

# the making



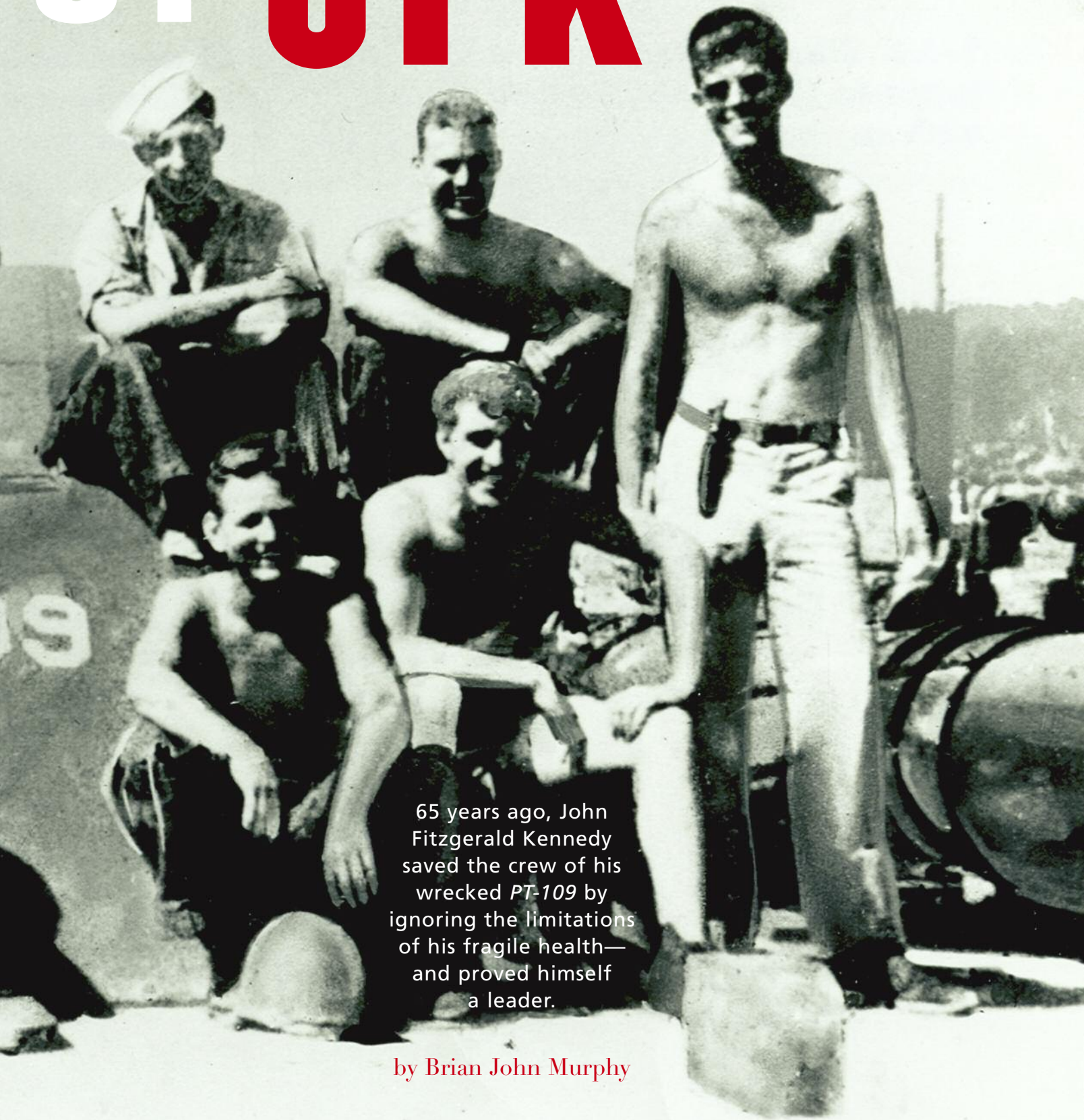
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# of JFK



65 years ago, John Fitzgerald Kennedy saved the crew of his wrecked *PT-109* by ignoring the limitations of his fragile health—and proved himself a leader.

by Brian John Murphy



EMERY LAMSON & SONS  
ADMIRAL HALSEY says  
"Kill japs, kill japs,  
KILL MORE JAPS!"  
You will help kill the yellow bastards  
if.. You DO YOUR JOB WELL





## the making of JFK by Brian John Murphy

**T**HE BOW OF *PT-109* DRIFTED AIMLESSLY into deepening blackness, slowly leaving behind its severed hull and flames that lashed frantically at an empty sky. Eleven men lay on the bow exhausted, breathing hard, and shaking off their shock. In their midst, 26-year-old Lieutenant Junior Grade John F. Kennedy resolved that these men were not going to perish and were not going to end up prisoners of the Japanese. They were going to get back to their American base alive. He would do whatever it took to make sure of that.

