

CONFIDENTIAL COPY

San Francisco, California

4 November 1944

I, Charles H. RHODES, a resident of lawful age of the City of Hoquiam, State of Washington, do make this statement to Lieutenant M. J. WILSON, whom I know to be an officer in the U. S. Naval Reserve:

I sailed aboard the S. S. JOHN A. JOHNSON from San Francisco, California, on Wednesday, 25 October 1944, serving aboard that ship as the Second Assistant Engineer.

On the night of Sunday, 29 October 1944, the S. S. JOHN A. JOHNSON was torpedoed at approximately 2100, at which time I was in my forecandle asleep. I do not know any of the circumstances leading up to the actual torpedoing of the JOHNSON, since almost immediately after the explosion occurred, the abandon ship order was given and I prepared to go overboard with the rest of the crew. I was among a group of twenty-eight men who occupied No. 2 lifeboat and after all men had entered the boat, we paddled away from the JOHNSON a distance of approximately a mile to a mile and one-half. About forty-five minutes after the torpedo had hit the JOHNSON, a submarine was seen to surface approximately 200 yards away from the position of our boat at that time. The submarine was moving slowly in the water and circled the area, observing the results of the torpedoing. The submarine then turned at a point about 200 yards away from our boat and steered a course bearing directly upon our boat, and was proceeding at a speed estimated by me to be ten knots. When it was apparent that the submarine intended to ram our boat, all of us went overboard, some of whom swam away from the lifeboat and others including myself stayed nearby in an effort to hold on to the side. The bow of the submarine brushed the boat which, together with the waves, shoved to the side of the submarine and the submarine continued on its way. However, at a point when the submarine was approximately amidship with respect to our boat and the group that were in the water, machine-gun fire was opened on us from a group of men who were standing along the

CONFIDENTIAL COPY

starboard rail on the main deck of the submarine. The distance from the point where the fire was opened to those men who were in the water is estimated by me to be approximately thirty feet. I was hit by a bullet in my left shoulder, the concussion of which caused severe pain to the entire left area of my body and has resulted in my hospitalization for treatment of the wound.

After the bullet hit me, I managed to get back to the boat and with the aid of the other men, was able to get aboard. The submarine proceeded on, trying, however, to swing its stern in an effort to catch some of the men in its screws. All of our group then returned to the lifeboat since the submarine had proceeded in another circling movement of the area. The submarine then turned and returned on a course bearing directly upon our boat, but proceeding at a slower speed than before. Those of our group who had not been hit by the gunfire again abandoned the boat, leaving three of us who had been wounded in the lifeboat. I lay in the bottom of the boat in a position as if I had been killed and was dead, and again the bow of the submarine brushed the boat and when it had reached a point approximately amidship of the submarine with respect to our boat, a brilliant white light was placed upon our boat. It is my belief that this light was used to take a picture. No guns were fired from the submarine at this time, although immediately after the light was removed, the submarine was turned hard port, obviously in an attempt to involve our boat and as many men as possible in the screws.

A large number of the members of the crew of the submarine were standing on the deck and gathered around in the conning tower and were yelling and laughing at our predicament. I personally saw five of the men from the JOHNSON who were wounded as a result of the gunfire from the submarine. I saw some of those men in the water and when taken aboard the U. S. S. ARGUS, which ship rescued all of the survivors. The submarine later disappeared, since approximately at that time, planes appeared overhead.

I am unable to definitely identify or designate any particular member of the crew who was seen by me to have been killed by the gunfire or to have drowned as a result of the torpedoing.

CONFIDENTIAL COPY

I have read the above statement of the facts and instances related therein, consisting of three (3) pages, including this page, and in all respects I swear that it is a true statement to the best of my knowledge, information and belief.

/s/ CHARLES H. RHODES

Thus done and signed on this, the fourth day of November 1944, at San Francisco, California.

/s/ M. J. WILSON
Lieutenant, U.S.N.R.

WITNESSES: R. HOLMES

R. W. HALBERT, Ylc, U.S.N.R.