



The Sumner Sentinel ©

Spring 2021

Volume VIII Number 1

“The Ship That Would Not Die”

History of the USS Laffey (Part 1)

Editor’s Note: the Sumner Sentinel is now a quarterly publication (every three months -Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter.

See Editor’s Desk for more info.

USS Laffey (DD-724), an Allen M. Sumner-class destroyer, was laid down and launched in 1943, and commissioned in February 1944.

The ship earned the nickname “The Ship That Would Not Die”

for her exploits during the battle of Okinawa when she successfully withstood a determined assault by conventional bombers and the most unrelenting kamikaze air attacks in history.

When the battle was finally over the grim toll was staggering: 80 minutes of continuous air attack, 22 separate attacks, six kamikazes crashed into the ship and four bomb hits.

But Laffey’s gunners had shot down nine attackers. The ship’s casualties totaled 32 dead and 71 wounded. Amazingly, eight guns were still able to fire.

LCS 51 came alongside to help fight the fires, but the little vessel had also been hit and could only offer limited help.

The only preserved Allen M. Sumner-class destroyer

in the U.S., as well as the only surviving U.S. World War II destroyer that saw action in the Atlantic, USS Laffey acted as an escort for convoys to Great Britain.

On D-Day, the destroyer helped bombard Utah Beach



at Normandy.

Sent into the Pacific, Laffey was involved in one of the most famous destroyer-kamikaze duels in the war. Hit several times, racked by explosions and fires,

Laffey remained afloat because of the valiant efforts of her crew to earn five battle stars and a Presidential Unit Citation for her World War II service and two battle stars for her Korean War service.

Laffey was the second ship of the United States Navy to be named for

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE . . .

Greetings to all,

Hope everyone is doing well and are staying healthy. Unfortunately things here in Texas haven't gotten any better, if anything it has gotten worse. Between the Covid-19



Frank DiBello

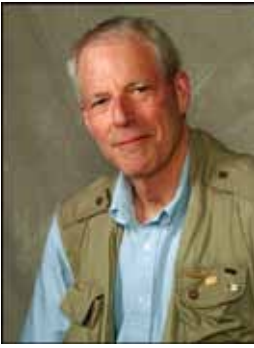
Virus and unusual weather we have been receiving, life as we have known it is only a memory. Everyday seems like a new chapter in life starting over again.

I am sorry to say I think the reunion in Texas isn't going to happen in May. I can only hope we can either get something together later in the year, or plan our 2022 reunion. With the Covid-19 Virus still not being under control, I just don't see how we can do our usual get together. I am working on something with a smaller scaled down get together.

I will be contacting our officers for some advice and any ideas we might try to have a "Mini" reunion. We would also like any input that the rest of our shipmates might be able to share with us. If so, there will be a registration form then.

Please be safe and let's all get thru this challenging time together, so that we can once again have a great Sumner family reunion together.

Frank DiBello, President USS Allen M. Sumner DD-692 Association



By Don Hayden
TM3 (1961-62)



The Senti-
nel is now
a quarterly
publication but

there is no need at this time to fill out a registration form.

Perhaps in the next edition there will be a time to do so. Currently there are no plans to hold a reunion in May (*See President's Message*).

Throughout this Covid-19 BS I'm sure a lot of us were looking forward to making the Texas reunion

I'll not be going to any reunion without Dr. Anthony Fauci's blessing.

And maybe not even with his.

According to Dr. Fauci we may be wearing masks well into 2022 with appropriate vaccination or not.

Any shipmate who has information on what our organization could do should get in touch with the president.

Oklahoma has a "portal" system whereby persons 65 and older can pre-register and supposedly get appointments.

What you really do is get on a list for appointment locations. But it seemed that every time I tried to use it, all the appointment slots were not available.

Then my next door neighbor got a

years.

The following day we both went to the health club where the neighbor had gone and while I waited in the car my Jane went inside to get information about what I could do to get on a list.

When Jane inside and told one of the nurses she had an 80-year-old man in the car, the nurse said to "get him in" as there

was a cancellation and I could use it.

And so I did!

And a month later I was able to go back to the health club for the second shot.

So maybe now even if I can't attend a reunion I can my hair cut at *Great Clips* or eat breakfast like I used too!

And needless to say I'm really looking forward to 2022 when I might be going to a Summer reunion or at least be able to attend the 30th reunion of the closing of the *The Tulsa Tribune*.

vaccine just by going to a health club at a hospital used by her primary care doctor.

She told my wife Jane about the experience and said we should go since we had used the same health club for many



Dr. Anthony Fauci

Laffey

Continued from Page 1

Bartlett

Laffey.

Seaman

Laffey was awarded the Medal of Honor for his stand against Confederate forces on 5 March 1864.

Laffey's keel was laid down on 28 June 1943 by Bath Iron Works Corp., Bath, Maine; launched on 21 November; sponsored by Ms. Beatrice F. Laffey, daughter of Seaman Laffey; and commissioned on 8 February 1944, with Commander Frederick Becton in command.

Upon completion of underway training, Laffey visited Washington Navy Yard for one day and departed

ing craft, and two Dutch gunboats.