Kennedy's unbending resolve and heroic efforts are the real story of *PT-109*. But it is a story that begins long before the August night in 1943 when a Japanese destroyer cut *PT-109* in two. The real story begins in Massachusetts sickrooms and Minnesota's renowned Mayo Clinic. It is the story of a chronically and severely ill young man whose response to lifelong physical suffering forged an officer of iron will and indomitable bravery, able to transcend his physical limitations.

John F. "Jack" Kennedy was the grandson of the powerful Massachusetts politician John Fitzgerald and the son of financier Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., the controversial former US ambassador to Great Britain. With such influential forebears, the charming and articulate Jack Kennedy easily became a celebrated member of high society.

Kennedy's early life included attendance at top private schools including Choate and Harvard. He became an expert yacht racer, sailing off Cape Cod's tony shores. Always active, he played tennis and touch football with his highly competitive brothers and sisters. He traveled the world, hobnobbed with the rich and powerful, and dated glamorous Catholic debutantes and winsome young actresses and models. He even wrote a bestselling book before finishing college, *Why England Slept*, about the British government in the lead-up to World War II.

Joe Kennedy, Sr., demanded strength and achievement from his nine children. Nothing was allowed to mar the public image of perfection that he crafted for his family. That meant that Jack's illnesses would never be admitted in public. The scope of his health problems would remain a guarded secret for more than 30 years after his death.

What only his family knew was that Kennedy suffered from one illness after another as a child and teen. His mother, Rose, remembered him as "a very, very sick little boy" and "bed-ridden and elfin-like." As a teen and later as a college student, he was jaundiced, possibly due to the adrenal disorder Addison's disease. By

the start of World War II, he was diagnosed with chronic colitis. He suffered agonizing abdominal pain much of the time, but doctors were unable to find a specific cause. He endured extreme lower back pain, made worse by a car crash in France. Asthma and allergies hampered his breathing.

When not bedridden, Kennedy lived a vigorous life. Rejecting the notion that his health limited his abilities, he went out for the most violent school sports. But willpower was not enough to keep him out of hospitals or relieve his symptoms. The best doctors in the East and at the Mayo Clinic saw him repeatedly. He was hospitalized frequently.

Unfortunately, Kennedy's doctors did not realize that the steroids they gave him, beginning probably in 1937 for colitis, created more problems than they solved. Kennedy developed a duodenal ulcer, and his back problems began. Today we know that continued use of steroids may cause bone loss. There is good reason to believe that by 1942, when Kennedy would enter the navy, he was suffering from steroid-induced osteoporosis, causing bone loss and severe damage to his lower vertebrae and discs.

As war approached, the one upside to being so unhealthy was that being drafted was less likely. When the United States introduced the draft in 1940, Kennedy was a celebrated young author and bon vivant in California. His lottery number made him a likely inductee, but it seems never to have entered his mind to seek the deferment to

which he was clearly entitled. He and his elder brother Joe Jr. felt patriotically obliged to join the service. Joe went first, becoming a navy pilot. Kennedy wrote a friend, "I am rapidly reaching a point where every one of my peers will be in uniform, and I do not intend to be the only one among them wearing coward's tweeds."

Like any other man applying for Officer Candidate School, Kennedy took an army physical, in July 1941. And like any other man with colitis, ulcers, back problems, asthma, and chronic urinary problems left over from what some historians say was gonorrhea, he was declared 4-F.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Previous spread: At Lumbari, Rendova, Lieutenant (JG) John F. Kennedy grins with crewmen aboard *PT-109*. Shown from left are (front) Charles Harris, Maurice Kowal, Andrew Kirksey, Leonard Thom, and Kennedy (standing); and (back) Al Webb (a friend, standing), Leon Drawdy, Edgar Mauer, Edmund Drewitch, and John Maguire. Some of these men would face *PT-109*'s final ordeal. Opposite: JFK joined *PT-109* at Tulagi, Solomon Islands, where this sign greeted him. Above: He had been "a very, very sick little boy," in his mother's words, and he was unfit for military service.

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Kennedy's next choice was the navy, where he had an in. Captain Alan Kirk had offered Joe Jr. a job in the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), but Joe had opted for pilot training. The slot was still open when Kennedy contacted Kirk. There was no heavy lifting, and the work suited a man of Kennedy's proven intellect. Kirk arranged for a cursory physical in Boston, and Kennedy was commissioned an ensign and assigned to ONI headquarters in Washington.

The young officer might have spent the whole war with ONI had he not begun an affair with Danish expatriate Inga Arvad. The FBI considered the married Arvad an undesirable person, because she had mixed socially with prominent Nazis in Germany before the war—even watching the 1936 Berlin Olympics from the Führer's own box. Unsurprisingly, the FBI deemed her a security risk, and in 1942 Kennedy paid the price for his romance; refusing to stop seeing Arvad, he was ousted from ONI.

