



# The Sumner Sentinel ©

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## A USS Cooper Survivor Tells All

*History of the USS Cooper*

*By (Survivor) Anthony Autorino*

Not all Americans know of the destroyer USS Cooper (DD-695)—but those who do know her story can be proud of the brief but gallant page she has written in naval history.

Here is a story about a sinking ship that went down with her guns blazing; her survivors struggling in the ocean at night with Japanese survivors of the destroyer she had sunk.

All of this drama had its beginnings when the keel for destroyer (DD-695) was laid by the Federal Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company at Kearny, New Jersey, on 30 August 1943.

When (DD-695) was launched on 9 February 1944, Mrs. Elmer Glenn Cooper smashed the bottle of champagne, which christened the ship USS Cooper. Mrs. Cooper is the wife of Lieutenant E.G. Cooper, who was

killed in an airplane crash while attached to the old carrier USS Langley (CV-1), February 1938.

Cooper was commissioned on 27 March 1944 with Commander J.W. Schmidt, USN, as her first commanding officer.



**Anthony Autorino**

A shakedown cruise which took the ship from New York to Bermuda was terminated at Norfolk, Virginia, where post-shakedown availability and exercises prepared the ship for her cruise through the Panama Canal to San Diego during August of 1944.

With her course set westward, Cooper arrived at Pearl Harbor, where on 21 October 1944, Commander Mell A. Peterson, USN, relieved CDR Schmidt and became the new commanding officer. Two days later, the ship's bow was parting water on a westward course again headed for the war zone.

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Frank DiBello  
[DIBELLOFP@AOL.COM](mailto:DIBELLOFP@AOL.COM)

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[the.chief@verizon.net](mailto:the.chief@verizon.net)

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[fred@dd-692.com](mailto:fred@dd-692.com)

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John Hruska  
- 2020 -  
[jhruska@centurylink.net](mailto:jhruska@centurylink.net)

Daniel Barrs  
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[danielbarrs1@att.net](mailto:danielbarrs1@att.net)

Joe Drabick  
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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE . . .

Greetings to all

I hope everyone is doing as well as expected during these holidays and trying times. Sadly I have heard from some of our shipmates that have had bad experi-



**Frank DiBello**

ences with them personally, or a loved one that has been directly affected by the COVID-19 virus. If you have been directly affected, we send our prayers out to you.

If anyone has any changes in your address,

phone or personal information, please forward the new information to Don Hayden so he can have up to date information on all of us.

Due to the COVID-19 virus we have not been able to finalize 2021 reunion plans. I have tentatively been able to make a few contacts, subject to the conditions in 2021.

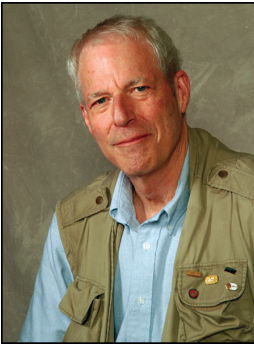
Nothing is secured with any nonrefundable deposits - just verbal and handshakes.

Hope everyone will be able to enjoy the holidays with family and friends peacefully.

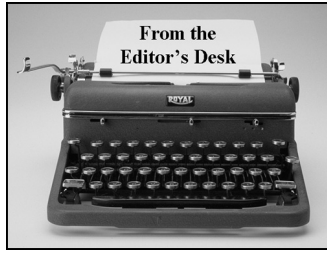
Fair Winds And Following Seas To All

Frank DiBello

USS Allen M. Sumner DD-692 Association



By Don Hayden  
TM3 (1961-62)



As the news-letter editor I had the privilege and honor of speaking

with one of the last survivors of the sinking of the USS Cooper, DD-695 (sister ship of the US Allen M. Sumner), DD-692) at Ormoc Bay in Leyte Gulf.

I learned of Anthony Aurorino's cruise aboard the USS Cooper through an article in Tin Can Sailors magazine.

He now lives in Port St. Lucie, Fla. and turned 95 in December. His wife

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**Cooper** Joining the  
**Continued from Page 1** 3rd Fleet,

Cooper's operation consisted of several strikes on the Manila Bay area, one against Japanese shipping approaching Ormoc Bay, and several minor bombing strikes. While with the 3rd Fleet, Cooper participated in an unusual rescue of a fighter pilot who was down in the water within twenty miles of Luzon in the vicinity of Polillo Island.

At the time Cooper was ordered to rescue the pilot, the task force was one hundred miles east of Luzon,

turned 93.

In 2005, Rob Lalumiere became the only diver to have descended to the wreck of USS Cooper, and the only known instance at that time of a shipwreck in the area being positively identified.

A memorial plaque was placed beside the shipwreck as a tribute.

A documentary TV film, USS Cooper: Return to Ormoc Bay, was produced by Bigfoot Entertainment and made its debut in mid-2006. It featured deep-sea diver Rob Lalumiere and survivors of the Cooper sinking.