The group arrived in the assault area, off Utah beach, Baie de la Seine, France, at dawn on D-Day, 6 June 1944.

On 6–7 June, Laffey screened to seaward, and on 8–9 June, she successfully bombarded gun emplacements.

Leaving the screen temporarily, Laffey raced to Plymouth to replenish and returned to the coast of Normandy the next day.

On 12 June, pursuing enemy E-boats that had torpedoed the destroyer Nelson, Laffey broke up their tight formation, preventing further attacks.



USS Laffey (DD-724) is an Allen M. Sumner-class destroyer was, laid down and launched in 1943, and commissioned in February 1944.

on 28 February 1944, arriving in Bermuda on 4 March.

Refueling at Greenock, Scotland, the ship continued on to Plymouth, England, arriving on 27 May. Laffey immediately prepared for the invasion of France.

On 3 June, she headed for the Normandy beaches escorting tugs, land-

Screening duties completed, Laffey returned to England, arriving at Portsmouth on 22 June, where she tied up alongside the battleship Nevada.

On 25 June, she got underway with the battleship to join Bombardment Group 2 shelling the formidable defenses at Cherbourg-Octeville.

See Next Page

Upon reaching the bombardment area, the group was taken under fire by shore batteries; destroyers Barton and O'Brien (both Sumner class destroyers) were hit.

Laffey was hit above the waterline by a ricocheting shell, but it failed to explode and did little damage.

Late that day, the bombardment group retired and headed for Northern Ireland, arriving at Belfast on 1 July 1944.

She sailed with Destroyer Division 119 (DesDiv 119) three days later for home, arriving at Boston on 9 July.

After a month of overhaul, the destroyer got underway to test her newly installed electronic equipment.

Two weeks later, Laffey set course for Norfolk, arriving on 25 August.

The next day, Laffey departed for

Hawaii via the Panama Canal and San Diego, California, arriving at Pearl Harbor in September.

Operating with the 7th Fleet, Laffey screened the big ships against submarine and air attacks, covered the landings at Ormoc Bay on 7 December, silenced a shore battery, and shelled enemy troop concentrations.

After a short upkeep in San Pedro Bay, Leyte on 8 December, Laffey with ships of Close Support Group 77.3 departed on 12 December for Mindoro, where she supported the landings on 15 December.

After the beachhead had been established, Laffey escorted empty landing craft back to Leyte, arriving at San Pedro Bay on 17 December.

In February, she supported TF 58, conducting diversionary air strikes



USS Laffey (DD-724) Shipmate group photo taken by Sumner Sentinel editor during a 2008 reunion at Patroits' Point, SC..



CWO Francis Embrey

Sumner Sailor Frank Embrey was called to final muster on Feb. 5.

A Vietnam veteran, he served aboard the Sumner in 1965-68 as an RM 2nd Class before eventually becoming a Chief Warrant Officer 3rd.

He is survived by his three children, Lois K., Cynthia L., and Gareth E.L.; four grandchildren, Alexander, Zackery, Noah, and Joshua; and six brothers.

After services at Parklawn Funeral Home, Embrey was to be interred at Arlington National Cemetery.

He spent 26 years in the Navy.

on Tokyo and direct air support of Marines fighting on Iwo Jima. Late in February, Laffey carried vital intelligence information to Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz at Guam, arriving on 1 March.

On 16 April 1945, Laffey was assigned to radar picket station 1 about 30 miles north of Okinawa, and joined in repulsing an air attack which downed 13 enemy aircraft that day.

The next day, the Japanese launched another air attack with some 50 planes including the **Aichi D3A** - the first Japanese aircraft to bomb American targets in the war, commencing with Pearl Harbor and U.S. bases in the Philippines, such as Clark Air Force Base. They sank more Allied warships than any other Axis aircraft.)

- At 08:30, an Aichi D3A Val dive bomber appeared near the Laffey for reconnaissance. When the D3A was fired upon, it jettisoned its bomb and left. Soon after, four D3As broke formation and made a dive into Laffey.

Two of the D3As were destroyed by 20 mm guns and the other two low angle attacks crashed into the sea. Immediately afterward, one of Laffey's gunners destroyed a Yokosuka D4Y making a strafing approach on the port beam.

- At 08:42, Laffey destroyed another D3A approaching the port side. While the bomber did not completely impact the ship, it made a glancing blow against the deck before crashing into the sea, also spewing some lethal aviation fuel from its damaged engine.

Three minutes later, another D3A approaching from port crashed into one of the 40 mm mounts of the ship, killing three men, destroying 20 mm guns and two 40 mm guns, and setting the magazine afire.

Immediately afterward, another D3A made a strafing approach from the stern, impacted the aft 5"/38 caliber gun mount, and disintegrated.

See Laffey, Back Page

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 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 quarterly form will appear in the Winter and Spring 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



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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.

Laffey, From Page 6:

Ten seconds later, Laffey's main gun battery hit a second D4Y on a bombing approach from the starboard beam. The D4Y's bomb detonated in the water, wounding the starboard gunners with shrapnel. The flames were quickly extinguished by the damage control team.

Part 2 will continue in the next issue - the Summer Edition

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