

The Ultimate Commemoration for the Ultimate Sacrifice

Southwest of the Japanese mainland lies a relatively small group of islands called the “Okinawa Prefecture.” Though the waters off their coast are currently docile, they were once home to *The Battle of Okinawa* – one of the bloodiest conflicts of World War II. During the naval portion of the battle alone, 20 American ships were sunk and 157 were significantly damaged (“Battle of Okinawa”). One of the ships that unfortunately saw its final day during that battle was the *USS Emmons*. She was hit by a number of relentless kamikaze attacks until her demise became inevitable. The crew members of the *Emmons* retaliated valiantly within the battle – many of them went down with the ship. Truly, the *Emmons* is a bastion of potent American valiancy and bravery.

The memory of the *Emmons* and her valiant crew members has been preserved and revered in a number of manners since her demise on April 6th, 1945 (“*USS Emmons (DD-457)*”). There is the *USS Emmons* Association which meets once per year to venerate the crew members – both those deceased and living – and update families with ties to the *Emmons* with new information. The association even has a scholarship fund to ensure that the legacy of the *Emmons* and her family is generous and helpful to society. Perhaps the most potent form of commemoration for the *Emmons*, however, manifests itself in the form of those who dive to her actual resting place. Indeed, the divers who work tirelessly to honor, protect, and document the *Emmons* embody the same valiancy of the crew members. Truly, I believe that these divers are driven by an overwhelming reverence for the bravery and plight of the *Emmons*.

Pepper Jay, daughter of Harold Jay (who survived the *Emmons*’ attack), once stated that “The *USS Emmons* was more than the veterans’ temporary home. It is the special connection to their love of and contribution to America,” (Sanchez). Indeed, the resting place of the *Emmons*

serves as the most tangible means to connect with her legacy. It is truly a “holy ground” to all who are a part of the *Emmons*’ community. Thus, those who dive to the bottom of the Pacific and interact with the vessel must harbor not only a great deal of respect for the *Emmons*’ legacy – but also for her lasting community. The experienced divers who complete this task most certainly embody both of these qualities.

Kurt Reese, a professional diver who continually dives to the *Emmons*’ resting place, is a prime example of the qualities these divers possess. Having been a Marine himself, Reese is fully aware of the magnitude of the sacrifices that being part of the military requires. In a letter to the *Emmons* Association, he stated: “[The *Emmons* community has] my utmost respect, and I’m honored to be involved in the process of keeping you informed regarding the USS *Emmons*. I will continue to do so as long as I’m able,” (“Kurt...”). Reese holds a potent sense of respect for all that pertains to the *Emmons*. His reverence for both the crew members and their families is further certified by his continual diving excursions to the *Emmons*. During one of his trips, he even placed an American flag on one of the cannons. It seems that Reese’s heartfelt portrayal of honor for the *Emmons* is driven by his comprehensive understanding of sacrifice and valiancy.

Without the admirable divers like Kurt Reese, the *Emmons* would simply go unnoticed at the bottom of the ocean. Thus, as a passionate member of the *Emmons* family, I am infinitely grateful to the men and women who use their diving expertise to honor the sacrifices made in the *Emmons*’ defense of freedom. To know that *Emmons*’ resting place is in the hands of such caring people is pleasing and fulfilling. Though I cannot visit the wreck myself, my certainty that the divers care deeply for our connection to the *Emmons* is the next best thing. It is truly spectacular that those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country are being honored in the utmost manner.