Dorie Miller, War Hero

The National Archives holds a wealth of material documenting the African American experience. In honor of African American History Month this February, we pay tribute to the struggles and achievements of the people and events that have shaped our nation. Today we share the story of Doris (“Dorie”) Miller, a U.S. Navy sailor in service on board the USS West Virginia during the attack on Pearl Harbor.

**USS Doris Miller (CVN 81)**

Just this week, the U.S. Navy announced that the newest aircraft carrier would be named after Dorie Miller, the first named for an African American. Learn more on [Navy Line, The Official Blog of the U.S. Navy.](http://navyline.navy.mil)
At 7:48 am on December 7, 1941, Japanese fighter planes and bombers began their surprise attack on the U.S. Naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. In two waves of attack, the Japanese sunk four battleships and destroyed 188 aircraft. The attack also damaged four other battleships, three cruisers, three destroyers, an anti-aircraft training ship, and one minelayer. The early morning attack killed 2,403 Americans and injured another 1,178. The attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese caused the United States to enter World War II.

Although there were limited opportunities for African Americans in the Armed Forces, 2.5 million black men registered for the draft and thousands of black women joined auxiliary units. African Americans generally served in segregated combat support groups with limited military engagement. On the homefront, African Americans supported the “Double-V” campaign, which meant victory against fascism abroad and victory against racism at home, in addition to supporting the March on Washington campaign in 1941, in an effort to demand equal employment in the defense industries.
Navy Messman Third Class Dorie Miller, was born on October 12, 1919 in Waco, Texas. Miller joined the U.S. Navy in 1939, and was made a mess attendant, then cook, aboard the USS West Virginia. During the Pearl Harbor attack, Miller first ensured the safety of several crewmates, before he began firing at Japanese warplanes with a 50 caliber anti-aircraft gun. Miller shot down two Japanese aircraft (possibly downed two more) during the raid.
In Record Group 80 Correspondence Relating to Discrimination, 1941-1944 (National Archives Identifier 120920855) series, the file unit Dorie Miller (National Archives Identifier 26416709) contains memorandums, letters, and newspaper coupons from the black community to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, encouraging him to admit Miller to the Naval Academy. As a messman, Miller was ineligible for military training, even though he was a hero in the Pearl Harbor attack. The letters and coupons from black newspapers to Roosevelt received attention from the president and were forwarded to the Navy Department. However, Miller was too old to attend the Naval Academy. Only candidates for midshipmen between the ages of 17 and 21 were considered. Miller was 23-years-old.

Following Pearl Harbor, Miller received a Navy Cross from Admiral Chester W. Nimitz. He would later receive the Purple Heart, the American Defense Service Medal – Fleet Clasp, Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal. In the spring of 1943, he was assigned to the USS Liscome Bay (still at the rank of messman), when he was killed during a Japanese submarine attack on November 24, 1943 near the Gilbert Islands in the Pacific.
Many thanks to Dr. Tina L. Ligon, Supervisory Archivist at the National Archives at College Park, Maryland. This feature was adapted from her post on the Rediscovering Black History blog for the 75th Anniversary of Pearl Harbor.

Explore further

The National Archives holds a wealth of material related to the interactions of African Americans with the Federal government—captured in millions of historical records including the Emancipation Proclamation, census records, military service records, and records documenting the civil rights movement.

Learn more on our website:

https://www.archives.gov/news/topics/african-american-history
https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans

Explore a selection of records documenting this vast history within the National Archives Catalog.
Citizen Archivist Transcription Mission

Help us finish transcribing the Official Military Personnel File for Doris Miller.

New to the citizen archivist program? Learn how to register and get started.

Get started transcribing!

Transcription Challenge Update

In our last newsletter, we asked for your help transcribing the Brink's Robbery case file, which contains materials pertaining to the U.S. Attorney's investigation and prosecution of the January 17, 1950 armed robbery of the Brink's Building in the North End of Boston, Massachusetts.

Wow! 13 Citizen Archivists transcribed 342 of 538 pages. Will you help us finish transcribing the Brink's Robbery case file?
New to the citizen archivist program? Learn how to register and get started.

Get started transcribing!

Questions or comments? Email us at catalog@nara.gov.