

On April 6, 1945, five kamikazes struck the *USS Emmons*, an American battleship providing anti-aircraft cover for the *USS Rodman*. Although the *Emmons* and her crew tried to counterattack, the onslaught of suicide-bent Japanese planes was too strong for the Gleaves-class destroyer. The *Emmons*, along with sixty of her crew, sank. The remaining men were rescued. For fifty-six years, the *Emmons* lay untouched at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, off the coast of Okinawa's Kouri Island until February 2001, when it was located by a group of American divers. Once located, the ship was not ignored. Instead, memorial plaques, wreaths, and an American flag were placed on the ship wreck to forever remember the fallen. Additionally, for the past ten years a group of men and women have utilized their diving talents to protect, memorialize and record the *Emmons*.

When asked what I feel inspired these divers to engage with the *Emmons*, there was one phrase I could not get out of my head: *freedom is never free*. Instead, there is a cost for our inalienable rights and freedoms. This cost is not monetary but is instead equivalent to the lives of those who choose to utilize their talents and strengths to serve and protect our country. For example, one of my grandfather's strengths is his determination. This determination allowed him to excel in the unbearably hot stokehold, where he was responsible for the operation and maintenance of the boiler, which powered the *Emmons*. Although my grandfather was fortunate enough to have survived the attack at Kouri Island, there were those with different talents and strengths who perished. These fallen men are one of the reasons that freedom is never free. I presume many of the individuals involved with the *USS Emmons* dive team understand this idiom and believe it is important to protect this underwater grave site as a thank you for those who made the ultimate sacrifice on that fateful day.

Through my research, I noticed that many of the *USS Emmons* divers were presently or had previously served in the armed forces. After discovering this, I wondered if maybe the parallel between the crew members and these divers may have also inspired them to become involved with the *USS Emmons'* families. When an individual perishes in the line of duty, history describes them by their title: admiral, captain, seamen, et cetera. Unfortunately, when our men, such as those on the *USS Emmons* are

described in this manner, we often forget their familial titles: husband, son, father, grandfather, uncle, brother and friend. Failure to recognize these titles can cause us to forget the impact these deaths can have on their families. When a serviceman is lost, the hearts and spirits of the family are broken forever. Of all Americans, I believe those in the military best understand a family's response to these patriotic deaths. On a personal note, they are reminded of the impact their own families would encounter upon their death. Additionally, many have seen firsthand the way a military related death can negatively alter the lives of the family. Therefore, I believe the military divers protect the *USS Emmons* out of respect and in honor of the families torn apart by this incident.

As a member of the *Emmons* family, the dedication and commitment these divers have with regards to the *USS Emmons* is very meaningful. Growing up, the *Emmons* was not often discussed around the supper table when my extended family got together. When it was mentioned, my grandfather would often comment on how the loss of life that occurred during World War II was unwarranted and unfair. This was then met with silence. When I was younger, I was confused by these long drawn out silences. As I have matured, I have begun to understand that they are not only a moment of reflection, but a time to thank and honor our veterans. In essence, I perceive the *Emmons* as a concrete silence. Without the upkeep of this memorial, we as Americans would forget the importance of commemorating the men whose fight allowed this nation to evolve and grow. As a member of the *Emmons* family, I do not want the fight my grandfather and his comrades engaged in to be forgotten. Instead, I hope that the protection of the memorial, along with stories from me and others in the *USS Emmons* family, will stand as reminders of these courageous acts. They gave their tomorrow for our today. The least we can do is ensure that their legacy never fades.