

NICKELSON, Raymond, MM2c, 291 58 11, USN  
Pers-S249-aid

15 NOV 1945

My dear Mr. and Mrs. Nickelson:

It is with the deepest sorrow that I, as Senior Surviving Officer of the former U.S.S. HOUSTON, write to you regarding your son, Raymond Nickelson, Machinist's Mate second class, U. S. Navy, who was reported as missing in action following the sinking of the ship on the night of February 28, 1942. Although officially reported as missing in action, I regret to say that as a result of a very careful review of all available information obtained from interrogating many repatriated HOUSTON survivors, and due to the great lapse of time since the sinking of the ship, I am personally of the belief that there can be no hope for his survival.

The HOUSTON left Batavia, Java, in company with H.M.A.S. PERTH, about 7:30 in the evening on February 28, 1942, enroute to the southern coast of Java via the Sunda Strait. At about 11:15, when within about five miles of St. Nicholas Point, Java, Japanese ships were sighted and immediately engaged by both the HOUSTON and PERTH. It soon was apparent that we had encountered a large Japanese force which was preparing to land on the coast of Java. This force was composed of Japanese cruisers, destroyers, seaplane tenders, transports and possibly submarines. About twenty minutes after the start of the engagement, the PERTH was struck by torpedoes, left the formation and sank shortly thereafter. From then on and for a period of about one hour the HOUSTON singly engaged the entire Japanese force in a fierce engagement, the range of the enemy at times being less than one mile. The HOUSTON was hit many times by both torpedoes and shell fire and finally was so badly damaged as to be in a sinking condition. At this time orders were given to abandon ship. Shortly after the survivors were in the water the ship, still under heavy Japanese gunfire and with the United States colors still flying, rolled over to starboard and sank.

It is with extreme regret that I tell you that your son has not been seen or heard from by any of us since that evening. The circumstances surrounding his disappearance are unknown to all of us. However, there was time for all survivors to get into the water before the ship sank. We have a record of all the men who were captured, and we know of others who were seen in the water but not captured. Since your son's name is not listed in our records, it is presumed that he went down with the ship.

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I have been advised that a full and complete review of the status of all missing HOUSTON personnel will be made by the Navy Department in the near future and at that time official notification of the status of your son will be given you.

I realize that no words of mine can lighten the burden of grief at this time. I do hope, however, that you can find some comfort in the knowledge that your son's efforts materially aided in making the HOUSTON a fighting ship of which our country and our people can be forever proud. Please accept my sincerest sympathy on behalf of all the surviving officers and men of the HOUSTON.

Very sincerely,

A. L. MAHER  
Captain, U. S. Navy

Mr. and Mrs. Lafe Nickelson  
RFD #1  
Milan, Indiana

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