

## Steward Stewart Ray Cooney V-35579



Steward Stewart R. Cooney. Photo:  
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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Belleville ON, 9 October 1922**
- **Enlisted: Kingston Division RCNVR, 4 May 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Polishing Glass, Consolidated Optical Company**
- **Death: Lost at sea when HMCS *Athabaskan* was torpedoed and sank on 29 April 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13; Cooney Lake, Memorial Passageway - HMCS *Cataraqui*, the Belleville Cenotaph & Memorial Plaque at Pointe Saint Mathiew, Finistère, France**

Stewart Ray Cooney was born in Belleville, Ontario on 9 October 1922. He was from a large family. Stewart had four older and two younger brothers, and one older and one younger sister. Stewarts's parents were Wellington and Lila Cooney. The Cooney family were members of the United Church. After completing Grade 7 he left school and worked as a glass polisher (lens grinder) for Consolidated Optical Company of Belleville, Ontario.

On 4 May 1942 Stewart Cooney enlisted as a probationary steward at the Kingston Division RCNVR (later known as HMCS *Cataraqui*). At enlistment, he was 5' 4 ½" tall, with light brown hair, blue eyes and he had a vaccination scar on his left arm. Cooney was placed on active service on 15 June 1942. Five days later he was drafted to HMCS *York* to begin eight weeks of basic training which include drill and seamanship. His next draft was to HMCS *Stadacona* where he completed his steward's course. On completion of his training, Cooney was posted to *Stadacona*'s wardroom for on-the-job training as a probationary steward.

Cooney was promoted to Steward on 15 March 1943. Three days later he was drafted to HMCS *Niobe*, the RCN Manning Depot, established in Great Britain. While serving ashore in Britain Stewart met and married his wife, Isobel 22 October 1943 at St. Mary's Chapel, Greenock, Scotland.

On 4 January 1944, Steward Cooney was drafted to HMCS *Athabaskan*, a Tribal-class destroyer. In February the *Athabaskan* joined the 10<sup>th</sup> Destroyer Flotilla in Plymouth. She saw extensive operational service in the English Channel as part of this strike force: the most significant action occurred on 25-26 April, when *Athabaskan* assisted in the destruction of the German torpedo boat *T-29*.

Three days later, on 29 April 1944 at about 0300 she was patrolling with her sister Tribal-class destroyer HMCS *Haida*. The ships, ordered to intercept German warships near Ile de Bas, the Canadian ships engaged *T-24* and *T-27*. *Haida* drove off *T-24* in flames and then drove *T-27* ashore before returning to her sister's last position only to find that she had sunk. One hundred and twenty-eight (128) men including Stewart Cooney were lost, 44 were rescued by *Haida*, and six by *Haida*'s motor work boat. At dawn, after the departure of *Haida*, 83 men were later taken prisoner by three German minesweepers. Stewart Cooney was 21 years 6 months old, and he never had the chance to meet and hold his baby daughter Maureen who was born 13 April 1944.

Stewart and most of the others killed have no known graves. However, in 2002 the wreckage of *Athabaskan* was located in 50 fathoms of water. She and those who may be entombed in her are under the protection of the French Heritage Code.

Stewart Cooney's mother was notified by letter on 15 January 1945 from the Secretary of the Naval Board, confirming her son's death announced in an earlier letter dated 10 October 1944. The Memorial Cross was awarded to his mother, Mrs. Lilley Cooney, and to his widow, Mrs. Isobel Josephine Cooney.

The Memorial Cross, often referred to as the Silver Cross for Mothers, was created in 1919 to commemorate the dead of the Great War. The original Cross bore the cypher of King George V and was worn around the neck from a long purple ribbon. Purple standing for suffering and mystery, traditionally was the stained-glassmaker's colour for black, expressing negation, mourning and death. It was common practice for recipients to alter the award, eventually the Cross was officially modified to be worn on a brooch instead of around the neck.

For his action Stewart Stewart Cooney was awarded the following medals: the 1939-45 Star, War Medal 1939-45, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp and Defence Medal. His wife, Isobel, received his medals on Stewart's behalf.

Stewart Cooney is remembered on Panel 13 of the Halifax Memorial, Memorial Passageway - HMCS *Cataraqui*, Book of Remembrance - Page 249, Memorial Plaque at Pointe Saint Mathiew, Finistère, France, the Belleville Cenotaph and Cooney Lake in Northern Ontario is named in his memory

#### Prepared By:

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#### Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – profile for Stewart Cooney
- Library and Archives Canada Service Record for Stewart Cooney (accessed via Ancestry.ca)
- Tucker, G.N. (1952). *The Naval Service of Canada: Its Official History. Volume 2: Activities on Shore during the Second World War: The Minister of National Defence, King's Printer.*
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMCS Athabaskan \(G07\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMCS_Athabaskan_(G07)) Retrieved 9 Mar 2022.

- [www.forposteritysake.ca](http://www.forposteritysake.ca) Page for HMCS Athabaskan. Retrieved 9 Mar 2022.
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