

The Lt John J. Griffin/ USS Emmons Memorial

Scholarship Essay

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OPERATION ICEBERG

The Battle of Okinawa is truly one that will never be forgotten. With 1,600 ships and 350,000 naval personnel, it was the largest assault force of World War II in the Pacific theater. Essentially, Okinawa was the last barrier standing in the way of the allied forces' defeat of Japan. It was the only land mass close enough for fighter aircraft to support bombers, and for naval and land forces to gather strength for the final invasion of the Japanese homeland. In the initial steps of Operation Iceberg, minesweeps and tactical strikes were carried out to open up the landing for the U.S. Army and Marines. As part of the Task Group 52.3, the USS Emmons, a High Speed Destroyer Minesweeper (DMS), had a critical role conducting sweeping operations to clear the approaches for support and joint expeditionary forces.

Since the Emmons' commissioning on December 5, 1941, she followed her orders to the fullest of her capabilities through to the day of her sinking. While on picket duty with her sister ship the USS Rodman on April 6, 1945, they came under heavy kamikaze attacks. One of the first planes to attack struck the Rodman. As a selfless act, the Emmons took up position circling the stricken ship to provide anti aircraft cover. The Emmons was struck by five suicide planes, crippled and ablaze, with more than half of her officers and crew killed or wounded. Lieutenant John J. Griffin took command of the Emmons and worked to save the ship, but the damage was overwhelming resulting in the order to abandon ship. On the global level, the sacrifice of the Emmons was not in vain because they showed that they were completely committed to the defeat

of Japan. On the personal level, ask the crew of the Rodman how they felt about the Emmons action!

Some may question why military command did not wait for the atomic bomb to end the war. Regrettably, United States research did not start until 1941, and was then taken up by the military with the Manhattan Project in 1942. It did not become a reality until the first successful test on July 16, 1945 in Alamogordo, New Mexico. As a highly classified project, few military planners knew of it, and those that did could not fathom its full potential and thought of it as only one element of the allied approach to the unconditional surrender of Japan under Operation Downfall.

The Emmons legacy encompasses the duration of World War II and continues to stand tall among many WWII stories of duty and heroism, but as a fourth generation ancestor of an Emmons shipmate, it is a story that has become personal. As a college student who plans to enter nursing school, I have the pleasure to volunteer my time at the VA hospital, and through that work, I am afforded the opportunity to share the experience of the USS Emmons with subsequent generations of United States heroes. It is through constant interaction with our living history that we can ensure that the valor of our brave forefathers never lapses. I will take the stories about my great grandfather, John H. Devers, as well as the Emmons Association members and shipmates and make sure their stories are told. I pledge to the crew members I met last year, Tony Esposito, Armand Jolly, George Flory, and Grover McMichael, the other Emmons survivors, their families and all USS Emmons Association members that I will do my best to ensure that her memory will not elapse with the passage of time.