

## **To Move Forward We Must Look Back**

World War II was probably the most important and impactful event in American history.

American men and women worked together on a massive scale to defeat Fascism, Imperialism and to preserve Democracy in the world. As the most powerful and influential nation, we have a responsibility to honor the past and preserve the future.

The Emmons story was one of many wartime examples of ordinary men taking heroic action and showing bravery in the face of danger. The personal accounts of the Emmons survivors are an inside view of the horrors of war. They provide us with a rare glimpse of the crisis the men faced and how their actions coupled with their training and discipline allowed them to survive and tell their story.

In his eyewitness account, Andrew Dodzik, SoM1/c, manned his gun until he couldn't. He and other crew members made sure the wounded were safely loaded into lifeboats as their ship exploded into flames and disintegrated around them. The official report indicated that the *men who remained aboard until the last expended every effort humanly possible to combat the damage*. While each crew member had his own role, as necessity dictated, the roles shifted and they all came together in a singular sense of purpose based on their concern for each other. Dodzik makes a notation at the end of his account which simply says, *All hands performed splendidly from beginning to end*. Because of this "splendid effort" there were survivors to tell the story of the Emmons.

Just as their training, discipline, teamwork were crucial to their survival, I believe these principles are also essential to the survival and success of our democratic nation.

Our history is what shapes us and what teaches us. Future generations of Americans can draw strength and spirit from those who fought and died for their country. These heroes should be celebrated as a way of maintaining their legacy and teaching future Americans about the spirit of unity as well as the need for discipline and the importance of education.

The study of history allows us to better face the future. Without it, we are more vulnerable as a nation to repeat past mistakes. By learning about our past we give life and meaning to the sacrifices made

by those on April 6, 1945. We show our respect and better ourselves by embodying their solidarity and selflessness, ensuring that their lives were not given in vain and that their meaning is preserved.

For me, the concept of ultimate sacrifice is personal. Stanley Layne Fisher was the father, grandfather and great-grandfather that we never knew. Tragically, he never knew us nor did he ever experience the joy of family; something we cherish everyday.

As a third-generation Emmons family member, I feel as though I have an obligation to continue the legacy of not only my great-grandfather but the entire crew of the Emmons. Active involvement with the Emmons association would be one way to do so. We should expand the membership and reach out to more members of the "Emmons family". For the past 8 years, I have gone with my grandfather every Memorial Day to honor and remember my great-grandfather by planting flowers on his memorial marker. I will continue this tradition with my children wherever we may live to teach them the importance of dedication and sacrifice for our country.

Lt. j.g. Stanley Layne Fisher, my namesake, lost his life in the battle of Okinawa. He, like so many others, gave his life for our country so that we could live in freedom. His memory and that of his shipmates are forever woven into the history of our country. As his great-granddaughter, I have the desire and motivation to become a better citizen. The discipline of the crew taught me the seriousness of the duties and responsibilities of a US citizen. As I go through life, I will aspire to live by the same virtues as those who served on the Emmons.

We can all emulate their spirit of unity and come together as Americans leaving our differences behind us, recognizing that just as the crew members of the Emmons would not have survived without these principles and teamwork, neither will we.

I want to thank you for this opportunity that caused me to learn more about my great-grandfather and his heroic shipmates. Looking back has taught me what I need to move forward.

Layne Fry