

WWII hero could get Medal of Honor

Pearl Harbor survivor killed in action in 1943

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USA TODAY NETWORK

Courage during Pearl Harbor made Dorie Miller a national hero.

In 1941, Miller risked his life to carry injured sailors to safety as the Japanese military torpedoed the battleship he was aboard. The Navy mess attendant 3rd class, sometimes referred to as a cook, took control of an anti-aircraft gun and returned fire. He shot down at least one – and possibly many more – enemy planes.

Historical accounts suggest that Miller’s actions saved lives. He inspired other Black men to enlist and challenged racist attitudes. And his heroism helped desegregate the armed forces.

More than 80 years after Miller was killed in action, current and former members of Congress, along with veterans and civil rights groups, are still seeking to recognize him with the highest award for valor during combat.

In March, offering the most recent legislative proposal to award Miller the Medal of Honor, Rep. Kweisi Mfume of Maryland went a step further: He proposed to also give Miller the nation’s highest civilian award, the Congressional Gold Medal.

“Dorie Miller protected America, and we are all the beneficiaries of his bravery,” Mfume said when submitting the legislation. “His valiance is even more admirable because he courageously worked to save a democracy that he could not fully enjoy at that time.”

Growing up in Texas

The third of four sons to Texas sharecroppers Connery and Henrietta Miller, Doris Miller was born in 1919, the grandson of slaves. Their family farm was just outside Waco, Texas, where a Black teen was lynched and burned alive three years before Miller was born.

As a boy, Miller worked on the family farm. He learned how to shoot by hunting for small game with his brothers. At



Dorie Miller is awarded the Navy Cross by Adm. Chester Nimitz on the flight deck of the USS Enterprise on May 27, 1942. Members of Congress and civil rights groups are now proposing he be awarded the Medal of Honor. PROVIDED BY U.S. NAVY

A.J. Moore High School, he landed a spot on the football team as a fullback, eventually growing to 6-foot-3 and 200 pounds.

But Miller dropped out. And, at 19, when he could not find work, he enlisted in a still racially segregated Navy.

Back then, Black men serving in the Navy, according to a Navy Times report published in 2019, were consigned “to the lowly messman branch, where they were tasked with making the beds and shining the shoes of their white officers and waiting on them in the officers’ mess.”

On Dec. 7, 1941, Miller was collecting laundry when he suddenly found himself amid a surprise attack. Japan had sent more than 350 warplanes to destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet.

As the air raid sirens sounded, Miller swung into action.

He ran to the deck as Japanese planes zoomed overhead and bullets rained. He saw the dead body of the ship’s captain. And despite having no formal training firing the .50-caliber Browning anti-aircraft gun, Miller aimed and shot until he ran out of ammunition.

Word of Miller’s valor spread.

At first, his actions were attributed

only to an “unnamed Negro messman hero.” But the Pittsburgh Courier, a Black newspaper, spent months running down “every possible rumor.” It confirmed accounts of his bravery with the Navy and published a report. It began: “Add the name of Dorie Miller, 22-year-old mess attendant in the United States Navy, to the illustrious ‘honor roll’ of Negro fighting heroes, who have inscribed their names in the red ink of raw courage.”

Miller, the report continued, was part of the unrecognized “phantom brigade of fighting black men” that it traced back to Crispus Attucks, another Black sailor often considered the first American killed in the American Revolution.

This and other reports put pressure on officials like Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, who wasn’t keen on Black men in combat roles, to recognize Miller’s bravery.

For the first time – a moment recorded in a black-and-white photograph – a Black man received the Navy Cross. It was presented to Miller by Adm. Chester Nimitz, commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet. The Navy put Miller’s face on recruiting posters and sent him on tour to sell war bonds.

But Miller’s life would be short. He

was aboard the USS Liscome Bay in 1943 when it was hit by a torpedo, according to the National Museum of the Pacific War. Its bomb magazine exploded.

Miller’s body was never recovered. He was 24 years old.

Honors given and not

Over the years, Miller has been honored in various ways.

Beyond the Navy Cross, his memory is preserved in news reports, history books and in World War II museums. A Navy ship that has since been decommissioned was named after him. There’s a 9-foot-tall, bronze sculpture of the hero in his hometown.

But many still want him to be recognized with the Medal of Honor, the highest armed forces award, to acknowledge his actions and as a nod to all Black soldiers, sailors and airmen who, as a result of racism, were not recognized. Supporters include the American Legion and the NAACP.

The ongoing effort also adds to the debate that is unfolding, largely along party lines, about how American history should be framed, what place people who had been left out of it should hold and who should be honored.

The Trump administration has attempted to scrub the names and achievements of Miller and other figures and events from government websites, national parks displays and other public records. It says it wants to eliminate what it considers “diversity, equity and inclusion” efforts and root out references that it claims “disparage Americans.”

Unless reversed, there’s one other honor that Miller is set to receive. In early 2020, during President Donald Trump’s first term, the Navy announced it would name a future aircraft carrier, one of the world’s largest warships, after Miller. It will be the first named for an enlisted Black sailor.

In the Navy’s news release at the time, Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas, who has since died, said Miller was her childhood hero.

Then-acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly said Miller “stood for everything that is good about our nation.”

FBI report: Crime rates down in all categories

Kathryn Palmer
USA TODAY

Violent crime fell in 2024, according to the FBI, marking the second consecutive annual decline as overall crime in the country continues a downward trend following COVID-19-era spikes.

