which gun shot down which aircraft. The .50 caliber guns were of limited effectiveness before an attacking aircraft's torpedo or bomb release. The best they could do was keep an attacking aircraft from circling back for another run. They fired until they were out of ammunition. He later told the Dallas press, "There was no time to think, it just seemed like the right thing to do".

Much was made later on in the press about Miller not having any .50 caliber anti-aircraft training. I doubt that made any difference. He knew

what he was doing, and how to do it. After all, he could lead and hit squirls on the run.

Lieutenant Claude V. Ricketts, who went from seaman to four-star admiral, engineered and led counter-flooding to prevent *West Virginia* from capsizing. He then directed Miller to help carry the partially-conscious Captain Bennion up to the navigation bridge. The Captain died soon after. Miller then helped move many other Sailors, pulling some from the sea, saving lives, with some saying acts as valiant as heroism on the bridge. The ship was ordered abandoned and lost 105 out of her crew of about 1,500. It was later determined that the ship was hit by seven torpedoes and 16 bombs. The ship settled on an even keel, fires eventually extinguished, and her holes patched. She lived on. Known as "Wee Vee", she was refloated in May 1942, and towed to the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. In September 1944, *USS West Virginia (BB-48)* returned, fought at Leyte Gulf, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, until war's end. In January 1947 she was decommissioned, having earned five battle stars.



Early newspaper depiction showing the world a moment of courage on a day, "that will live in infamy".

Newspapers describing that Sunday morning spoke of a large black Negro, "who stood on the hot decks of his battleship and directed the

fighting"; "a Negro mess attendant who never before had fired a gun manned a machine gun on the bridge until his ammunition was exhausted". Some false accounts were of a Negro firing a gun from the *USS Arizona (BB-39)* as it capsized. Three months later the sailor was identified as MAtt 2/c Doris Miller. Why the delay? Then, and now, all call him "Dorie". The Negro press and advocates for desegregation and civil rights now had a hero.

Doris Miller was born on 12 October 1919 to Connery and Henrietta Miller on the family sharecropper farm near the rural communities of Willow Grove and Speegleville, just northwest of Waco, Texas. The third of four sons, he was a large young man, an avid hunter and a good shot with a .22 rifle. His mother had hoped for a daughter and told the midwife that she liked "Doris", and although a boy, kept the name anyway, even as Connery objected. Growing up in the Great Depression he helped on the farm, his mother taught him how to cook and sew, and he hunted squirrel and rabbit and skinned and stuffed the skins enjoying taxidermy. Doris attended local segregated rural schools that only went to the seventh grade. He attended A. J. Moore High School in Waco and played football as fullback and was called by his pals, "Raging Bull". This only Black Waco high school was named for Professor Alexander James Moore who had brought to Waco the "First District Negro School" in the 1870s to provide education to those denied.

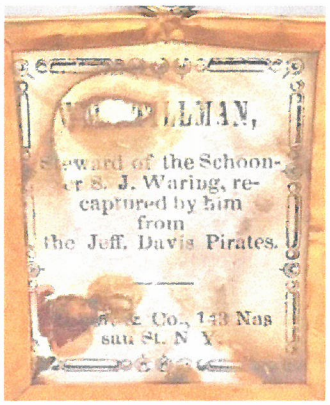
Doris dropped out of school to go to work as a cook in nearby Waco and help out at home. Waco had been known for its lynching's of Blacks two decades before, and an active Klu Klux Klan Klavern, but there is no family history of a confrontation. He wanted to join the Army but his mother refused to give permission, wanting him to remain in high school. He applied for the Depression era Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) but was denied because they took young men supporting unemployed parents. One early article on his life falsely said he was turned down because the CCC was racists and denied entry to Blacks. At

nineteen years old, Doris Miller traveled to Dallas, Texas, and on 16 September 1939 successfully enlisted in the United States Navy.

The "Union's First Black Hero" of the Civil War was also a steward and a cook. His name was William Tillman (Tilghman), a "freeman" from Delaware, who at seventeen years old began performing galley duties on packet ships sailing the east coast. It was on board the merchant schooner S. J. Waring sailing from New York to Uruguay when on July 7th 1861, the ship was boarded by men from the new confederacy's privateer, *Jeff Davis*. The Civil War had begun just weeks before.

Without a Navy, the Confederacy began commissioning privateers with "letters of marque" to harass Union commerce. The letter was signed by Jefferson Davis, himself. Famous in its day, the schooner was credited with capturing nine merchant ships in just seven weeks off New England. Under the name of *Echo* just a few years before, her history as an infamous slave trader is a study all in itself. The *Jefferson Davis* was the most successful Confederate privateer of the war.





After cook Tillman's heroic gave the action famous steward and "Billy" (Tilghman) action, he speeches on sea at the at museum of P.T. Barnum in New York City. (An 1861 museum souvenir tintype, from the author's collection.)