Kennedy now had to learn how to be an ordinary naval officer. Graduating from a 60-day midshipman's course, he felt attracted by the exploits of PT (patrol torpedo) boats in rescuing General Douglas MacArthur from the Philippines earlier that year. He accepted assignment to PT boat school at Melville on Newport Island, Rhode Island.

Prior boating experience stood Kennedy in good stead at Melville. He trained with the two types of PT boat in service: the Elco Boat Company version and the Higgins Industries model. The 80-foot wooden Elco boat displaced 55 tons. It carried about 3,000 gallons of 100-octane fuel for its three 1,500-horsepower

Packard engines and could travel at 48 miles per hour, going from zero to 40 miles per hour in about 11 seconds. It was armed with four Mark VIII torpedoes and numerous machine guns and automatic weapons.

Excelling at Melville, Kennedy stayed on briefly as an instructor. Finally he was ordered to the Solomon Islands to command his own boat. On his way there, he witnessed his first combat. Traveling from New Caledonia to the PT boat base at Tulagi, the *LST-449*, on which he was traveling, was nearly sunk during a massive Japanese air raid around Guadalcanal on April 7, 1943. The destroyer escorting the ship, the *USS Aaron Ward*, went down during the melee. *LST-449* was damaged, and the skipper's back was broken.

Some days later, as *LST-449* arrived at Tulagi, Kennedy could not have missed the giant billboard that greeted incoming ships with the words of area commander Admiral William "Bull" Halsey:

*Kill Japs,  
Kill Japs,  
Kill More Japs!*

*You will help to kill the yellow bastards if you do your job well.*

Kennedy was given an Elco boat to command. Commissioned just nine months earlier and having served out of Tulagi only a few months, *PT-109* was already a patched-together, service-scarred craft that would need a lot of TLC to be battle-worthy. Kennedy set to work.

The crew was astonished to find its new commander wearing



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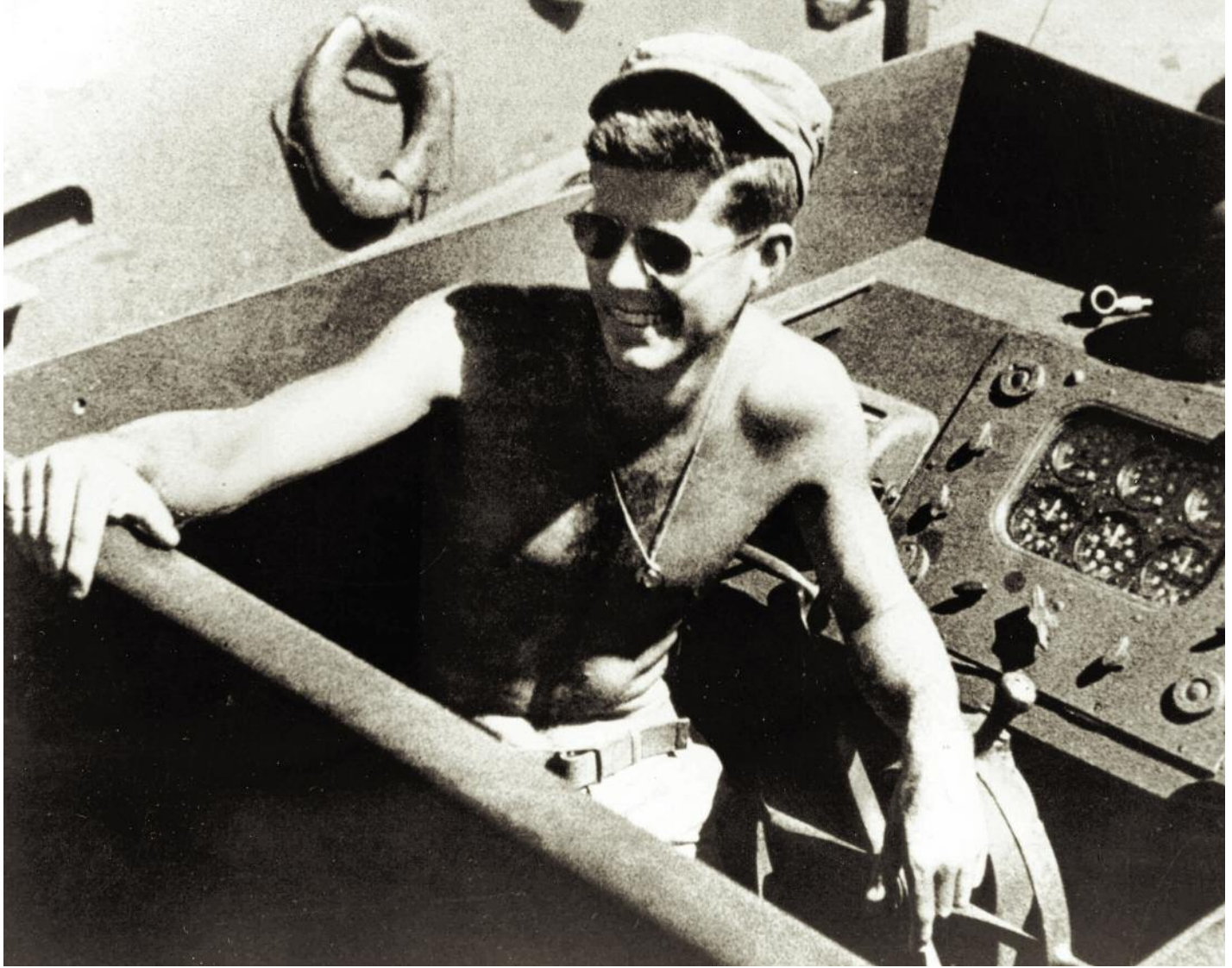
DREAMLINE CARTOGRAPHY/DAVID DEIS

