

The Lt John J. Griffin/ USS Emmons Memorial Scholarship Essay

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Gallant Service Beginning to End: WWII

Looking back, the USS Emmons and her crew showed great courage and resilience during World War II. Commissioned at the start of the war, the Emmons served with strength and effectiveness earning a Navy Unit Commendation and 5 battle stars before finally sinking off the Okinawa coast near the war's end. Initially, half of her officers and the majority of her crew were vocational faculty from the navy, but by the end, nearly all of her officers and 80 percent of the crew were volunteers.

She journeyed through the harsh waters of the North Atlantic performing escort patrol and anti-submarine duties leading up to pre-assault minesweeping, heavy bombardment, and fire support for the invasion of North Africa and eventually Normandy, which marked the beginning of the end for Nazi Germany. One moment that stands out in my mind during this period was an operation in 1944. The crew became aware of a wounded German pilot, and rather than ignoring him, they brought him aboard in order to assist with his injuries. However, the pilot eventually succumbed to his wounds. The Emmons crew, while giving everything to destroy and defeat the enemy, were still able to show compassion on a singular human level. This characteristic of unyielding determination to defend our country at all costs, while still remaining humane was demonstrated by the USS Emmons officers and crew, and is a hallmark of United States Navy and American soldiers in general.

As Admiral Anderson stated, our pride and confidence for the US Navy in the past will continue in the future. The “Old Navy” was able to transition from sailing ships to ironclads, while the “New Navy” has evolved multiple modern steel-hull ships primarily designed for specific roles such as aircraft carriers, patrol, submarines, and auxiliary, with a few exceptions such as the multi-role destroyers. While the future is uncertain, technology will be a big part of future designs, but the main drivers will be cost, survivability, and flexibility. Whether they are steel hulls or composite materials (such as the trend in modern aircraft); standard ammunition or railguns and lasers; manned or unmanned (once again the trend in military aircraft) the important criteria will remain: can the Navy afford it, will it survive in the next generation’s environment, or will it be flexible enough to be upgraded as new technologies become available? For 244 years, the navy has demonstrated utmost loyalty and determination to protect our country. Today, 320,000 active-duty personnel continue to carry out the actions with honor of the sailors who came before them. Memorial Day allows us the opportunity to reflect on the courage of the sailors on the USS Emmons, and all of the men and women who have served our country and paid the ultimate price for our freedom.

Although I never met my great grandfather, I have heard numerous stories about him and his pride of service in the United States Navy Reserve and time aboard the USS Emmons. His United States flag, medals and ribbons stand proudly in my grandparents’ house, and I have great confidence that the future United States Navy sailors will carry out the fine traditions, legacies, and create their own stories like those of my great grandfather’s.