"Billy" Tillman became a prisoner when a five-man prize crew took charge of the Waring and headed to Charleston, South Carolina, with its cargo to seek prize money. At first Tillman was treated well, but it did not take long for him to discover a plan to be sold into slavery along

with the prize cargo. He would have none of it. At midnight on July 16, he took a hatchet and killed three of the five confederates and with help from other crew members threw their bodies into the sea. He then led the Waring's safe return to the North. Horace Greeley, in the New York Daily Tribune, wrote of William Tillman, and a "nation … indebted to this black steward for the first vindication of its (the Union) honor on the sea".

Booker T. Washington called him, "Lion of the Sea.

From our early history until 1865, African Americans have served in the U. S. Navy. Ten percent of the Continental Navy during the American Revolution, and twenty percent later in the Union Navy, were of the African diaspora. Eight received the Congressional Medal of Honor (MOH) during the Civil War. It was the only medal of valor, but nevertheless evidence of exceptional heroism. But the history prior to the Civil War saw periodic banning, a prohibition against slaves serving, quotas, and limiting assignments, when it came to bringing Blacks into the Navy. Then came the post-Civil War Jim Crow era of abuse, the Klu Klux Klan, and finally the 1896 Supreme Court decision making segregation legal, i.e., "separate but equal". The Navy limited the ratings for which Blacks could apply to coal heaver, changed to coal passer in 1893, messman, steward, and cook. Separate, but hardly equal.

Blacks served only as enlisted men during World War One. Secretary of the Navy, Josephus Daniels, from North Carolina and famous for eliminating alcohol aboard ship, said, "As a matter of policy, it has been customary to enlist colored men in the various ratings of the messman branch … and in the lower ratings of the fireroom; permitting colored men to sleep and eat by themselves".

Some remained after the war but recruitment of Blacks ceased in 1919, allegedly in the belief that Filipinos were better messmen.

It 1932, a new "Messman Program" was initiated by Navy Captain Abram Claude, that would bring Americans of African descent into the Messmen Branch. One of six Navy enlisted branches, it managed officer's country and the wardroom with duties performed predominantly by Filipinos. One can only imagine the difficulty he faced. Working his way through prejudice and bureaucracy, Captain Claude was able to convince the Bureau of Navigation (BuNav), the predecessor to the Bureau of Naval Personnel (BuPers), that Blacks should return to the Navy as Mess Attendants, perhaps, as one said, "With the least possible publicity". Capitan Claude's initiative has a special place in the heart of Navy Black history.

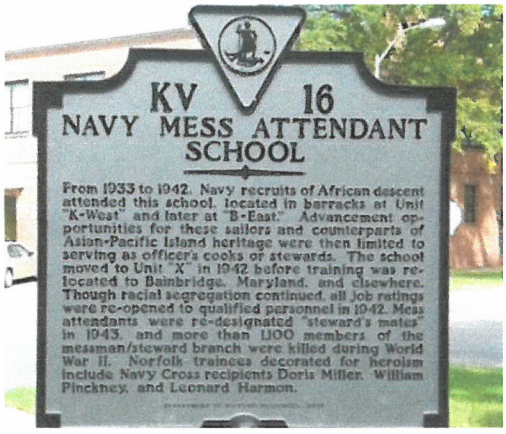
The best understanding of Dorie Miller's obstacles and success in the Navy can be found in former Chief Hospital Corpsman, turned college professor and writer, Richard E. Miller's 2004 book, "The Messman Chronicles". The best description of his life growing up in Texas can be found in a small book, "Hero of Pearl Harbor", by Bill O'Neal, former State Historian of Texas. And a remarkable book on both his life, and what it meant to the Civil Rights movement that followed, is found in "Doris Miller, Pearl Harbor and the Birth of the Civil Rights Movement", by historians and college professors, Thomas W. Cutrer and T. Michael Parrish. All three are must reads for any who want to understand Black History in the United States Navy and how Doris Miller came to make a difference.

When Captain Claude set out, there had been no Messman training since WW I. Chinese, the Chamorro of Guam, and Filipinos as U.S. "nationals", performed officer wardroom duties. There were three ratings in the branch; Officer's Cook (Ck), Officer's Mess Attendant (MAtt), and Officer's Steward (OS). Ship's Cooks were in the white Commissary Branch.

Soon there would be established an all-Black segregated Messmen School on the Naval Station in Norfolk, Virginia. A building known as

K-West near the train tracks would become home. "Old and dilapidated" at a location "reserved for colored only", it would welcome the first 22 recruits in 1932. Not far from gate number two, the school was moved in the late 1930's to B-East, and remained there until it closed in 1942.

It was B-East where Dorie Miller took up instruction. This was the same building where in 1953 I dropped my seabag in preparation for going on board *USS Wisconsin (BB-63)* as a third-class Midshipman. No longer a school, it was the "middies" processing center. We joined a thirty-ship armada that steamed for South America, the largest U.S. naval ship visit to Brazil since World War II. We went ashore in liberty boats with our fellow Black Sailors.



Virginia state historic plaque on board Naval Station Norfolk, honoring the school attended by the Messmen Branch at locations K-West and B-East, "reserved for colored only". Located at the corner of Morris and Bacon Streets, it was sponsored by the K-West and B-East Mess Attendant Association at the suggestion of Richard Miller, and dedicated 10 November 2005, Veterans Day weekend.