only shorts, scraping paint and working on the hull in the stifling tropical heat like any enlisted swabbie. His accessibility and hard work solidified his command. He got to know the men, and they appreciated his concern. Day by day, *109's* crew and commander became a more efficient and unified combat team.

The *109* and her men were soon transferred to the Russell Islands, 80 miles west of Tulagi. The biggest excitement they experienced there came when Kennedy accidentally rammed his boat into a dock. Ever after he was Crash Kennedy.

Although Kennedy thrived as a PT boat skipper, his health problems were still with him. Photos taken at this time show him to be cheerful, even jaunty, but almost skeletally thin. His execu-





tive officer, Ensign Lennie Thom, mentioned Kennedy's back problems in his letters home, but said his skipper refused to go to sickbay. "Jack feigned being *well*," he wrote. Except for Thom, in fact, Kennedy's crew and commanders remained in the dark about his health problems. The only visible concession he made to his hurting back was to stick a plywood board under his mattress.

On July 15, Kennedy and *PT-109* were transferred again, this time to Lumbari, near Rendova Island. He was now in contested territory. The army and marines were stalled on New Georgia, and powerful Japanese forces were on the nearby islands of Kolombangara and Vella Lavella. Between these latter two islands and islands farther east were Ferguson Passage and Blackett Strait. To PT boat men they were known collectively as The Slot—the waterway down which the Japanese shipped supplies and reinforcements to New Georgia. The PT boats' mission was to cut off this supply route.

**O**N HER FIRST NIGHT ON PATROL, July 19, a Japanese float plane straddled *PT-109* with two bombs. Shrapnel wounded two men and punctured the hull. *PT-109* experienced

two more near misses on July 24 with no casualties.

When *PT-109*'s rudder was found to be defective, she was laid up for repairs, on the 29th. At the same time, Kennedy moved to correct what he thought was a deficiency in the boat's firepower. He scrounged a 37mm anti-tank gun from the army and rigged it to the bow of the boat using two 2x8 coconut planks. The gun would never be fired, but the planks would come in handy.

With the new gun rigged, and a life raft left behind to make room for it, *PT-109* motored for Blackett Strait on the evening of August 1, 1943. Aboard were an unlucky 13 men, including Kennedy's friend Ensign Barney Ross. Kennedy put Ross in charge of the deck cannon and made him forward lookout, unaware that he suffered from night blindness.

There were 15 PT boats in the patrol, which crept slowly into Blackett Strait so as not to leave a wake visible to Japanese pilots overhead. Around midnight, Japanese ships entered the strait—four destroyers carrying 900 troops to reinforce Kolombangara. A skirmish erupted and some of the PTs (not 109) fired torpedoes, though no hits were scored. Japanese return fire missed, too.

The PT boats with radar were the ones that had fired on the

Opposite, right: JFK was proud to be a PT boat commander. At Tulagi, *PT-109*'s first base, he poses (center) with fellow PT boat officers: James Reed (left), Paul "Red" Fay (right), and George "Barney" Ross (rear). Ross would be standing in as bow lookout aboard *PT-109* the night it was rammed. Above: Kennedy at the helm of *PT-109* at Tulagi. The Roman Catholic religious medallion given him by Clare Boothe Luce (actress, writer, and wife of *Time* publisher Henry Luce) is visible around his neck.





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Japanese. They now headed back to base. For two hours afterward, in the early hours of August 2, *PT-109* patrolled Blackett Strait, waiting for the destroyers' return from Kolombangara. Kennedy kept only one engine running, to reduce the amount of phosphorescent wake that might make the boat visible to enemy aircraft.

