

## PT 109 INCIDENT

### 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (1943-2023) - Paul Jehle

Though John F. Kennedy would be honored for his heroic actions after the harrowing night of August 1, 1943, the entire incident began “as an unmitigated disaster.”



PT-109 was one of fifteen Patrol Torpedo boats sent out to engage or turn back the “Tokyo Express;” the nick-name given to the Japanese navy’s supply convoy. Though several PT boats fired torpedoes and missed, PT-109 was one of three boats left to try again. Suddenly, looming out of the darkness, was the *Amagiri*, a Japanese destroyer, that rammed the side of the much smaller PT boat, throwing almost everyone into the water.

Kennedy ordered the men to abandon ship. Here John F. Kennedy demonstrated his physical skills of swimming (from his Harvard college days) and endurance, will and tenacity to both survive and continue to serve his country. Though two of his crew were presumed lost, Kennedy led the rest on a three and half mile swim to a nearby islet. Though exhausted and on shore, he re-entered the water, treading water to make sure they were safe.

Swimming from island to island to get water and food, the ordeal, where he led his men with valor and courage, would not end until August 8 when he was rescued. Kennedy was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, and his injuries qualified him for a Purple Heart. But no one could have conceived that his legacy would catapult him to the White House, where in his inaugural he would say what he already had demonstrated; “*Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country!*” Truly JFK knew the price of freedom!