Dorie Miller's twelve-week course included the usual shipboard duties of firefighting, small arms instruction, infantry drill, and deck seamanship. And then there were the responsibilities of the specialty; the management of a wardroom, the pantry, the linens, china, silver-ware, and serving from the left and removing from the right. For Blacks entering as Officer's Mess Attendant Third Class (MAtt 3/c) in 1932, it

was not a matter of choice. Officer Stewards (OS 3/c) learned to make bunks, press uniforms, and shine shoes, skills now well taught at the U.S. Naval Academy and on Midshipman cruises; experience I gained in the Boy Scouts. For Dorie, it was $21 a month; no tips.

Some liberty was offered in Norfolk on alternate Wednesdays and weekends. The base swimming pool provided segregated hours. If you chose to go to a movie, you could sit in the balcony. The first graduates were ordered to the battleship *USS Wyoming (AG-17)* in 1933 as a segregated unit. Graduates would move as groups, and over time, other segregated units would be assigned to large, and later small, combatants, slowly displacing Filipinos. It was noted that, "As far as possible, colored and Filipinos should not be employed as messmen on the same ship". Upon graduation, Miller went on board an ammunition ship, the USS Pyro (AE-24) on 29 November for further transfer to Commander Base Force for assignment, and then on the 2nd of January1940, reported for duty on the USS West Virginia (BB-48).



Blacks joined Bolsheviks and Jews in a German Nationalist Peoples Party poster urging voters to, "get rid of them". The U.S. Army had "loaned" its segregated Black 93rd Division to France in WW I where it fought under French leadership, and wore their uniforms including the distinctive helmet. Perhaps they fought too well; they made this 1933

poster. Dorie was fourteen years old. The idea that one race or a people are superior to another lingers on today in our national discourse.

After recruit training, whites in other branches could move immediately from Apprentice Seamen to Seamen Second Class. Mess Attendants Third Class could not move to Second Class until a year later, which meant lower pay than white contemporary school graduates in other specialties. Dorie Miller was a MAtt 2/c on the morning of his heroism.

This was the school Doris Miller entered on 19 September, 1939 after having traveled over fifteen hundred miles by rail in a segregated passenger car. Had it been by road, this future hero would have had to sit in the back of the bus. In early debates about accepting Blacks into the Navy, official opinions included, they "should not be enlisted for general service" and, "because men live in such intimacy aboard ship … we simply can't enlist Negroes above the rank of messmen". Admission into general service rates was announced in April and began in June, 1942. Blacks, however, were still denied petty officer status. It took a war to bring real change.

It was not long after the heroism of Doris Miller appeared on the front pages of American newspapers that he became a celebrity, a symbolic part of an effort to eliminate segregation in the military services. Like the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests six decades later, this future icon's newspaper headlines were about the injustice, and absurdity, of racial discrimination.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had been founded in 1909 for a purpose largely unchanged from today, "to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination". Immediately the NAACP set out to gain recognition for this new Black hero. Although Americans of African descent were admitted to the U.S. Armed Forces, segregation of Whites and Blacks

remained. The Army had a quota limiting new recruits to ten percent of the wartime draft.

Over 1.2 million Americans of African descent served in WW II, and over a million worked in the defense industry, including 600,000 women. At the end of the war, more than 187,000 African Americans had served in the Navy. The Navy, however, had only 64 officers, including the well-known "Golden Thirteen", commissioned in March 1944. Six months later, Black women were admitted into the "Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES)".

Blacks in the Navy would have their own military segregated "colored units", like the U.S. Army's famous Tuskegee Airmen, the "Red Ball Express", and the Black Panthers tank battalion lauded by General "Black Jack" Pershing.

At the urging, if not insistence, of President Roosevelt's wife, Eleanor, the Navy crewed two ships with Black sailors, a destroyer escort and a submarine chaser. When commissioned, the destroyer escort, *USS Mason (DE-529)* picked up a nickname by some, "Eleanor's Folly". Black Sailors waiting for the ship were assigned temporary work in steward type duties until BuNav intervened. Old stereotypes die hard.

Both the *Mason* and the submarine chaser, PC-1264, had white commanding officers. When PC-1264 went out of commission, the Executive Officer, Ensign Samuel L. Gravely, Jr. "fleeted up" and took charge, making him at that time, in my view, the first African-American Commanding Officer of a U.S. Navy ship. He genuinely earned that distinction in 1961 when he became skipper of the USS Theodore E. Chandler (DD-717), and later the USS Falgout DE-324 and USS Jouett DLG-29. Sam Gravely went on to become a Vice Admiral and one of the most admired and respected officers in the United States Navy. Today the USS Gravely, an Arleigh Burke class Aegis guided missile destroyer, bears his name.

On its shakedown cruise to Bermuda, the *Mason's* Black crew members, unlike white officers and petty officers, were not allowed to go on liberty. The ship saw convey duty in the Atlantic and on one occasion rescued smaller craft in a storm. Each crew member was recommended for a Letter of Commendation. The commendations were not granted until 1995, fifty years later.

