

Navy may strip Black war hero's name from aircraft carrier — possibly to rename it after Trump

Story by Christopher Rhodes

A new [Navy](#) vessel set to honor a Black sailor who fought in one of the most famous battles in U.S. history may be renamed before it has even launched. While the heroic World War II sailor may still be honored by the Trump administration in other ways, the possible removal of his name from a new aircraft carrier comes as the administration continues to whitewash American history.

USS Doris Miller, named after Black war hero, may be renamed before it sets sail

[CNN](#) reported Thursday that sources have indicated that a new aircraft carrier may not bear the name USS Doris Miller, in honor of a Black enlisted sailor who fought the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor, as had originally been planned. The change, reversing the 2020 announcement of the vessel's name under the first Trump administration, appears to be a result of a 2025 Navy review of naming practices conducted under former Secretary of the Navy John Phelan, who believes in limiting the names of aircraft carriers to U.S. presidents, Navy admirals or major naval battles. According to the three sources who spoke with the news network, it is not clear what the name of the vessel will ultimately be, although two of the sources claim that one option being discussed is naming the vessel after President Trump, even though naming the ship after a sitting president would break precedent. While discussions are ongoing about the carrier's name, one of the sources indicated that another vessel might be named after Miller instead and that the sailor might be awarded the Medal of Honor, the highest recognition of valor for members of the U.S. military.

Whichever honors are ultimately awarded by the Trump administration to Miller will add to the sailor's [legacy](#). Miller, born in 1919 in Waco, Texas, was serving as a cook — one of the few jobs open to Black sailors in the segregated Navy — aboard the USS West Virginia when the battleship and other vessels at Pearl Harbor were attacked by the Japanese military on December 7, 1941. After being ordered to help move his wounded captain, Mervyn Bennion, and then load an anti-aircraft gun, Miller took the initiative to operate the weapon against the attacking force. Despite having no formal training, Miller is said to have successfully shot down several [Japanese bombers](#). Miller was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions at Pearl Harbor. He was the first Black person allowed to go on a speaking tour along with white military personnel, raising War Bonds, and his face appeared on a 1943 recruitment poster along with the caption “above and beyond the call of duty.” Miller died in 1943 aboard the USS Liscome Bay, which was sunk by a Japanese torpedo. He was later portrayed by Cuba Gooding Jr. in the movie *Pearl Harbor*.

Trump, Hegseth's whitewashing of American history

Even if the Trump administration decides to honor Miller in another way, the potential removal of Miller's name from an aircraft carrier continues a pattern of the administration's whitewashing of American history, including within the military. Under Trump's [anti-DEI agenda](#) and Secretary of Defense Hegseth's campaign to eliminate "DEI woke s**t" from the military, information about Black individuals has been removed from various facilities, such as the [U.S. Naval Academy](#). A Navy vessel named after pioneering gay politician [Harvey Milk](#) was renamed, with the names of ships named after Harriet Tubman and Thurgood Marshall also placed under review. Hegseth has supported the honoring of some Black figures, such as the all-Black "[Harlem Hellfighters](#)" who served during WWI. However, under Hegseth's leadership, a number of Black military [officials](#) have been forced out of leadership positions, even as Hegseth has blocked [promotions](#) of women and Black officers within the military.

Miller's great-nephew, Thomas Bledsoe, initially told CNN that Miller's family had not been made aware of discussion about removing his name from the aircraft carrier currently being constructed. Bledsoe also said that the family had been working "for years" to have the Medal of Honor awarded to Miller, with the Navy's response being "very positive." Bledsoe spoke Thursday with CNN's Laura Coates, saying, "For our family, it was quite a shock to hear that there was conversation about the possibility of renaming the Doris Miller carrier." Bledsoe also told Coates "Not only was it a shock, but it was also a shock that we found out from a news outlet, comparably from the Navy." Bledsoe, asked about what he would say to Hegseth about the naming decision, responded, "I would really want someone to take the time to realize the true impact of changing the name and what it would do to society," maintaining that "Doris Miller stands for so much about America and who we are today."

The government's plans for additional honors for Miller have yet to be finalized. The heroic Black sailor's legacy has long been established, but the decisions concerning how to further honor him today will come as the Trump administration has clawed back honors and recognition for Black and other minority figures in U.S. history, including those who fought and died for the country.