

November 17, 1942.

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DECLASSIFIED

From: Senior Known Survivor, U.S.S. JUNEAU (Lieutenant Roger W. O'Neil, MC-V(G), U.S. Naval Reserve).  
To : Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet.  
Via : Commanding Officer, U.S.S. FLENA.  
Subject: Report of U.S.S. JUNEAU Activity from November 11 to, 13, 1942, inclusive.  
References: (a) U.S. Navy Regulations, 1940, Arts. 712 and 874(6).  
(b) PacFlt Conf. Ltr. 24CL-42.

1. In accordance with references (a) and (b) the following report covering the activity of the U.S.S. JUNEAU from November 11 to 13, 1942, inclusive is submitted:

November 11

Occupied our positions in formation of Task Force. Nothing of unusual note occurred aboard ship.

November 12

Captain and Gunnery Officer were very much satisfied with anti-aircraft performance during afternoon air attack by Japanese planes. They felt that we had accounted for a good percentage of planes destroyed. Planes were described as twin engine bombers of Mitsubishi type, and very large. There were no casualties on board the JUNEAU during this attack. At nightfall we were on our way out the channel, and to the best of my knowledge we were outside the channel about 2230. We reentered with the Task Force sometime later, approximately between 2300 and 2400. We had radar contact about 2400 which was at first thought to have been enemy contact but later found to be land. We were advised on station at approximately 0130 of November 13 to expect enemy contact momentarily. Scene of action illuminated by star shells, searchlights, and some of JUNEAU personnel thought also enemy planes were dropping flares. We commenced firing somewhere in the vicinity of 0140 to 0150, at which time we were on the port side of the SAN FRANCISCO. I understand that she ordered us to get out of the way in order that she might get a broadside on a heavier Japanese warship on the port side, and we proceeded to pick up speed, cross the SAN FRANCISCO's bow, and came back on her starboard side where we were when hit by an enemy torpedo which I feel was originally intended

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for the SAN FRANCISCO. We had fired a very small amount of ammunition. I would say approximately 25 rounds of 5" plus some 20 mm and 1.1 ammunition. The torpedo hit was of sufficient concussion to buckle the deck just aft of turret 8 plus throwing 3 depth charges overboard. The port motor whaleboat was also torn to pieces and lost by the impact of that hit. I should say that the torpedo hit somewhere between frames 42 and 45 on the port side and entered the forward fireroom. The hit was below armor belt and above rolling chinks. All hands, approximately 17 inside, were lost immediately. Immediately forward to the forward fireroom was the plotting room, and later on I learned from Ensign Kloter, who had been there, that they were thrown to the floor but were protected from the forward fireroom by a double bulkhead. The first one had given away and the second had buckled somewhat and was leaking in spots at seams. The deck had also buckled and oil fumes were coming through. They attempted to carry on but had to secure a short time following this. The Chief Engineer was quoted as having said that in his opinion the keel had been broken by the torpedo hit. Immediately following the hit the ship seemed to rise and settle deeper and listed somewhat to port. All lighting forward of after mess hall was lost. I understood that immediately following the hit we shifted to the after engine room generators for power but that they could not carry the load, so we shifted immediately back to emergency diesel for our power. We had lost all fire control of our turrets. We immediately left the scene of action; to the best of my knowledge proceeded through Sealark channel, and headed northeast for Malaita Island. I had occasion to do some minor surgery on the Navigator and Chief Engineer about dawn and had occasion to overhear their discussion from which I was given to understand that we were running on our after fire and engine room and doing approximately 20 knots, and were headed towards Malaita where Captain Swenson had hopes of finding a cove which might offer sufficient shelter to enable us to accomplish temporary repairs before making a dash for Button. By dawn we had accomplished sufficient repairs so that we had local fire control in one turret at a time. This was previous to sighting the remainder of the Task Force - HELENA, SAN FRANCISCO, etc. We sighted them about dawn on our starboard side until which time we thought we were alone. We were not sure at this time whether they were friendly or enemy ships. Also at dawn there was evidence the JUNEAU was 10 to 12 feet down by the bow with approximately 2 degrees list. I understood this remark was attributed to the First Lieutenant. We had also lost suction in the main feed pump causing reduced pressure

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and the ship to go dead in the water several times about dawn. We were making turns for 27 knots and doing a proximately 2', according to Dennis, who was a throttleman in the after engine room. Due to the excessive casualties on the SAN FRANCISCO, the senior medical officer of the latter asked assistance, and my senior medical officer, Lieutenant Commander James G. Neff, (MC), USN, who had struck his head at the time of the first torpedo hit, asked me if I would care to go over. The destroyer O'BANNON a short time later, sent over a boat and I took three of my corpsmen, namely, Theodore D. Merchant, Orrel G. Cecil, and William T. Sims, plus some medical supplies, and proceeded to the SAN FRANCISCO. I was in the Admiral's cabin just donning a mask prior to assisting Lieutenant Commander Lowe to operate on Captain Young of the San Francisco, when the JUNEAU was torpedoed the second time at approximately 1101, November 13th. In view of the fact that the Admiral's cabin is located on the port side, and the JUNEAU was on our starboard side when hit, I did not see the actual hit. However the SAN FRANCISCO swung to the starboard side and within 30 seconds of the hit I saw the spot where the JUNEAU had been. The only thing visible was tremendous clouds of gray and black smoke. I could not see any debris in the water but I was at least two to three thousand yards distant. Later on I questioned men on the SAN FRANCISCO, who had been on watch on the starboard side and had witnessed the incident, from the list of which I gathered that three torpedoes had been fired. The first crossed the SAN FRANCISCO's bow and just missed astern of the JUNEAU. The second appeared to come from beneath the SAN FRANCISCO and its wake was not visible immediately. The third came aft of both ships. It was the second torpedo which struck the JUNEAU on its port side very close to the location of the first torpedo hit in the early morning. It was impossible for the SAN FRANCISCO to inform the JUNEAU of its imminent attack, and if the JUNEAU actually saw the torpedo wake I am of the belief that it was impossible to heel hard starboard because of its broken keel and the possibility of breaking the ship in two. The men told me that the JUNEAU appeared to explode instantaneously and appeared to break in two, both segments of which sunk within 20 seconds. The debris from the explosion flew many feet in the air, one portion of which struck number 1 gun of the SAN FRANCISCO, putting it out of commission. The signalman on the bridge of the HELENA was in the process of taking a message from the JUNEAU and had his glass trained on the signalman of that ship and reports that the signalman was blown at least 30 feet into the air.

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Report of U.S.S. JUNEAU Activity from November 11 to  
12, 1942, inclusive. (continued).

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2. I wish to state emphatically, that during the operations described above, my shipmates conducted themselves magnificently.

ROGER W. O'NEIL

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