The Navy did not have any Black Medal of Honor recipients in World War II, and neither did the Army or the Marine Corps. In 1997 after a review, the Army awarded seventeen. The Navy reviewed the past records of Filipinos and others of Asian descent.

There is the story of the heroes of "Gun Tub Number Ten" on the *USS Intrepid (CV-11)*. All were Black and all were recommended by their Commanding Office for the Navy Cross. It is a remarkable story of courage. All six actually received the award from Commander, Fast Carrier Task Force Far East. For reasons unknown, the medals were downgraded. It took fifty years and a law suit against the Secretary of the Navy to begin confirming awards long denied.

The *Mason* was scraped in 1947, but its name and legacy were revived in 2003 with the naming of the DDG-87, another Arleigh Burke class Aegis guided missile destroyer.

Black sailors in segregated groups were assigned to the Seabees and cargo handling units, ordnance and supply depots, with few opportunities for combat. Groups of about 200 men moved as "base companies". On the island of Noumea, Lieutenant Commander Herschel Goldberg, a Navy Supply Corps Officer, Jewish, and later Chief of his Corps, broke the barrier of segregation. Black and White Sailors would eat and attend movies together. Not a problem.

With Doris Miller, there was now a hero, clear evidence of character and courage. First, he was identified simply as an unnamed Negro Mess Attendant, from apparent reluctance to place a Black man's name among

the war's early heroes. There would be no early WW II Negro poster boy. Contrast this to when newspapers called Captain Colin Kelly, a pilot and West Point graduate, a "first hero of World War II", even though the heroic and gallant sacrifice of his life for his flight crew took place three days later in the Philippines. It was not until March that Miller was identified. Today, some articles refer to him as a heroic cook.

On the first of January 1942, the Navy released a list of commendations for actions during the attack. One was for an "unnamed Negro." The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) asked President Roosevelt to award the Distinguished Service Cross, which was not a Navy Medal, to the unnamed African-American Sailor. Lawrence Reddick, the Director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem, was able to discover Miller's name. He was identified in the African-American newspaper Pittsburgh Courier, and then by the Associated Press, on 12 March 1942.

The Pittsburg Courier was well known for its, "Double "V" Campaign", raised fingers on both hands with the "V" sign. Its graphic newspaper symbol had "Democracy" on top, with two interlocking Vs below. Then, "Double Victory … At Home Abroad". Think victory in war. Think victory over discrimination. The paper successfully fought to overcome a prohibition on blood donations from African-Americans by the American Red Cross. They readily admitted there was no difference because of race. Besides, there was a war on.

The Courier had published an October 1940 letter from fifteen members of the Messman Branch on board the *USS Philadelphia (CL-4)*. They wrote: "Our main reason for writing is to let all our colored mothers and fathers know how their sons are treated after taking an oath and pledging allegiance and loyalty to their flag and country." Grievances included "kicking around…without being able to do anything about it", being "sea-going bell hops, chambermaids, and dish washers", being objects of shipboard fights, etc. They saw their life aboard ship as one of

unwarranted racial, even physical, abuse. Richard Miller, who studied and published the incident in his 1998 Master of Arts thesis at Morgan State University, calls the men, "The Philadelphia Fifteen". I wonder how, what we might call a disruptive, perhaps degrading, command climate today, should have been handled. Others called writing the letter, the "Philadelphia Mutiny". Three Sailors received Bad Conduct Discharges. Twelve received Undesirable Discharges.

There is a certain irony. Rear Admiral Chester Nimitz, as Chief of the Bureau of Navigation responsible for Navy personal policy, defended the discharges to a *Courier* reporter in November. He could "not deny discrimination", but the action was supported for maintaining "ship efficiency."

This is the same Chester Nimitz that salutes Doris Miller on board *USS Enterprise,* just eighteen months later.

Chester Nimitz was a traditionalist. That could be seen when addressing a group of Black medical professionals in a meeting with a committee of the National Medical Association (Negro) of Washington DC. He said, "Negroes are superior generally to the white who enlist and would therefore (if integrated into general service) have to be made petty officers. The white enlisted personnel would not stand for this. White men will not tolerate colored petty officers, and I have heard Negroes don't like them either".

The Navy had institutions, traditions, processes, structures, conventions. Today some would call elements of that past, "institutional racism".

The USS Nimitz (CVN-68) bears the name of a heroic Fleet Admiral.

The USS Doris Miller (CVN-81) bears the name of a heroic Messboy.

Sons of Texas. Serving at sea. Together.

The "Philadelphia Fifteen" received extensive publicity and became a battle standard for those decrying racism and segregation, not unlike

Doris Miller eighteen months later, or Black Lives Matter (BLM) today. Richard Miller saw it as a "great mystery", and wondered why the incident had not received an "official inquiry". How wrong was it for Sailors to bring to public attention shipboard abuse from discrimination, when the chain of command would not?

