

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
Navy and Marine Corps Commendation medal Award Ceremony in Honor of Carl E. Clark  
Moffett Field, CA  
17 January 2012

Thank you so much, Congresswoman Eshoo. I know that you all know how much she has done to make today possible. And this is just one example of her great leadership and dedication. Thank you so much. And now I am honored to be here with all of you today as part of this long overdue recognition. Congresswoman Eshoo has recognized so many leaders, so many friends and family in this crowd.

I want to recognize one of the Navy's senior enlisted leaders, Master Chief Sidney Dawson Jr., the Command Master Chief of the Navy Supply community.

You know, the Defense Department creates a lot of paperwork. I work in the Pentagon, you can trust me on this one.

One of the most important pieces of paper generated in every service member's record is the "Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty"—DD Form 214. DD 214 is completed at the end of every service person's time in the military and offers a really concise, one-page overview of that person's time in service. I, like everyone else who has served, have one from my time in the Navy and I, like most people, have kept it.

Carl Clark's DD 214 includes all of his personal information data, including his home address, the same address in San Mateo where he has lived for over 60 years. It also records that Carl's service was honorable.

But his DD 214 is missing one entry. And today, we will add that final official entry that has been missing for almost exactly two-thirds of a century. That entry will record that Carl E. Clark has been awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation medal with Combat V.

The day was coming to a close on that long ago Thursday evening, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1945, but it was far from over for the crew of the USS Aaron Ward, which was serving as a picket ship off the coast of Okinawa. The ship, a destroyer-minesweeper barely six months from its commission date and it suddenly became the target of approximately 25 Kamikazes.

The attacker's plan was to hit the Aaron Ward and the other ships on station, while their planes were full of fuel and armed with bombs, in order to ignite a firestorm when they hit.

The Ward's gunners shot down some of the Kamikazes, but six planes and three of their bombs hit the ship. They hit the port side, they hit the main deck, they hit the superstructure. The aft engine room and fire room quickly flooded.

The rudder was jammed hard left as the ship was turning in a tight circle while gun batteries and damage control teams kept working to save the lives of the ship and crew.

Just imagine being in a fight like that. Imagine being a member of that crew, engulfed in water and flame, relying on training and experience and determination to overcome the fear you have to feel.

Carl Clark not only can imagine it, he lived it.

He was a Steward First Class working in the Officer's Mess, but once the alarm went off for General Quarters, his job became the job of every other Sailor on that horrific night—his job was to fight for the life of the ship and the lives of his shipmates.

The attack lasted less than an hour, and did not, and could not sink the Aaron Ward. But the resulting fires continued to rage, forcing the crew to work through the night to keep their vessel afloat, to keep the wounded alive and provide for their dead.

Carl Clark's efforts were crucial as he fought through his grief over the deaths of the rest of his repair locker. He took up a fire hose usually manned by several Sailors, and throughout

the night, sometimes on his own, stood his ground until the fires that threatened to ignite the ammo locker and sink the Ward were extinguished.

Simply put, Carl Clark was, and is, a hero.

When the war was over, he came home and led a good and productive life. He worked for the Postal Service until he retired. He was active in his community and his church. He is a painter and writer. His has been a full life and one that has honored America.

But the country he helped defend did not honor his wartime actions. Today, we correct that omission.

Already part of a legacy because of his actions, Carl Clark now officially joins other pioneers like the Golden 13, the Tuskegee Airmen and the Montford Point Marines; African-Americans who proudly served and risked their lives for their nation and the great promise of this nation that is enshrined in our Declaration of Independence and in our Constitution. They did this even during a time when their nation had not redeemed this promise for all Americans; at a time when their nation, our nation, did not always live up to the principles that Carl Clark and so many others served to protect. Their unwavering dedication to the ideals of America, even when those ideals were yet to be fully realized back at home, exemplifies a standard of conduct we should all aspire to achieve.

So today, I am proud to honor, however belatedly, Carl Clark's willingness to face great risks in the service of others and in the cause of freedom. It was that same spirit that we honored two months ago when we christened the Navy's latest supply ship for another African American World War II veteran, civil rights martyr Medgar Evers, from my home state of Mississippi.

It was that same selflessness and devotion that we honored earlier today at Camp Pendleton when I presented a posthumous Navy Cross to the family of Lance Corporal Donald Hogan, USMC, who died in Afghanistan saving his fellow Marines.

Carl Clark will tell you that he doesn't consider himself a hero. He said, "I only did the best I could in a very ugly and demanding situation".

Well, Carl, you may not consider yourself a hero, but we do. And more than just the people here, America considers you a hero, and I am proud to offer this symbol of our thanks from a grateful Navy and a grateful nation.

It is decades overdue, but that amount of time does not diminish what you did. What you did that night echoes down through the years. Your actions were timely, our recognition of them, sadly, was not.

So, after 67 years, let's at last award you the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal with the Combat V for valor that you so dearly earned those many years ago.

Carl Clark, would you please join me.