The figures, released by the agency Aug. 5 in its annual national crime report, also show a dip in property crime and hate crimes reported in 2024.

It records a 4.5% decrease in violent crime from 2023 to 2024, while property crime, such as burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft and arson, decreased by nearly double that rate, at a little over 8% year-over-year. Hate crime decreased by 1.5%.

“When considering 5- and 10-year trends, the 2024 estimated violent crime total was 5.5% below the 2020 level and 0.7% below the 2015 level,” the FBI said in its report.

The report is based on data voluntarily submitted by local law enforcement agencies to the FBI’s national reporting systems. About 86% of these local agencies participated, covering 95.6% of the population, the FBI said, including all major cities of more than a million inhabitants. An additional 562 agencies participated in the crime reporting program for the 2024 report, compared to the previous year.

Violent crime consists of murder, nonnegligent manslaughter, aggravated assault, rape and robbery. Aggravated assaults accounted for a little under three-quarters of all violent crimes reported to law enforcement for the year – at 71.3%.

Here’s the breakdown:

- Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter decreased 14.9%.
- Rape decreased 5.2%.
- Robbery decreased 8.9%.
- Aggravated assault decreased 3%.

Rates in murder and nonnegligent manslaughter saw the biggest drop among the four categories, and is at that category’s lowest rate in nine years.

However, the FBI’s breakdown of the number of violent crimes committed



The FBI’s annual national crime report recorded a 4.5% decrease in violent crime from 2023 to 2024.

ALEX WROBLEWSKI/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES FILE

across the country in 2024 remains sobering, with one violent crime committed on average every 25 seconds. Further, the agency estimates each day a murder occurs every 31 minutes, a rape occurs every 4 minutes, a robbery at least every 2 minutes and an aggravated assault every 36 seconds.

Property crime offenses decreased year-over-year by 8.1% in 2024, while the FBI noted a broader 10-year trend shows a 24.7% decrease when compared with the 2015 estimate.

Here’s the breakdown:

- Burglary decreased 8.6%.
- Larceny-theft decreased 5.5%.
- Motor vehicle theft decreased 18.6%.
- Arson decreased 7.5%.

Violent crime arrests decreased 5.2% in 2024 when compared with 2023 arrests, the FBI said, and property crime arrests increased 2.9% in the same period. Arrests of minors decreased 6.5% in 2024, while arrests of adults decreased 1.0%.

The federal agency’s annual report also recorded 64 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty in 2024, with firearms involved in 46 of those deaths.

The FBI noted that reported assaults on law enforcement officers, including aggravated and simple assault offenses, reached a 10-year high in 2024, with 85,730 officers assaulted in 2024.

Contributing: Reuters

Bat incident leads to nearly \$21,000 bill

Stephanie Murray
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To say Erica Kahn had an interesting experience at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in Page, Arizona, last year would be an understatement.

Nearly a year after her trip, the Massachusetts woman launched a GoFundMe to ease the nearly \$21,000 in medical bills that she accrued after a bat flew into her mouth during a photography session at Horseshoe Bend.

“It was kind of an out-of-body experience,” Kahn said. “I was thinking, ‘Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. There’s a bat in my mouth.’ ”

What started as a “really gross” encounter with a bat went from bad to worse, landing Kahn a daunting medical bill that she’s still tackling a year later.

Kahn, 33, had recently lost her job when she traveled to Arizona with her father in 2024. Her health insurance ended Aug. 2, 2024, and she did not sign up for a \$650-per-month COBRA plan to keep it going, she said.

She was uninsured when the bat flew into her mouth 11 days later.

Kahn was taking long-exposure photos of the starry night sky when she noticed bats flying “closer than normal.” Suddenly, a bat flew between her face and the camera.

When Kahn opened her mouth to scream, part of the bat flew briefly into her mouth. It was dark. Kahn couldn’t tell if she made contact with its wing or head. She did notice how it tasted, though.

The creature had “kind of a dirty, earthy flavor,” Kahn said, but it was the “sweet” element that made her particularly worried about rabies exposure.

“I don’t know where the sweetness came from. That was kind of a surprise, I guess,” Kahn said. “Apparently, bats lick their wings, and that’s why it was such a high risk of transmission of saliva between me and the bat.”

She went to the emergency room at Flagstaff Medical Center the next day for rabies shots in case the bat had ex-



Erica Kahn and her father, Richard Kahn, were visiting Horseshoe Bend in Arizona when the bat encounter occurred. PROVIDED BY ERICA KAHN

posed her to the deadly disease. She said she signed up for health insurance through Innovative Partners but was denied coverage.

Over the next two weeks, she received additional rabies vaccines at other hospitals.

“I wasn’t really sweating that part of it,” Kahn said. “It became a tragic story when the bills came.”

Kahn’s medical bills for her rabies treatment, which entailed seven shots over two weeks, totaled \$20,749.

“It’s mentally pretty stressful to think about that sum of money,” she said, calling it “horrible timing.”

In an effort to shrink her bill, Kahn went to the press. She submitted her story to the health publication KFF’s “bill of the month” column at the encouragement of her cousin, who is an Arizona doctor.

Her story spread from there, showing up in national publications.

Kahn said her experience reinforced her beliefs about the health care system being unfair, especially when it comes to health care being tied to employment. “I’m kind of happy to shine a light on what I think is a really broken health care system,” Kahn said.

Kahn, a biomedical engineer, has a new job and is putting money toward her medical bills. She also started a GoFundMe to help pay the medical debt.