

On December 7, 1941, we were attacked by the Japanese, causing the United States to take part in World War II. Although many of us may not have been alive at the time, just imagine how utterly devastating it would have been to find out that we were attacked on American soil. Bombs were dropping, wounded screaming, people dead everywhere you looked. A living nightmare of horrors. Yet in the midst of the chaos, mess attendant, Doris Miller, had a clear head and was saving lives.

Doris Miller, or Dorie to most people, was born on October 12, 1919. Growing up Dorie lived in Waco, Texas for the majority of his life. Before having to drop out of high school, he was the school's star football player, but as the times continued to get tougher due to the Depression, Doris became a cook, hoping to help sustain his family. That job wasn't enough though. Doris was wanting a way to feed his siblings and help his parents out. Seeking adventure, he decided to enlist in the Navy. Despite being free from slavery, the life of an African American was not easy, and the only position open to Dorie was a messman. Less than a month before his twentieth birthday, Doris Miller trained at a segregated bootcamp for his new life as a Navyman. Not long after bootcamp, he was assigned aboard the USS West Virginia. For two years he washed dishes, made beds, and did the chores of all the white people aboard. For two years he did the work of a maid. How then was he the first African American to be given the Navy Cross for heroism?

On the morning of December 7th, Dorie was gathering dirty laundry when the Japanese dropped their first bombs on Pearl Harbor. He had most likely been taught what to do in the

event that his ship was bombed, but practicing controlled drills versus chaotic reality are radically different. After two years of peace and being docked on the beautiful shores of Hawaii, Doris probably doubted that he would ever need to implement their emergency plan of action. When suddenly, in the middle of one of Dorie's morning tasks, explosions boom, the ship lurches, sirens are sounding, and the screams of terror as the most dreaded thing happens. We were under attack. Doris dropped his laundry and ran to his reported battle station, only to find the ammunition storehouse already flooded and the water rising still. He then rushed to the main deck to find the ship's commander, Captain Mervyn Bennion, lying there mortally wounded. Dorie carried him to a safer place aboard the battleship before doing the same for multiple other wounded comrades. Despite having never been taught how to man a deck gun, Dorie found an unattended gun and started firing at the attacking enemy planes. With the constant danger around him, he didn't stop shooting until the anti-aircraft gun had run out of ammunition. That in itself is an incredible display of bravery but Doris didn't stop there. When Captain Bennion was pronounced dead, orders were given to abandon the battleship, as people jumped from the ship into lifeboats and dove into the ocean to save themselves, Dorie was unable to do the same. He could not leave behind the wounded and helpless. He started pulling soldiers from the burning oil and putting them on the last of the rescue boats, saving a multitude of people. Alas, as the boat was rapidly sinking, Doris, being one of the last three men aboard, jumped in the ocean and swam ashore, all the while having to avoid patches of burning oil and debris.

In the following months on May 27, 1942, Miller was awarded with the Navy Cross for his bravery and heroism. Doris was one of the lowest ranking men aboard the ship, he was of African American descent in a time of segregation, and he was inexperienced around the guns aboard due to his position, yet Miller stepped up to protect his fellow soldiers. His actions were

revolutionary. Dorie was fighting racism within the military without even trying to, he just knew what the right thing to do was, and pushed his fears aside and did it.

Real bravery isn't having an absence of fear, real bravery is feeling your fear, yet doing the right thing anyway. Doris is the perfect example of what true courage means. He shows us to stand up for what we believe, to go against societal norms to do what is right. In this current generation of young people, we will often do one of two things: We will either shy away from helping the hurt, and the helpless, selfishly trying to save our reputation when all the while we are ruining it, or, we do what is right out of the desire for praise, not actually caring about what we are doing. Why has it come down to those two things? What happened to us as humans, that we no longer care about others? We have become so self-centered that we are blind to the helpless, and lack courage to help the hurting.

I believe the most impactful lesson we can learn from Doris Miller's story, is the need we have for courageous people. But even more than needing just a brave person here or there, knowing that you can be that person, that you should be that person. When you lend a hand to a stranger in need, or when you give some words of encouragement to that bullied girl at school, to you it might seem like such a tiny thing, but to that person maybe it was major. We don't know what is happening in the lives of everyone around us, maybe they look like they have their life together but at home they have to watch their mother being hurt. Everyday we have the opportunity to go against the flow and do something brave. You don't have to shoot down enemy air planes to be courageous, you just have to push past our fears to do what is right.

In my own life, Dori's story is changing how I see every action I make. We aren't guaranteed a long life, in fact we aren't even guaranteed tomorrow. Look at Doris for instance, we know the story of his bravery, yet just one year after he was awarded the Navy Cross, on

November 24, 1943, at age 24 his ship was torpedoed and sunk, killing the famous Doris Miller. He only got 24 years of life, yet he left behind a legacy of bravery. If I were to die tomorrow, what would my legacy be? After reading about Doris Miller, I long to be remembered for my courage and kindness. If everything I am doing now will forever be part of my story, it is up to me to make it how I would like it to be. It is up to me to care for the hurting and helpless, for everyone who's story might not be as fortunate as mine. It is my job to give a smile and lend a hand to anyone and everyone who might need it. Doris didn't have the same level of luxuries and respect as the white men aboard, yet that didn't hold him back from saving their lives. My job is to run against the current of cowardice and run toward bravery, to follow what I believe is right, until one day maybe I won't have to be running against the current, maybe the current will also be running to the right thing.

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