




Doris Miller Sailor and Hero

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Doris ("Dorie") Miller (1919–1943), an African American sailor, became one of the earliest heroes of World War II. He was awarded the Navy Cross for his courage and quick thinking during the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

The son of Connery and Henrietta Miller, Doris Miller was born on October 12, 1919, on a small farm near Waco, Texas. He joined the U.S. Navy when he was 19. Miller was assigned as a mess attendant, or kitchen worker, to the battleship *USS West Virginia*, which, on December 7, 1941, was anchored in Pearl Harbor on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. It was a calm Sunday morning, and Miller was doing his laundry on deck. Little did he know that the *West Virginia* and other U.S. ships anchored in the harbor were about to become the victims of the greatest surprise attack in naval history.

Pearl Harbor is Attacked At 7:55 A.M., 353 Japanese bombers approached the harbor. One by one the planes peeled off and plunged toward their targets. As they passed overhead, a powerful bomb hit the *West Virginia*. Miller was knocked down by the blast but managed to scramble to his feet. Through the smoke and flames, he spotted someone lying unconscious on the captain's bridge. He ran to help and discovered that the wounded man was the captain himself, Mervyn Bennion. Miller moved his badly injured captain to a safer place and looked for help as bullets from the enemy planes rained down around him.

Fights Enemy Planes After medics arrived to treat the captain, Miller ran to one of the big antiaircraft guns on deck. Meanwhile, the enemy fire continued. Bodies were scattered around the deck. Some men jumped overboard as enemy planes flew low over the ship, shooting at the fleeing sailors.

Although Miller was a good shot with a rifle, he had never fired an antiaircraft gun. Miller later said he thought he had shot down one plane. Others have credited him with shooting down as many as four planes. With all the confusion, though, no one knows for sure. Because the *West Virginia* was sinking, Miller was ordered to abandon ship.

Receives Navy Cross for Bravery For several months, stories circulated about the incident, but Miller was not

publicly identified. In March 1942, a newspaper identified Miller as the hero and started a campaign to honor him. The pressure from newspapers and civil rights groups was unending. Finally, on June 10, 1942, on the direct orders of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz pinned the Navy Cross to Miller's uniform.

Miller's next assignment was aboard the *USS Liscome Bay*. On November 24, 1943, a Japanese submarine shot torpedoes at the ship, which sank with most of her 712-person crew. Among them was Dorie Miller.

Thirty years after his death, the Navy honored Miller by naming a ship, the *USS Miller*, for him. Almost 50 years after his death, Hollywood honored Miller. A dramatized version of his heroism was featured in the 2001 film *Pearl Harbor*.

Review Questions

1. Where was the *West Virginia* anchored when it was attacked?
2. What did Miller do when he saw that his captain was wounded?
3. How did Miller die?

Critical Thinking

4. **Understanding Motivation** Why do you think some men jumped overboard during the attack on the *West Virginia*?
5. **Recognizing Effects** What effect did the pressure from newspapers and civil rights groups have on the navy?
6. **Summarizing** What made Miller a hero during the attack on Pearl Harbor?