I wonder if a nation can move, and then melt, a statue of a Civil War southern hero to bring greater understanding to events of the past, why it can't change a few pieces of paper in an old file cabinet, to bring understanding, and perhaps justice, to Sailors who believed they were opposing injustice.

Is it too late?

In response to public pressure about denial of recognition for the Doris Miller heroism, Senator James Mead of New York and Representative John D. Dingell Sr. of Michigan introduced resolutions to award Miller the Medal of Honor (MOH). The Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, allegedly having little regard for the capabilities of nonwhites, responded with a Letter of Commendation. This ignited an extensive letter writing campaign by African-American organizations to convince Congress that Miller should be awarded the Medal of Honor.





Modern pinback of hero Dorie Miller, not unlike those of WW II war bond drives, in contrast to a racist pinback from 1909 Jim Crow Charleston, South Carolina. (Author's collection)

The National Negro Congress denounced Knox. On the other hand, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest J. King, understood the importance of African-American support for the war effort. Perhaps Secretary Knox had a change of heart. On March 4th, 1943, he announced he would name a destroyer escort, the USS Harmon, the first warship named for an African American.

The NAACP planned a "Doris Miller Rally" at the Lincoln Memorial. This was where the internationally famous Black contralto, Marian Anderson, sang on Easter Sunday in 1939. The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) had denied use of Independence Hall. On August 28th 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. stood there before the statue of Abraham Lincoln and told the world, "I have a dream".

There were rallies in his behalf, souvenir buttons and pinbacks, and posters. There were poems and ballads; "Dorie was peeling sweet potatoes, when the guns began to roar." It was sought to have Dorie Miller returned to the States like other heroes to participate in war bond drives.



Dorie Miller speaking at a WWII war bond rally

A CBS Radio series, "They Live Forever", had a program based on Miller's life and heroism. That June, New York City was the site of ceremonies honoring "Negro Achievement Day," designed to recognize

"Distinguished Service to America." The honorees included George Washington Carver, Mary McLeod Bethune, Joe Louis, Adam Clayton Powell … and Doris Miller. When the Navy couldn't spare Miller from the war bond campaign, his mother Henrietta was invited in his stead. Speaking in Harlem, she said, "Some say we colored people have nothing to fight for. We all have something to fight for. We have freedom to fight for. But we can't fight this war by ourselves. We've got to put Jesus into it, for He has never lost a battle"

There was a petition for Miller to enter a service academy like some who had distinguished themselves in battle. The Navy said that at 22, he was too old for Annapolis. Lieutenant Ricketts, also of the *West Virginia,* had been a sailor, sent to the Naval Academy, and became Vice Chief of Naval Operations.

It is never about brains or ability, it is about opportunity, from the school house, to the White House.

One newspaper wrote, "where the boy is white, he is returned to this country and advanced to a commission. In the other case where black, he is returned to the kitchen and given a mop." An Army sergeant who had warned about the Japanese attack, and was ignored, came home and sent to officer's training.

There were 14 Medals of Honor from the tragic events of Pearl Harbor, including Captain Bennion, Miller's commanding officer, who he helped carry to safety. Flag and commanding officers of ships struck that day and killed in action were accorded the MOH.

There was no rally. An astute and understanding President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, personally awarded Doris Miller the Navy Cross, the nation's second highest award for valor, and the first for an African American. At the time, the Navy Cross was third in order of precedence after the Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Service Medal, but moved to second precedence in 1942.

On the 27th of May, 1942, the Navy Cross was presented to Mess Attendant Second Class Doris Miller by the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, on board the *USS Enterprise (CV-6)* in Pearl Harbor. On the first of June he was promoted to Mess Attendant First Class. The citation given earlier read First Class. I wonder if he got five days back pay. This was the same day that Blacks could enter General Service ratings in addition to the Messman Branch.

During an interview that Christmas December in San Francisco, this humble farm boy from Texas said that his action a year before, on December 7th 1941, came from, "God's strength and mother's blessing".



Dorie Miller in San Francisco on New Year's Eve 1942 with shipmate Robert Jenkins and a lady friend at the Filmore USO located in a portion of San Francisco known as, "Harlem of the West". Dorie had spent Christmas in Waco; the family having moved there during the war. The USO had "Negro USO Shows", and this San Francisco "home away from home" was in the other part of town. Negro Shore Patrol could not discipline Whites, even in a fight. The USO worked hard to provide for Black servicemen, even when confronting local resistance. By the end of 1943, 180 USO clubs out of a total of 1346 were open for Blacks in uniform. Although he had a girlfriend back home, Miller never married.

After sinking of the *West Virginia*, Miller was ordered to the *USS Indianapolis (CA-35)*, a heavy cruiser, and remained until May 1943. He participated in war bond rallies and enlistment campaigns. He spoke in January to Black recruits at the U.S. Naval Training Center at Great Lakes, Illinois, that for the first time were graduating into general service ratings. Dorie Miller became a national figure.

Miller was assigned briefly to the Puget Sound Navy Shipyard and then to a new escort aircraft carrier, *USS Liscome Bay* (CVE-56), a "jeep carrier" under construction in Vancouver, Washington. After commissioning on 7 August, it soon deployed to the western Pacific.

