

June 6th, 1944 will forever be known as D-Day, the day that single-handedly changed the fate of the free world and became the turning point of World War Two. The battle at Normandy will always be remembered as the ferocious, bloody, and brutal battle that led the allies to victory and France to liberation and freedom. However, what many may not know is the details of how the United States Naval Forces pulled off this masterpiece of a victory.

It was called Operation Neptune, and included more than 7000 ships, boats, and amphibious crafts as well as 34 U.S. destroyers and destroyer escorts. The original order given to the destroyers at the beginning of D-Day was to provide screen cover from approximately 3000 yards offshore. As the invading ships reached the beach of the Bay of Seine, the USS Emmons, with a code name of "Easy Money" was the first to capture the attention of the enemy forces. At 0537 an enemy battery on the bluffs opened up on the Emmons, with several near misses. The Emmons silenced the enemy with 16 rounds from her 5" guns. She had received her baptism of fire, and the battle of Omaha Beach had begun.

From their positions offshore, the destroyers could see that the battle was not going to plan. Most of the tanks were destroyed before they could even make landfall, and the few men who did make ashore were forced down by enemy fire. The 8 destroyers of the Omaha Bombardment group were then ordered to risk grounding by steaming close to shore to provide fire cover for the men on the beach. The Emmons and the other destroyers came speeding shoreward at 20 knots or more. One sailor aboard a landing craft reported seeing a destroyer heading for the beach, "My God", he thought, "*they are going to run aground right in front of the German artillery*". At the last minute, the destroyer made a sudden hard left, turned her starboard side parallel to the beach, and "*began blazing away with every gun it had, point blank at the defensive positions*". A beach master on Omaha reported watching the "tin cans" fire into the cliffs, and claimed that the handful of American destroyers, "destroyed practically the entire German defense line at Omaha Beach". The destroyers provided the needed fire cover to allow the landing crafts to land their men and machines on the beach. Over the ensuing 90 minutes, the destroyers turned the tide of the battle on Omaha Beach. At the end of the day the Allies had put 132,500 men on shore, and the liberation of

Europe had begun. Major General Leonard T. Gerow summed up this sentiment in a message to General Omar N. Bradley, "*Thank God for the United States Navy!*".

It is important to remember that many of the servicemen paid the ultimate sacrifice on that fateful day were only 18 years old or less. They stepped up and chose to serve before they even had the right to vote. This is true for my own great-grandfather, Walter Donovan Blair, who was only 17 years old when he got his mother's permission to enlist on June 14, 1943. It is difficult to imagine that at 18, the same age that I am now, he served and fought at Omaha Beach. I look around at myself and my peers and realize some of our biggest challenges are getting a better score on our SAT, or worrying if we will have a date to prom, which makes me realize the importance of preserving the memory of D-Day and the memories of the men lost that day. We need to remember so we can understand and appreciate the cost of freedom, so that when the call to serve goes out again in the defense of freedom, there will be those brave enough to stand up and answer that call.

As I researched the role of the Emmons during the invasion of Normandy, I was amazed by the bravery of my great-grandfather and his shipmates on the USS Emmons. While we had known that my great grandfather had served on the USS Emmons, the only details that he had shared with my mother were humorous stories about his friends and shipmates, his utter dislike of "chipped beef on toast", and of course the day that he could never forget, April 6, 1945. He had told her the story of the day USS Emmons was hit by 5 kamikazes, and he had to abandon ship and wait for rescue in the sea with two of his shipmates hanging onto his life vest. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to research this essay and read "The Emmons Saga" because we were able to follow along in my great grandfather's footsteps and learn details about his time on board the Emmons, the places he had been, and the battles that he had seen. As we came to the end of the book, my mother teared up as she read the familiar story that my grandfather had told her. It was there with his name in black and white, forever preserving his memory in history. It is safe to say that we will never forget, "Easy Money", and we will continue to tell her story and the story of her brave men to future generations.