HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1851, William Cooper Nell, in his dissertation – Services of Colored Americans in the Wars of 1776 and 1812 – stated, “There are those who will ask why make a parade of the military service of Colored Americans?” He then criticized the “combination of circumstances which have veiled from the public eye a narration of those military services of Coloreds which are generally conceded as passports to honorable and lasting notice of Americans.”

Ninety years later, on December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor inflicting devastating damage to the United States’ war capabilities. When the bombers hit the West Virginia, its skipper was mortally wounded. Amid a hail of bullets and bombs, Mess Attendant Dori (Dorie) Miller moved his captain to a place of safety. He then made several trips below deck, risking his life in toxic oil and water to rescue a number of sailors. He later manned an abandoned deck gun and took on the Japanese Air Force. The lifesaving deeds of Miller are the equal of the valor of those who received the Medal of Honor at Pearl Harbor.

According to the latest research, Miller was named in the after-action report by his ship’s surviving officer and eventually he received the Navy Cross; however, the information regarding his valor was not included on his Navy Cross Citation as is the practice in awarding honors such as his. Nearly two years later, on November 24, 1943, Miller was killed when his ship, Liscome Bay, was sunk by a Japanese submarine during the Battle of Gilbert Islands.

It was public knowledge that Secretary of the Navy, William Franklin Knox and others within the Department of the Navy to include the Commandant of the Marines did not look favorably upon the service of African Americans. Secretary Knox “was able to deter the advancement of African-Americans in the U.S. Navy, preferring to keep African American Sailors in the Steward’s Branch, relegated to servient roles.” Major General Thomas Holcomb said, African Americans “had no right to serve as marines.” He then added, “If it were a question of having a marine corps of 500 whites or 250,000 Negroes, I would rather have the whites.”

Given these attitudes, it is clearly understood why the Medal of Honor was not bestowed upon Dorie Miller. During both WWI and WWII, African Americans were excluded from such honors. In recent years, the process has been amended to allow for several African American recipients of the prestigious Medal of Honor; however, the United States Navy has resisted corrective action.

The Dorie Miller Medal of Honor Committee urge all Americans to join this campaign for justice.

To learn more about The Dorie Miller Medal of Honor Campaign or to support, please email us at info@thedoriemillermedalofhonor.com or visit our website at www.thedoriemillermedalofhonor.com.