

The history of the United States Navy is anchored first and foremost by its people, purpose and dedication to service. Even today, famous battle cries from legendary ships stay relevant as reminders and symbols of a steadfast commitment to duty. During World War II, this exact spirit was personified by a destroyer called the USS *Emmons*. Affectionately referred to as "Easy Money" by her sister ships, the nickname meant that betting on the *Emmons* to handle any mission was a sure thing. The crew served across two oceans, leading up to heartbreaking sacrifice at the Battle of Okinawa. *Emmons* and its crew represent the heart and soul of an American military experience.

As detailed in Rear Admiral Edward Baxter Billingsley's book, *The Emmons Saga*, the ship rightfully earned its reputation by consistently performing under pressure, with nearly flawless execution. Whether faced with U-boat threats in the frigid Atlantic or heavy artillery off the coast of France, the crew mastered every obstacle with poise and precision. To the rest of the squadron, "Easy Money" proved success and reliability was imminent.

While the ship itself was impressive and grand, it was the internal culture that truly kept it afloat. Much of the crew consisted of young sailors my own age-under twenty years old-full of life and patriotism. My great-grandfather, Walter D. Blair, served as a Seaman First Class (S1c) aboard the ship from August 12, 1943, until that fateful day on April 6, 1945. His duties placed him right in the middle of the daily survival, handling deck maintenance, mooring lines, and, manning the gun mounts during battle. While living conditions were cramped, uncomfortable and often life-threatening, he and his shipmates developed a brotherhood and deep connection. They became a tight-knit family who understood they were dependent on one another for their survival. This bond was firmly tested off the coast of Okinawa when a devastating wave of kamikaze suicide planes struck the ship.

Instead of erupting in panic, the sailors manned their battle stations, fighting fires and firing their guns until no ammunition remained. My great grandfather survived this brutal attack, but sixty of his brothers did not.

Preserving the memory of the *Emmons* has quickly become a personal calling for me. Decades later, we enjoy our freedom due to the commitment, effort, and great sacrifices of these young men. In uncovering more about this special piece of history, I commit to passing on the legacy of "Easy Money" to future generations by transforming WWII stories from history textbook facts into meaningful conversation pieces. I hope to ensure the courage, sacrifice and humanity of this era lives on not only to remember it, but to connect with it.

Growing up in a digital world has taught me a lot of about fleeting moments. While there is so much we can document, it easy to forget how delicate memory can be. For my peers, World War II is often a chapter in a history book to be skimmed, highlighted and tested before moving on to the next chapter. However, my memory is now etched with the story of my great-grandfather, Walter D. Blair. It has opened my eyes to how capable young adults can be. My next adventure is an exciting one: college at my dream school. Like the *Emmons* crew, I too will form tight-knot bonds, face moments of uncertainty, and give unwavering effort to the challenges ahead. But I will do so with a greater appreciation and purpose, knowing these opportunities were made possible by the sacrifices and courage made by my great grandfather and the legacy of the *Emmons*.