On the first of June, after attending cooking classes, he had been promoted to Cook Third Class (Ck3c), in the renamed Steward Branch. He was probably good; his mother taught him well. Mess Attendants were now Steward's Mate. Miller was still in the segregated Steward Branch, and not the Commissary Branch with its white "Ship's Cooks". A year later, cooks and stewards in the Steward Branch were able to wear petty officer style badges, and finally in 1950 attained Petty Officer status. Cloth badges on their uniforms had moved from, "bread loaves" to the "crow".

On November 24, 1943, during Operation Galvanic off Butaritari Island in the Gilbert Islands, the *Liscome Bay* was sunk by a single Japanese submarine torpedo. With the loss of 644 men, 70% of its crew, it stands as the deadliest sinking in history of a United States Navy aircraft carrier.

On December 7th, 1943, the parents of Doris Miller were notified that their son was missing in action. He was not officially presumed dead until November 25th, 1944.

On July 26, 1948, under the signature of President Harry S. Truman, segregation officially ended in the United States Armed Forces. A genuinely concerted effort to make the Navy reflective of society as an

integrated force would not begin until over twenty years later under a Chief of Naval Operations who, like Admiral Nimitz 30 years earlier, had been chosen to lead the Navy while passing over many more senior admirals. His name was Elmo Zumwalt, "Bud" to those who cherish his memory.

On January 20th, 2020, Martin Luther King Junior's birthday, Acting Secretary of the Navy, The Honorable Thomas B. Modly, announced he would name the Ford class aircraft carrier, CVN-81, the *USS Doris Miller*. It will be the first aircraft carrier named for both an enlisted man and an American of African descent. Its commissioning will follow another new ship with a storied name, *USS Enterprise* (*CVN-80*).

The naming of U.S. Navy ships is a unique personal responsibility of a Secretary of the Navy. There are no laws or regulatory absolutes, only tradition and "conventions", that for over 200 years have been crafted and modified as dictated by history, and sometimes personality. They are generally adhered to, but exceptions abound. An interested student can read the periodic Congressional Research Service, "Navy Ship Names: Background for Congress", and the 13 July 2012, "A Report on Policies and Practices of the U.S. Navy for Naming the Vessels of the Navy" prepared by Department of the Navy historians. The report was required by Public Law 112-81 as a result of NDAA 2012, and prompted by criticism that then Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus was taking Navy far afield from established convention. The conclusion was that he was not.

Conventions associated with the naming of ships have changed over the years. As reported to Congress, today the convention for nuclear powered aircraft carriers (CVNs) is, "individually considered". Most are named for past presidents, with some exceptions, notably two Senators who were honored for their commitment to a strong Navy and Marine Corps.

In July, 2019, when Secretary of the Navy Richard Spencer became Acting Secretary of Defense, Under Secretary of the Navy Tom Modly became Acting Navy Secretary. It was only for two weeks, and he thought about how he might name CVN-81. He wanted to. He had the authority. Lawyers said so. He also felt that it should be named for a heroic African American, and had made the suggestion before. Just a few months later, he had the authority again when Secretary Spencer was fired. Once more, he was Acting Secretary of the Navy. His lawyer might have said, "you had motive, now you have opportunity." Tom Modly would serve in that role for the next four and a half months naming several ships. CVN-81 would be special. It would be legacy.

A businessman, Naval Academy graduate, Navy pilot, and son of Eastern European immigrants who had fled the Iron Curtain, Tom Modly wanted ship naming, "to have the names of our ships demonstrate the values of courage and sacrifice that were at the core of our naval heritage." He conducted his own quiet study of heroic African Americans. Not satisfied, he sought the advice of four former African American Flag officers; Bruce Grooms, "Sinc" Harris, "Shep" Shepherd, "JC" Caesar, and former Acting Secretary of the Navy, "Buddie" Penn, a retired Navy aviator whose call sign had been, "Super Bad". They met in the Pentagon "E-Ring" with the Secretary. The charge: find an African American hero of WW II, a war where clearly the nation was "united in a common cause." They retired for quiet deliberation at a diner in Fairfax County.

These were successful Naval officers. They had achieved, and they had endured. They talked about how Doris Miller kept striving, pushing, going. Maybe opportunity for something better was not widely available in the 1930s, but courage and persistence were. There were many who faced discrimination and refused to take it; refused to give up. Successful people overcome the challenges of life. Some face the artificial barrier of racial discrimination. Miller overcame both. Many continue to do so.



Artist depiction of the USS Doris Miller, CVN -81, "Lion of the Sea".

It was clear that this was more than just about honoring an individual. Who could best represent the long unrecognized contribution of thousands of Americans of African descent in the U.S. Navy? Men who had overcome? The unanimous answer … Doris Miller.

It was a first. An enlisted Sailor. An African American. It was a bold application of ship naming authority.

The announcement was made at Pearl Harbor on 20 January 2019 alongside members of the Miller family. Secretary Modly made it clear that, "In selecting this name, we honor the contributions of all our enlisted ranks, past and present, men and women, of every race, religion and background".

