Navy Names Future Aircraft Carrier Doris Miller During King Day Ceremony



Family members of World War II hero Doris “Dorie” Miller react after the unveiling of the new Ford-class aircraft carrier USS Doris Miller at a Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Alexander C. Kubitza

WASHINGTON – Acting Navy Secretary Thomas B. Modly on Jan. 20 named a future aircraft carrier the USS Doris Miller (CVN 81) during a Martin Luther King Jr. Day ceremony in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, honoring black Americans of the Greatest Generation.

The day’s ceremony also paid homage to the beginning and end of America’s role in World War II and the scene where Doris Miller’s heroic actions cemented him into America’s history books.

“It’s an honor to join you today on the birthday celebration of one of our nation’s – and the world’s – greatest spiritual, intellectual and moral leaders,” Modly said. “Seventy-five years ago, our nation bound together to secure victory against an existential threat, but also to secure opportunities for broader liberty and justice for the entire world.”

“But we were not perfect in our own pursuits of these values here at home,” Modly continued. “That contradiction is an undeniable part of our history, one that cannot be glossed over or forgotten.”

Doris “Dorie” Miller manned anti-aircraft guns during the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, for which he had no training, and he tended to the wounded. He was recognized by

the Navy for his actions and awarded the Navy Cross – the first black man to ever receive the honor.

U.S. Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas) delivered an emotional speech about the influence of Miller's legacy on her own life.

"All of my life, I've heard about how great Doris Miller was," Johnson said. "[He] was my childhood hero. It was the spirit of Dorie Miller that made me appreciate being an American more than anything else because, in the days of real segregation, a black man from my hometown had stepped up to help save America. Dorie Miller started the civil rights movement and perhaps even gave Martin Luther King Jr. the spirit to lead us into the era of which he did."

Modly noted that throughout U.S. history, the finest of every generation have stepped forward to serve the cause of freedom around the world even if they were denied those same freedoms at home simply because of the color of their skin.

On Dec. 7, 1941, Doris Miller did not let the prejudice of others define him, the Navy secretary said. Johnson said naming CVN 81 in honor of Doris Miller has done so much to recognize and highlight that no matter the color of a person's skin, they can achieve anything.

U.S. Rep. Bill Flores (R-Texas), which includes Miller's hometown of Waco, said it was an honor to pay tribute to one of America's heroes from the Greatest Generation.

"[Miller] was a man who exemplified the hearts of our Sailors and the spirit of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., who we also recognize today," Flores said. "Dr. King once said, 'The time is always right to do something right' and that is what Petty Officer Miller did. His story of bravery is a testament to his courage and commitment to serve both his fellow Sailors and his country."

For the members of Miller’s family present at the ceremony, it was a moment to reflect on the legacy their family lives to honor with every generation.

“When Uncle Doris decided that he was going to step up to the machine gun and shoot, it was a ‘why not me?’ moment,” said Henrietta Blednose Miller, a niece of Miller’s. “As we go through life, we’re all going to be confronted with ‘why not me?’ moments whether they are small or big, but with each one, you will be affecting someone if you take an action at that moment.”

CVN 81 will be the second ship named in honor of Miller and the first carrier ever named for a black American. The Doris Miller will also be the first aircraft carrier to be named in honor of a Sailor for actions while serving in the enlisted ranks.