There was no moon that night so, without radar, *PT-109* was virtually blind on this pitch-black night. No one saw the approaching Japanese destroyer *Amagiri* until about 10 seconds before the collision. The destroyer's silhouette was mostly hidden by the shadow of mountainous Kolombangara Island. It was Kennedy himself who spotted the ship and raised the alarm. He began turning his boat to starboard for a torpedo attack, but with only one engine engaged, the turn was too slow and too late.

Moving at 40 knots, *Amagiri* heeled over as it aimed for the 109. The *Amagiri's* narrow bow smashed into the 109's starboard side at a 20-degree angle and sliced straight through, detaching her

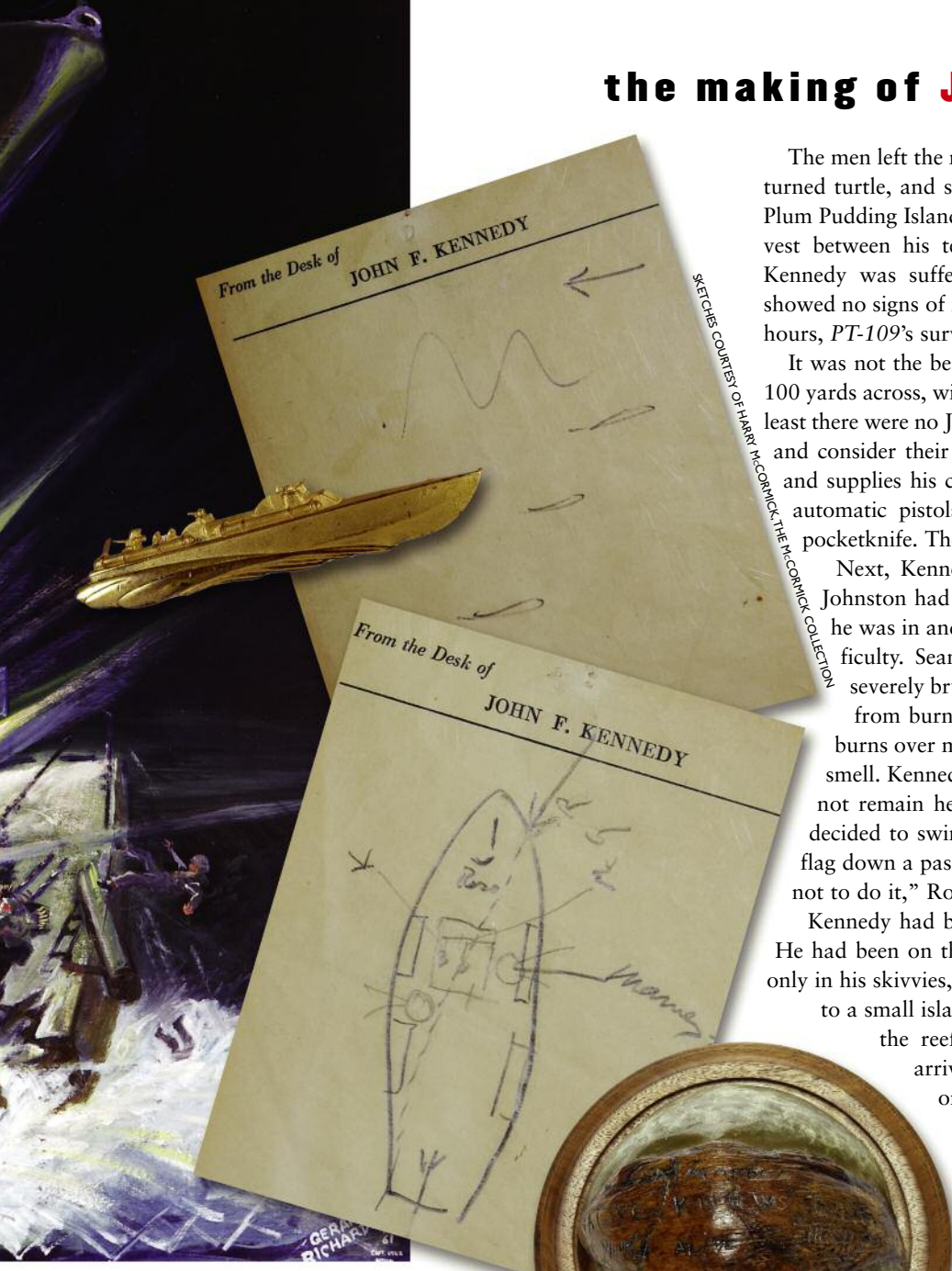
target's starboard side and part of its engine compartment. The 109's fuel spilled and ignited in a towering ball of flame. The bow section bobbed upright in the water, but the rest of the boat sank, taking two men with it. *Amagiri* steamed away into the blackness.