The wind was fair; seas were following.

In 1973, a Knox class frigate, FF-1091, had been commissioned and named to honor Miller. It served until decommissioned in 1991. Its class was named, not for a former Navy Secretary, but for Commodore Dudley Wright Knox, an early and prominent Navy historian. He led the Navy's historical office, whose legacy brought me to the professionals of the Naval History and Heritage Command.

The *USS Doris Miller* would be the sixteenth ship of the United States Navy named for an African-American. The first was the *USS Harmon*

(DE-678) launched in 1943, also in honor of a graduate of B-East, a fellow Texan who entered the Messman Branch just a few months before Miller. Leonard Roy Harmon was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross for heroism on board the *USS San Francisco* during the Battle of Guadalcanal. In May 2004 the USS Pinckney (DDG-91) was commissioned, named for the last of the three Messmen School's graduates who had earned the Navy Cross. Her naming came from a campaign by fellow shipmates, members of the K-West and B-East Mess Attendants Association.

Eighteen Liberty ships were named in World War II for prominent African Americans. In 1943, the SS Robert L. Vann was commissioned and named in honor of the famous lawyer/editor/writer/advocate of the Pittsburgh Courier who had said in 1914, that his new newspaper would labor to, "abolish every vestige of Jim Crowism…" She was sunk by a mine in 1945. All hands survived.

The naming of those eighteen ships is credited to a government seeking ways to bring African American support into the war effort at a time when they had been long marginalized by a nation now in peril. I also have no doubt that this recognition of the contribution of African Americans to the defense of our country was prompted in large part by the national campaign for racial equality whose public face after December 7th 1941 was, Doris Miller.

The first Liberty Ship named for a famed African American was the SS Booker T. Washington. Time magazine declared, "The Booker T. will serve not only in the war of ocean transport, but in the war against race discrimination."

Over 2,700 Liberty ships were the backbone of the United States Merchant Marine moving essential cargo in WW II across the Atlantic and Pacific. The civilian crewed ships suffered more casualties than the military services. There were no Black shipmasters serving as captains, but they did have one serving as cook. Hugh Mulzac had held a

master's license for over 20 years, after passing the U.S. shipmaster exam with a perfect score. Since he was Black, his service in the Merchant Marine would be found in a ship's galley. Mulzac was offered command of the Washington, but it was to be with a Black civilian crew. His response, "Under no circumstances will I command a Jim Crow vessel". He got his way. The SS Booker T. Washington was ultimately crewed with 18 nationalities including whites, would make 22 round-trips across the Atlantic and Pacific, and even be credited with downing two enemy aircraft. The Navy crewed and provided deck and anti-aircraft guns. Mulzac became the first African-American Merchant Marine officer to command an integrated crew during World War II. Fittingly, it was Marian Anderson who made hearts sing as she christened his ship.

The Messman Branch. with its three skill sets merged, was retitled the Steward Branch in 1943, and the word "officers" removed. In 1974, the Steward rating (SD) merged with the Commissarymen (CS) and became the Mess Management Specialist (MS). It became Culinary Specialist (CS) in 2004, and today you might find a CS in study at the Culinary Institute of America. They no longer have to fear the warning from fellow shipmates; "If you don't know how to cook, you better know how to swim."

Tillman, Miller, Mulzac? Makes one wonder about ship's cooks.

"We may live without poetry, music, and art. We may live without conscience, and live without heart. We may live without friends; we may live without books. But civilized man cannot live without cooks." (Owen Meredith 1831-1891)

The Messmen and Stewards of the United States Navy served with pride and professionalism. They were Sailors first. They went to war. Let not anyone who reads this history misunderstand that, or that these men misunderstood or denigrated their work and their duty.

I will not be at the commissioning of CVN-81. I would like to see on the ship's plaque, "**Lion of the Sea**."

"God will not ask thy race, nor will he ask thy birth. Alone he will demand of thee, what has thou done on earth?"



Reflection

This essay is written for the young men and women of today who will be the Sailors, Petty Officers, and Naval Officers of tomorrow, serving with pride on board the *USS DORIS MILLER (CVN-81)*. It is a story. About a man. His life, his heroism, and its impact upon America. Maybe you.

It began as an historical article written for "The Oakleaf", the periodical of the United States Navy Supply Corps Foundation. It was intended not only to cover history, but also take retired Supply Corps officers back to their days at sea when Navy Stewards were part of our shipboard departments and professional lives. Memories linger long. When dealing with professionals at sea as an officer, you may have no idea what your enlisted men might be dealing with. I never saw discrimination, but then as a white Lieutenant Commander, why would I? A shock came when a Master Chief Steward Navy Reservist came on board the USS Princeton LPH-5, for two weeks of active duty. It was 1969. I was the Supply Officer and the Master Chief was a senior federal government official. It was the Chief that pointed out that two very special berthing compartments up forward under officers' country had their own private bunks, toilets, lockers, showers, and face bowls. The Essex class aircraft carrier had been designed for segregation. One compartment for Blacks, the other for Filipinos. It was a lesson; a memory never to be forgotten.