In December 2017, a Paul Allen expedition aboard the research ship RV Petrel pinpointed the wreck of Cooper, and conclusively confirmed her identity after cross-referencing the destroyer's armaments and sinking position with historical documents.

which indicates the extent a fleet commander will go to rescue an aviator who has been engaging the enemy.

With the help of planes orbiting around the "dunked" pilot and the use of radar, the pilot was brought safely aboard Cooper. On the way back to join the task force, Cooper found herself without air protection and had to shift for herself in warding off enemy planes.

During the evening of 19 November, a radar plot of bogies showed that the ship had been located and that a rough night was promised.

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It was still twilight, and 45 minutes after the first radar contact, a Jap[anese] plane made its way in.

Coming in low, he was taken under fire and turned away only to return in 15 minutes for a second approach.

It was apparently a torpedo run, and at 2,000 yards, the plane turned away and disappeared from the radar screen.

After a few days at Ulithi during November, Destroyer Squadron 60, which included Cooper, proceeded to report for duty in the 7th Fleet by 29 November.

Several assignments in the Leyte Gulf were completed, and Cooper, with other destroyers of Division 120, received orders to proceed to Ormoc Bay to seek out and destroy Japanese shipping.

Cooper in company with USS Allen M. Sumner (DD-692), and USS Moale (DD-692), approached Ormoc Bay at about 2330 on the night of 2 December. The ships were in line with Sumner to port and Moale to starboard.

Numerous bogies were encountered up to midnight.

Cooper took three under fire, the second of the third salvo from her five-inch batteries causing the plane to burst into flames and crash into the water about 4,000 yards ahead.

The second plane was taken under fire by Sumner and Cooper and is believed to have been damaged but was not seen to crash.

Only two salvos were sent after a third plane, but with a land back-

ground, it was lost from radar perception.

The action of the surface vessels is taken partly from memory of the survivors of the Cooper and the records of the Allen M. Sumner and the Moale.

Two minutes after midnight, contact was made with surface ships, and a minute later, Cooper commenced firing. Her first salvo fell short about 200 yards, but the second struck the Jap[anese] ship right between the two forward guns.

The Japanese ship was a large destroyer carrying troops aboard. The target was then hit repeatedly from stem to stern, which threw many of the troops topside into great confusion.

After eight minutes of firing, the Japanese destroyer was thoroughly wrecked and sinking.

“Cease Fire” was ordered to lay the guns on a second target, and in a minute, Cooper was firing on a Japanese ship of destroyer-escort size. The first salvo hit the target, followed by several more hits.

Firing was ceased to clear the bearing of USS Moale as the Japanese ships were passing astern.

Cooper came to right momentarily and then swung left to resume her former course.

Just before reaching the formation course, a lucky torpedo struck her amidships on the starboard side.

Cooper’s guns continued to blaze as she went down.

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The last salvo ricocheted off the water as the ship heeled over to 45 degrees. Two gun mounts were reloaded but were never fired again as the ship was on her side and broken in two in less than thirty seconds.

The entire scene was a Buck Rogers spectacle with guns firing from the ships on both sides, two Japanese ships burning, short batteries firing at our ships from the shore, Japanese PT boats in the vicinity, and Japanese submarines lurking below the surface of the water.

Bombs were dropped from planes overhead, and tracers from the 40-millimeter guns formed an arching glow to the various targets.

Torpedo wakes were sighted, and the ships heeled crazily from port to starboard with radical turns.

The light of a full moon was diffused just enough to illuminate the ships in an eerie setting for this nightmarish action in which a white haze of smothered steam rose slowly from the water, marking the resting place of two Japanese ships.

From the time Cooper was hit until the time she went down, the commanding officer noted no confusion and heard not a cry.

All topside personnel wore kapok life jackets. Four rubber boots, two life rafts, and three floater nets were adrift in the water for the survivors, this permitting the wounded to be out of the water and allowing rest for the tired swimmers.

***Sentinel Editor's Note: According to Autorino the Cooper sank in 36***

***seconds. He said he was in the one of the 5-inch 35 gun mounts on the starboard side and was in water for 17 hours.***

Ample driftwood in the water made for improvised paddles.

Japanese survivors in the nearby water acted very friendly in the apparent hope of landing a place on the life rafts, but the rafts were built for saving American sailors and they did a good job of it.

Considering the circumstances under which Cooper was sunk, it is a credit to the cool heads and cooperation that of an original 339 men and 29 officers, 158 men and 10 officers were saved.

PBY Catalina flying boats did a wonderful job in picking up survivors with the assistance of the Philippines ashore.

The PBY's (Black Cats) made an outstanding record in the darkness. The largest load carried by any of the Black Cats had 56 survivors; another had 48, and both planes broke all existing records for the rescue work.

One of the planes carried a load of 3,000 pounds heavier than it had been designed to fly.

The commanding officer, Commander Mell A. Peterson, was recommended for the award of the Silver Star for his courage, daring, and skillful fighting of his ship.

The destroyer division officer said, "Words cannot express the feelings of the Division Officer at the loss of this splendid ship and so many of her

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gallant officers and crew.

The USS Cooper was seen, by observers of the other ships, to go down with her guns firing, in the highest tradition of the United States Naval Service.”