**S**URVIVORS BEGAN SWIMMING to the 109's bow, which they could see by the light of the burning fuel. Kennedy gave his life vest to a sailor whose vest wasn't working. He also rescued Seaman Patrick "Pop" McMahon, at 44 the eldest member of the crew and the most badly burned—over 70 percent of his body. Kennedy towed McMahon to the wrecked bow, then swam out to rescue two more crewmen. Then, with the rest of his men, he lay exhausted on the drifting bow.

At dawn, about 15 feet of the bow still remained above water, sticking out at a 45-degree angle, but it was clearly taking on water and beginning to capsize. The current was taking it toward



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Gizo Island and its 100-man Japanese garrison. Escape to Kolombangara was out of the question; 10,000 Japanese were there.

Kennedy asked his men if they still wished to function as a military unit. They said yes, so he resumed command. His first decision was that they swim for it, to a tiny island four miles off. One of the 2x8s used to mount the gun was turned into a float for the non-swimmers and injured, and abler crewmen towed it.

The men left the remnant of *PT-109*, which by now had almost turned turtle, and swam for the speck of land later identified as Plum Pudding Island. Kennedy took a strap from McMahon's life vest between his teeth and towed the badly burned sailor. If Kennedy was suffering from his chronically painful back, he showed no signs of it. After swimming against the current for five hours, *PT-109*'s survivors reached the island around 6 P.M.

It was not the best place to be marooned. The island was only 100 yards across, with a few coconut palms and no fresh water. At least there were no Japanese, so the Americans had a chance to rest and consider their next step. Kennedy inventoried the weapons and supplies his crew had salvaged. There were six .45-caliber automatic pistols, a .38-caliber revolver, two knives, and a pocketknife. There was also a signal light and a lantern.

Next, Kennedy assessed the wounded. Seaman William Johnston had deeply inhaled fumes from *109*'s spilled fuel; he was in and out of consciousness and breathing with difficulty. Seaman Charles "Bucky" Harris was nursing a severely bruised leg. Seaman Gerard Zinzer was suffering from burns. Pop McMahon was in terrible shape, with burns over most of his body that were now emitting a foul smell. Kennedy knew the men, especially the injured, could not remain here for very long. It was a long haul, but he decided to swim out to Ferguson Passage to see if he could flag down a passing PT boat. "All of us tried to persuade him not to do it," Ross recalled, "but he was determined."

Kennedy had been in the water for 15 of the last 24 hours. He had been on the island for just half an hour when, dressed only in his skivvies, he began this new swim. He went a half-mile to a small island southeast of Plum Pudding and then along the reef that stretched out into Ferguson Passage, arriving around 8 P.M. There was nothing going on in the passage, though Japanese float planes were skirmishing with PT boats near Gizo. Seeing no prospect of help, Kennedy swam back toward Plum Pudding. Just short of his goal, he was caught in a current and swept two miles out into the middle of the passage. Digging deep for reserves of strength, an exhausted Kennedy started over. He finally reached a small island just east of his goal. Physically spent and feverish, he collapsed, sleeping until dawn on August 3.

His crew had all but given him up for dead by the time he swam back to Plum Pudding that morning, bone-tired and feverish. Kennedy asked Ross to make the swim to the passage that night, then he lay down and slept the rest of the day.

Opposite: *PT-109*'s end came around 2 A.M. on August 2, 1943, off the coast of Kolombangara. In this navy painting, the Japanese destroyer *Amagiri* bursts out of the night to cut *PT-109* in two. Above, drawings: In 1957, as a senator, JFK sketched these diagrams on letterhead for a TV play about the incident. The top sketch indicates *PT-109* (top) in relation to its companion boats *PT-162* (middle) and *PT-169* (bottom) as the *Amagiri* approached. The bottom sketch shows where the *Amagiri* sliced through *PT-109*. Above, pin: JFK wore this lapel pin while he commanded *PT-109*. After the shipwreck, it was a symbol of survival. Kennedy gave it to his mother. Above, bottom: JFK's most precious artifact of the *PT-109* ordeal was this coconut shell (made into a paperweight) into which he had etched the message "Naru Isl native knows pos't he can pilot 11 alive need small boat Kennedy" and given to two Solomon Islanders for delivery to an Allied coastwatcher.



# joe jr's war



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Joseph Kennedy, Jr., was the heir apparent to leadership of the Kennedy clan and by decree of his father, Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., he was going to be president of the United States. But Joe Jr.'s war story would turn out much differently than that of his younger brother Jack.

In 1941 Joe Jr. took a break from Harvard Law School and politics (he had been a 1940 Democratic Convention delegate) to join the US Naval Reserve as an aviation cadet. Ambassador Kennedy reportedly remarked, "Wouldn't you know it? Naval aviation! The most dangerous thing there is!"

