

The history of the United States Navy is built upon courage, sacrifice, and unwavering dedication to duty. In 2025, Americans commemorate both the 250th anniversary of the United States Navy and the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Okinawa, one of the fiercest naval battles of World War II. Among the ships that distinguished themselves during that conflict was the USS Emmons (DD-457/DMS-22), affectionately nicknamed "Easy Money" by her crew and sister ships because she consistently accomplished every mission assigned to her regardless of the danger or difficulty. My great-grandfather, Walter D. Blair, served aboard the Emmons as a Seaman First Class (S1c), and his service reflects the bravery, loyalty, and brotherhood that defined the ship and her crew.

Rear Admiral Edward Baxter Billingsley's book, *The Emmons Saga*, demonstrates how the USS Emmons earned its reputation as "Easy Money." Commissioned just two days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Emmons served throughout nearly the entire war and participated in some of the conflict's most dangerous operations. The ship escorted convoys across the Atlantic, protected Allied warships near Iceland and Norway, participated in Operation Torch in North Africa, supported the Normandy invasion, and later served in the Pacific during the Okinawa campaign. The Emmons adapted to changing wartime needs and were converted from a destroyer into a high-speed minesweeper before being sent to Okinawa in 1945. Throughout all of these assignments, the ship developed a reputation for reliability and determination. No matter the challenge, the crew completed its duties with professionalism and courage.

The nickname "Easy Money" reflects more than confidence—it symbolized trust. Other sailors knew the Emmons could be depended upon under the harshest combat conditions. She took part in every major landing in the Eastern Atlantic Area except Sicily and Italy. She also participated in several special missions which were of major importance to the war effort, but which received little public notice because they went so smoothly. During the Battle of Okinawa, the ship was assigned hazardous minesweeping and radar picket duties, placing it directly in the path of Japanese kamikaze attacks. Despite being lightly armored and highly vulnerable, the Emmons and her crew fought valiantly. On April 6, 1945, the ship faced overwhelming enemy air assaults. Even after helping defend the damaged USS Rodman, the Emmons continued firing at attacking aircraft and reportedly shot down several enemy planes before being struck by five kamikazes in rapid succession. The devastating attack killed 60 crew members and wounded 77 others, yet the crew fought to save the ship until the order to abandon it was finally given. Their heroism earned the Navy Unit Commendation and cemented the Emmons' legacy as a ship whose crew never backed down.

My great-grandfather, Walter D. Blair, served as a Seaman First Class aboard the Emmons. Sailors holding this rating performed essential duties necessary to keep the ship operating effectively during both routine operations and combat. As an S1c, Walter likely stood watches, assisted with deck operations, handled equipment, and participated in damage control and general ship maintenance. On a destroyer minesweeper like the Emmons, every crew member

had a critical role, especially during combat situations when survival depended on teamwork and discipline. Men like Walter formed the backbone of the ship's daily operations.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Emmons crew was the strong bond shared among sailors, many of whom were still teenagers. Living together in cramped quarters, enduring long deployments, and surviving constant danger created deep friendships and loyalty. The crew relied on one another not only as shipmates but as brothers. This sense of camaraderie became especially important during the attack on April 6, 1945. Damage control efforts required absolute trust and cooperation as sailors worked desperately to fight fires, rescue wounded shipmates and keep the vessel afloat amid explosions and chaos. The courage displayed that day was not only the result of military training but also the loyalty these young men felt toward each other. They fought for their country, but they also fought for the men standing beside them.

It is extremely important to me that awareness of the USS Emmons and her crew continues to be promoted. The sacrifices made by my great-grandfather and his fellow sailors should never be forgotten. Their generation defended freedom during one of the darkest periods in world history, often at tremendous personal cost. As time passes and fewer World War II veterans remain alive, preserving these stories becomes even more necessary. Remembering the Emmons honors not only those who died but also the values they represented: courage, duty, sacrifice, and unity.

Personally, I can help preserve the Emmons legacy by sharing my great-grandfather's story with future generations, supporting the USS Emmons Association, and participating in educational and commemorative events. I can also continue researching and documenting Walter D. Blair's service so that his experiences remain part of my family's history. By keeping these stories alive, younger generations can better understand the sacrifices made by ordinary Americans who answered the call to serve their country. The legacy of the USS Emmons and her crew deserves to endure because their courage helped shape the freedoms Americans enjoy today.