

## The Sullivan Brothers



This is the sixth in a series of articles that we hope to publish for years to come. With this series, we want to honor Service Members that served our great Nation. As I mentioned in the last article we need your help to honor these fine Americans. If you have someone you would like us to include please email us at [mhamlegionpost113@gmail.com](mailto:mhamlegionpost113@gmail.com)

I was asked to write about veterans from outside our community, once you read it I think you'll understand why. This is the story of a family that weathered the Great Depression in the Midwest and in the end paid an even higher price than most. George, Frank, Joe, Matt, and Al Sullivan were born and raised in Waterloo Iowa. They joined the US Navy after the attack on Pearl Harbor to avenge the death of a family friend. They were killed when a Japanese torpedo hit their ship. The Sullivan Brothers became synonymous with the US Military's Lone Survivor Policy. No one family should ever have to pay such a terrible price losing all five boys, let alone all five at one time.

The 5 boys enlisted in the Navy January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1942, making headlines around the country. George and Al had already served four years in the Navy before World War II, so they along with the other three decided they would all sign up at the same time and ask to be assigned to the same ship. The Navy had a policy not to assign siblings to the same ship but it was not strictly enforced.

The USS Juneau a new Light Cruiser launched on 25 October, 1941 with the Sullivan Brothers on board.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, the Juneau was part of a Task Force sent in to protect Guadalcanal and Henderson Field. The weather was awful. The American and Japanese ships got into "close combat" and both took heavy losses. The Juneau had taken a hit to the bow so it was barely able to sail back to a rear area base for repairs. Later that same day The Juneau and the remaining American ships were sailing back when I26, a Japanese submarine, torpedoed the Juneau. It is believed that the second torpedo struck the area close to the ammunition magazines, three of the Sullivan bothers were below deck and died immediately. The two older brothers were above deck.

The Captain of the USS Helena did not believe anyone could have survived the blast and thought it would only cause more loss of life if he sent any of the remaining ships to check. A B17 flying overhead had seen men and lifeboats in the water but did not break radio silence to report it. When the B17 crew landed they reported seeing men from the Juneau in the water but

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the report got buried and it wasn't until several days later that the Navy ordered a search for survivors.

George and Frank survived the initial blast but Frank died a day later. Survivors reported that George spent 4 days going from life raft to life raft looking for his brothers. On the 4<sup>th</sup> day George became delirious and jumped into the water where the sharks had been circling and was never seen again.

The Navy notified the family that all five boys died in January of 1944, some two months after the Juneau sank. After the death of all five boys Alleta and Tom became spokespersons for the war effort, even christening a ship named The Sullivans in honor of George, Frank, Joe, Matt, and Al. speaking to workers at manufacturing plants that were supporting the war effort to help keep workers motivated and increase production.

If you want to learn more about the story there are a couple books that have been written about The Sullivans, one that I thought was well written was "The Fighting Sullivans: How Hollywood and the Military Make Heroes" written by Bruce Kuklick. There was also a movie made about a year after the sinking of the Juneau named The Fighting Sullivans.

Compiled by Jerry Hook