Joe Jr. passed ground school and basic pilot training, graduating as an ensign with his wings just after Pearl Harbor. After more training and a stint as an instructor, he flew with an anti-submarine squadron based in Puerto Rico and then at Norfolk, Virginia. When his commander formed Squadron VP-110 to patrol the Bay of Biscay for German subs, Joe signed on, and by the end of September 1943, he was in England flying the PB4Y-1 Liberator, the navy version of the B-24 bomber. Finishing his required number of missions, Joe stayed on, patrolling the western approaches of the English Channel during the June 1944 Normandy Invasion.

Around this time, the army and navy were seeking ways to crack Germany's V-1 missile bunkers and its super-hard U-boat pens in France and along the North Sea. The basic plan called for bombers packed with Torpex, the most powerful explosive of the non-nuclear era. Two men would pilot the bomber, bail out over England, and let an operator watching the flight on TV aboard a plane that was trailing at a safe distance fly the bomber via remote control into the target. The navy version used a Liberator carrying 25,000 pounds of Torpex. Joe Kennedy volunteered for the project.

On August 12, the navy sent Joe out as co-pilot and technician beside pilot Lieutenant Wilford Willy to hit U-boat pens at Helgoland, Germany. Kennedy and Willy boarded the Liberator at 5 P.M. and took off. Twenty miles away, aboard a PV-1 Ventura, a lieutenant watched the plane on television and prepared to take radio control.

The bomber was on course at 2,000 feet and approaching the English coast. Willy and Kennedy prepared to bail out. Kennedy switched the plane to remote control, left his seat, and began arming the fuses. It was 6:20 P.M.

Abruptly, the Ventura's monitors showed nothing but snow. More than 10 tons of Torpex had exploded, vaporizing the Liberator, Willy, and Kennedy. Only a piece of the plane's radio antenna was found. A chase plane following 300 feet behind was damaged and had to land. The blast shook a village below, damaging 59 buildings.

The Kennedys received Joe Jr.'s Navy Cross and Air Medal, and a new destroyer was named the *USS Joseph P. Kennedy Jr.* Joe's brother Robert served on her in 1945 and 1946 as an enlisted man. The ship took part in the quarantine of Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Today she rests in Battleship Cove in Fall River, Massachusetts.

—Brian John Murphy

The next day, August 4, found the crew with a depleted supply of coconuts, no fresh water, and McMahon getting worse. Kennedy could see a small island about a half-mile distant, which looked promising. Using the coconut plank again as a float for the injured and non-swimmers, and with McMahon's life vest strap again clenched in Kennedy's teeth, the men set out. It took two hours to reach the island because of a strong opposing current. Kennedy and McMahon were the first to arrive on what was later identified as Olasana Island.

There were plenty of coconuts on Olasana. The ones on the ground were ripest and tasted best, providing food and hydration. The men stayed in the bush so they would not be silhouetted on the beach and spotted by Japanese patrol boats. McMahon was put in the water, where he found relief from the excruciating pain of his burns.

Kennedy and Ross swam to nearby Naru island the next day, August 5. Japanese had been spotted there from time to time, but the island appeared deserted now. The two officers found a crate of supplies left behind by a Japanese shore party. Inside were candy and about 40 small bags of crackers. A little more investigation turned up a beat-up native canoe and a small barrel of drinking water.

Suddenly, the Americans and a pair of natives paddling past the island noticed one another. The Solomon Islanders were on a mission for New Zealand coastwatcher Lieutenant Arthur Reginald Evans, who had seen *PT-109's* collision with the *Amagiri* from his lookout station on Kolombangara. But the natives thought Kennedy and Ross were Japanese and fled despite the pair's desperate attempts to signal them.

That night the officers camped on Naru. Kennedy used the canoe as a float to swim back out to Ferguson Passage and try again to flag down a PT boat. He returned at 10 P.M. Then, leaving the exhausted Ross to sleep and regain strength, Kennedy loaded up the canoe with water, crackers, and candy. Using the boat as a float, he swam his cargo to the crew on Olasana.

When Kennedy got there, he was surprised to find Thom chatting amiably with the natives who had fled from him on Naru—Biuku and Eroni. Introductions were made and the Solomon Islanders invited Kennedy to ride with them as they paddled back to Naru. Kennedy accepted and the trio set out, intercepting Ross, who was swimming back to Olasana.

The four men were back on Naru just after midnight on August 6. Biuku and Eroni showed Ross and Kennedy the hiding place of a large two-man canoe. It was time for the Solomon Islanders to resume their mission, but Kennedy wanted them to take word back to Allied forces. Using a knife, he carved a message into a coconut shell: "Naru Isl native knows pos'it he can pilot 11 alive need small boat Kennedy." Biuku and Eroni took the coconut and left.