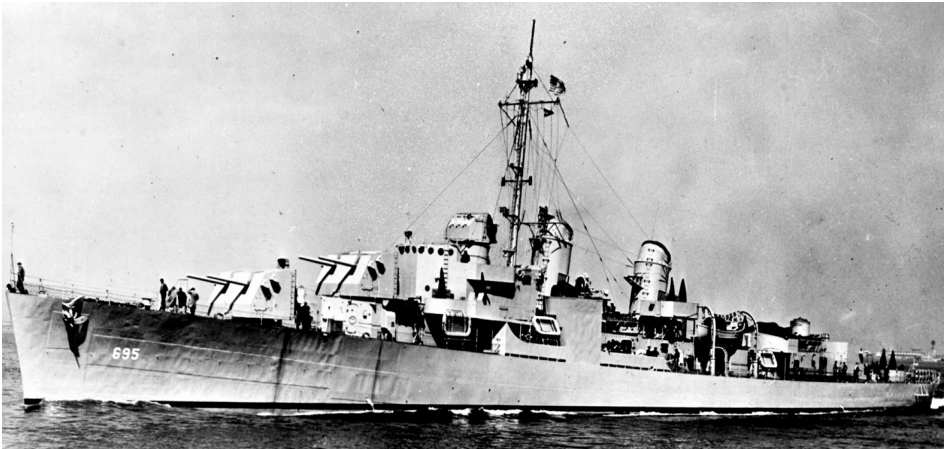
The USS Cooper (DD-695) earned one (1) battle star on the Asiatic Pacific Area Service Ribbon for participating in the aforementioned operation.

When Autorino got back to the United States he was stationed at Treasure Island as a master-at-arms in the shore patrol.

On Monday October, 28 2020 the Tulsa World issue of what happened “on this date . . . “in 1944 the World War II Battle of Leyte Gulf ended in a major allied victory over Japanese

forces, whose naval capabilities were badly crippled.

*(Tin Can Sailors Editor’s Note: In my last CIC, I informed you, our readers, of how we are going to be careful with derogatory terms. It is known that during World War II Americans used the term Jap for their enemy. As this story reflects that time frame, it is understood that using it fits. The author was careful in using the term and did so only during the battle when talking about ships and planes. In other instances, he used the country’s name. During the first few uses of the negative word I bracketed the word and just changed the term to Japanese for the remainder.)*



USS Cooper (DD-695) photographed when first completed, circa March 1944, was an Allen M. Sumner-class destroyer. She was laid down by the Federal Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company at Kearny, New Jersey, on 30 August 1943, launched on 9 February 1944, and commissioned on 27 March 1944.

Wartime censors retouched this image to obscure radar antennas on the ship’s foremast and Mark 37 director.

*Official U.S. Navy Photograph, from the collections of the Naval History and Heritage Command.*

# Membership Renewal Form

Due to changes in the structure of our organization shipmates need to be aware of whether or not they have renewed membership. Our membership year is based on a regular calendar year. If the year "21, 22 or greater or L, etc. after your name on the newsletter mailing label does not reflect the upcoming **Reunion** year, you need to renew your membership.

This form will appear in the November-December and January-February issues of this newsletter and note that you need to renew your membership in the USS Allen M. Sumner Reunion Association. If you cannot afford the \$15, send what you can (if anything) as we will not deny a shipmate membership because of a hardship. And no one else needs to know.

For Sumner renewals, send to Pete Dromms, Reunion Association Treasurer at 301 Park Ln., North Syracuse, NY 13212-2143

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

(A/C) \_\_\_\_\_ Primary Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Other Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Years on Sumner - From \_\_\_\_\_ To \_\_\_\_\_

Rate/Rank on Sumner \_\_\_\_\_

Retired from Navy (Yes/No) \_\_\_\_\_

Retired Rate or Rank \_\_\_\_\_

Other info you wish to share \_\_\_\_\_

Make Checks Payable to USS A.M. Sumner Association, 301 Park Ln.,  
North Syracuse, NY 13212-2143



Newsletter Office  
3026 S. Cincinnati Ave.  
Tulsa, OK 74114  
(918) 743-2924  
Editor.....Don Hayden  
E-Mail: [editor@dd-692.com](mailto:editor@dd-692.com)



[www.dd-692.com](http://www.dd-692.com)  
Webmaster  
Ron Babuka  
[ron.babuka@cornell.edu](mailto:ron.babuka@cornell.edu)



If you are going to change your address (e-mail or physical), or no longer wish to receive the newsletter, let the editor and webmaster know.

**Editor Note:** I should have paid a little more attention when I bought my recent printer to realize it won't accept 8½x14 paper.

As I am not using a commercial printer during the pandemic I have had to change the format of the Sentinel to 8½x11 to use my home printer.

In a way this will be better as I can send a copy to everyone who has a physical address when it comes time to send out issues for dues renewal.

**Sumner Sentinel**  
**3026 S. Cincinnati Ave.**  
**Tulsa, OK 74114**