I have always loved American history and collect artifacts, including those of the African diaspora. They will pass on to my grandchildren so they can learn. I enjoyed and valued having Buddie Penn, Sinc Harris, and Shep Shepherd in my home and listening to how they made a historic judgment and conclusion. Theirs were lives that overcame. The very special tiny tin type of the first Black naval hero of the Civil War is mentioned because he, like Doris Miller, was a steward and cook. I could have mentioned James Henry Conyers, who in 1872 entered the United States Naval Academy as the first African American midshipman. He endured harassment and discrimination and did not graduate. Nevertheless, he endured. By good fortune, I have the only known artifact of his time at the Academy, the text book on "Seamanship", where he wrote, "Don't give up the ship". I think he was writing about himself. The book is on loan to the Academy. The Naval Academy did not have an American of African descent graduate until 1949. Today you will find them leading the Brigade of Midshipmen.

Another reason I have enjoyed writing about Miller is that the more I read, the more things did not look right. It was felt there had to be more. Some things were in conflict. There were references to him as a historic cook, a chef, a petty officer, and receiving no shipboard weapons training. Others had him rejected by a racist Civilian Conversation Corps and dropping out of school because he failed the eighth grade twice. While I am sure there are errors and omissions in this essay, I hope the reader will come away understanding why a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier bears his name.



In 2010, Cook 3/c Doris Miller was honored in the Distinguished Sailors collectible stamp series by the United States Postal Service.

Two ships named Miller are not alone. There are schools, parks, buildings, monuments, a military housing complex, a VFW Post, even a gun club. The Doris Miller Memorial in Waco, Texas is a park of beauty, architectural brilliance, and impact. In the 2001 movie, Oscar nominated Cuba Gooding Jr. portrays Miller in the film, "Pearl Harbor". Miller's heroism and the resultant public reaction were given early credit for not only how Blacks were portrayed in the movies, but also helping propel a national attitude change that included President Truman's elimination of segregation in the Armed Forces, and the energized civil rights movement, brought on by war, and accelerated by many in the decades that followed.

Miller's legacy is long.

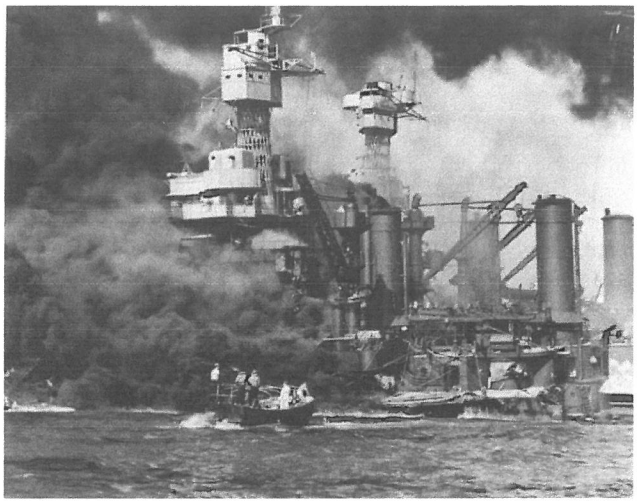
Dedication

To William E. Powell, Jr., my friend, and the first African American Rear Admiral in the United States Navy Supply Corps. The Messmen Branch, whose 50-year history, and "K-West and B-East", should not be lost to memory. The Stewards of the Wardroom of *USS Boxer (CVS-21/LPH-4)*, who once a week, allowed me to plan and add a meal to the menu, and whose competence, professionalism, and friendship, made me smile, and helped make a ship a home. The Naval History and Heritage

Command, whose professionals keep history alive. And Master Chief Mess Management Specialist, Melvin G. Williams Sr., a fellow Missourian, who as a leader in the Pentagon E-Ring, managing the CNO and SECNAV Mess, compelled change that eliminated the last vestige of structural racial divide in my United States Navy.

Responsibility

Rear Admiral Daniel W. McKinnon, Jr. Supply Corps, United States Navy, retired in 1991 as Commander, Naval Supply Systems Command and 36th Chief of Supply Corps. He is the recipient of the Defense Distinguished Service Medal and the Navy Distinguished Service Medal. The Navy Marine Corps Achievement Medal holds a "Combat V". He retired again in 2000 as President and CEO of "NISH, creating employment for people with severe disabilities", where he received the "Distinguished Leadership Award" from the National Institute for People with Disabilities, and "Keeping the Nation's Promise Award" from the Association for Service-Disabled Veterans. He is President of the Project Handclasp Foundation, sponsoring humanitarian projects in the Philippines. He was recently recognized by Philippine Senate resolution for leadership in returning national icons, "The Bells of Balangiga". Dan collects and studies the artifacts of slavery. In 1958, he served as Wardroom Mess Caterer on board the *USS Boxer.*



Seven torpedoes and sixteen bombs could not sink a ship.

Discrimination and malice among men cannot sink determination and triumph.

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