

May 24, 2026 (Memorial Day Weekend)

Lt. John J. Griffin, Jr./USS Emmons Memorial Scholarship Essay

The year 2025 marked the 250th anniversary of the United States Navy and the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Okinawa, where sixty crew members of the USS Emmons made the ultimate sacrifice. For my family, these anniversaries are deeply personal. My great-grandfather, Edward “Skee” Tostanoski, served as Boatswain’s Mate Second Class (BM2c) aboard the destroyer known as “Easy Money.” His wartime experiences continue to shape our family’s understanding of duty, resilience, and brotherhood.

“Easy Money” earned its reputation through consistent excellence. As detailed in Rear Admiral Edward Baxter Billingsley’s *The Emmons Saga*, the ship distinguished herself in convoy escort, anti-submarine warfare, shore bombardment, and minesweeping across the Atlantic, Mediterranean, Normandy, and Pacific theaters. From Operation Torch in North Africa and fire support off Omaha Beach on D-Day to high-speed minesweeping as DMS-22, the Emmons and her young crew repeatedly proved reliable under fire. The nickname reflected well-earned confidence: when the ship was on station, the mission would succeed.

That reputation faced its ultimate test on April 6, 1945, off Okinawa. Assigned to radar picket duty, the Emmons and USS Rodman came under intense kamikaze attack. After assisting the damaged Rodman, the Emmons downed six enemy planes before five kamikazes struck her in rapid succession. Fires raged, compartments flooded, and sixty crewmen were killed or mortally wounded. The ship was so badly damaged that she was scuttled on April 7, 1945.

What enabled these sailors to fight so effectively was the strong camaraderie and loyalty forged through years of shared experiences. They spent every moment together, eating their “three squares”, listening to music and sharing stories about their wives and girlfriends. They were on the ship together

with a common goal: protect our rights and country. Living and training together, they became brothers, entrusting one another with their lives. On April 6, that bond proved vital. Survivors saved shipmates, fought fires, manned guns, and responded with discipline even after losing senior officers. Their loyalty transformed individual courage into the collective resilience that defined the Emmons.

My great-grandfather was at the center of this chaos. As Boatswain's Mate Second Class, Skee managed critical deck seamanship duties—handling lines, rigging, boats, and essential ship operations under combat conditions. He joined the Emmons in September 1942 and served through her entire wartime career. This service brought him from New York to North Africa, Normandy, Europe, England, Russia and back to The United States of America. During the Kamikaze attack at Okinawa, Skee was wounded by shrapnel to his legs and back and lost part of his heel. He swam to life rafts, assisted fellow crew and retrieved the “Colors” (Flag and Commissioning Pennant). After being rescued, he was taken by ship to Guam for treatment. He was later transferred to Treasure Island, California, where he recuperated before being re-united with his mother, Mary, wife, Mary Anne and son, Edward Jr.

I am committed to supporting the USS Emmons Association's mission. I understand the flag that my Grandpa, John “Skee” and Uncle Edward delivered to the Association has been restored. I would like to know its whereabouts and perhaps arrange a visit. I intend to seek opportunities to promote naval history and veterans' causes at the Epstein Family Veterans Center located at Cal State San Marcos.

Preserving the memory of the USS Emmons and her crew is especially meaningful to me. These young Americans answered the call during our nation's greatest conflict, sacrificing so that future generations may enjoy freedom and opportunity. My great-grandfather's service reminds me that extraordinary outcomes arise when people are united by purpose, trust, and loyalty. I am proud to carry his legacy forward and honored to apply for this scholarship. Rory Mackin