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Above, left: Lieutenant (JG) Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., JFK's older brother, had his own war adventures, but they turned out tragically. Here, Joe is seen in England, where he patrolled the Bay of Biscay for German subs. Opposite: JFK walks with a cane on Tulagi before going home. His triumph over adversity in the *PT-109* incident proved him a leader, but it devastated his already frail health.



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That night, Kennedy and Ross took the canoe out into Ferguson Passage to look for a PT boat, but a squall came up and capsized the boat, throwing Ross onto submerged coral. He was badly cut up. With some struggle, the two officers got back to Naru.

The next morning, August 7, a large war canoe of Solomon Islanders arrived at Naru to pick up Kennedy and Ross. The islanders brought food, water, and medical supplies, courtesy of Evans, who was now based on a small island near Wana Wana. At Kennedy's insistence the supplies were taken to the crew on Olasana. Then the natives took Kennedy to Evans's coastwatching station, arriving around 6 P.M. After enthusiastically greeting Evans, Kennedy was allowed to use the radio to contact his base at Lumbari. Two PT boats were dispatched to rendezvous with Kennedy near Patparan Island in Ferguson Passage that night at 10:30.

**T**HE PT BOATS ARRIVED an hour late, carrying a pharmacist's mate to tend to the wounded, Biuku and Eroni, and news reporters. Kennedy climbed aboard *PT-157* furious at the boat's lateness and curtly refusing food, saying "I just ate a coconut." He did not refuse a jolt of whiskey, though. Kennedy embraced Biuku and Eroni, and gave Eroni a Catholic medallion he had received from writer and politician Clare Boothe Luce for good luck. Kennedy later wrote to Luce that the medallion had done "service above and beyond its routine duties during a rather busy period."

*PT-157* sped to Olasana to find the entire crew hidden in the brush, fast asleep. Kennedy woke them up and they embarked on *PT-157*, arriving at the Rendova PT boat base at 5:30 A.M. on August 8. The ordeal was over.

Kennedy had nothing to say to the reporters, but the crew praised him and Thom to the skies. A day after the rescue Kennedy was in the hospital, where doctors found him exhausted and covered with nasty scrapes and lacerations from coral, especially on his feet, and with pronounced jaundice.

The navy offered Kennedy a ticket home, but he wanted to stay and avenge his boat and the death of his two crewmen, which haunted him. He was bitter that no other PTs had come to *109's* aid or searched for him and his crew that early morning of August 2. The thought brought him to tears of rage and regret.

Once he was out of the hospital, Kennedy received command of a new boat, *PT-59*, which the navy rearmed and designated *Gunboat Number 1*. When Kennedy assumed command of the

vessel at Guadalcanal, five of his *PT-109* crewmen looked him up at dockside. "What are you doing here?" Kennedy said, smiling, as he spotted his former shipmates. One of the men replied, "What kind of a guy are you? You got a boat and you didn't come get us!" Kennedy was deeply moved.

Kennedy was made a full lieutenant on October 8, but it was obvious that his *PT-109* ordeal had damaged his already fragile health. On November 23, on Tulagi, an X-ray revealed a duodenal ulcer. Kennedy was given a sacroiliac support belt for his back pain and, having no duties, ambled around Tulagi with a cane.

During a 30-day stateside leave, Kennedy visited the Mayo Clinic, was hospitalized by a jaundice attack in Palm Beach, and ended up in New England Baptist Hospital. There doctors found extensive lower spinal damage. He was told he needed an operation if he hoped to walk without crutches. The surgery, on June 24, 1944, was ultimately a failure and substantially increased his pain. "[I] will confine myself to saying that I think the Doc should have read just one more book before picking up the saw," Kennedy wrote.

By mid-July Kennedy had lost 35 pounds and was thoroughly jaundiced. Ulcers and spastic colitis complicated his recovery. The navy awarded him the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for his heroics and discharged him. Kennedy's war was over.

*PT-109* and Kennedy's rescue of his crew has since passed into American legend. The press played up the story for 20 years. In 1944, John Hersey wrote a major article on it, entitled "Survival," for *The New Yorker*. A bestselling book about the incident, *PT 109: John F. Kennedy in World War II* by Robert J. Donovan, appeared in 1961 during Kennedy's presidency and was made into a movie in 1963. But no account told the story from the perspective of Kennedy's lifelong poor health.

Knowing as we now do how much resolution and courage it must have taken to perform as he did during that crisis, and the terrible price he paid in pain for the rest of his life, we can only find new and enhanced respect for John F. Kennedy the naval hero. Seen in this light, the Navy and Marine Corps Medal seems insufficient. Perhaps someday a more appropriate honor will be conferred on him posthumously: the Navy Cross. ★

BRIAN JOHN MURPHY is a contributing editor of *America* in WWII. His article on the Allied victory in Europe appeared in our first issue.



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