

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

Amanda Jolly

When the USS *Emmons* served during World War II, the United States came together as one to combat fascism, Nazism, and put an end to global atrocities committed by the very worst impulses of humanity. The mission was clear: defeat the Axis Powers. Today, that sense of national resolve is difficult to grasp. The year 2021 finds the nation confronting deep societal rifts, emerging threats, and increasing political polarization.

In this time of national division, the legacy of the *Emmons* reminds us what we can achieve when we come together as a nation - and the global consequences at stake if we fail. To understand what the U.S. can accomplish when it unites, we need look no further than the heroism of the *Emmons* and her crew, who fought and sacrificed to defend the safety of the U.S. and the world.

In 1941, two days after the USS *Emmons* was commissioned, the attack on Pearl Harbor launched the U.S. into World War II. As the attack catalyzed a nation, each crew member of the *Emmons* was drawn together by a mission greater than themselves. From 1941 to 1945, the ship traveled more than 300,000 miles around the world, valiantly advancing this mission from Ghana to Iceland and from the beaches of Normandy to the waters of Okinawa.

Through the dangerous, the mundane, the victorious and the tragic, the record of the *Emmons* was unfailingly characterized by her courage, competence, and selfless service. A defining moment came at Omaha Beach, where the *Emmons*' bombardment was pivotal to the U.S. invasion on D-Day. The *Emmons*' role, and the role of fellow destroyers, was essential to the Allies' victory on that historic day (Billingsley 252).

It was this selfless commitment to a national good that also drove the *Emmons* to make the ultimate sacrifice to protect others. When the USS *Rodman* was attacked by kamikaze planes, the *Emmons* sped to the ship's defense, circling to provide support and draw fire. The *Emmons* defended itself and the *Rodman*, before the ship was tragically lost after being struck by five kamikaze fighters off the coast of Okinawa.

The Greatest Generation did not back down from difficult work. This generation defeated the global threat of the Axis Powers, empowered the U.S. to shape a new post-WWII world order, and laid the foundation for decades of increased global security and economic opportunity. The story of the *Emmons* and the outcome of WWII prove that a U.S. unified through a higher purpose can change the world for the better. Conversely, a U.S. fractured by internal divisions has the power to endanger the security of the world, the health of its citizens, and the future of generations to come.

Works Cited:

Billingsley, Edward Baxter. *The Emmons Saga: A History of the USS Emmons (DD457-DMS22)*. iUniverse, Inc., 2005.

Today, the U.S. is facing new threats, from emerging technologies to rising extremism. The stakes are high and the decisions we make, or fail to make, will echo for generations. In a maelstrom of conflicting social identities, political interests, and national priorities, unity can seem out of reach. But, if the USS *Emmons* has taught us anything, it's that we cannot flinch from the hard work. Together, we can address the emerging threats on the horizon, repair injustices within our nation and without, and, in doing so, honor the legacy we inherited from the Greatest Generation.

For me, a place to start can be found in the stories of the men of the *Emmons*, men like my grandfather Armand Jolly. When Armand was asked what lesson he hoped people would take from the *Emmons*, he said, "Do what you have to do. Don't be afraid, just do it. Make friends – and get along. It's a beautiful world."

Following in the footsteps of my grandfather, I want to serve a role in shaping the identity of our nation and the common purpose we share as Americans. I am pursuing graduate studies with the goal of crafting U.S. policy. In my career at the World Affairs Council of Connecticut, I work to empower my community through education, resources, and conversations with experts to build dialogue, rather than division, around global issues.

Together we can meet this moment and emerge a nation strengthened by our differences, rather than divided by them. We are trustees of the legacy of the Greatest Generation, the USS *Emmons*, and shipmates like my grandfather Armand. The challenge before us is clear: to meet this moment as the shipmates of the *Emmons* did – with resolve, selflessness, courage, and an unshakeable faith in our neighbor, nation, and one another.

Works Cited:

Billingsley, Edward Baxter. *The Emmons Saga: A History of the USS Emmons (DD457-DMS22)*. iUniverse, Inc., 2005.