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NAVY DEPARTMENT

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and refer to

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QB4/AFB/cco
Serial 3174
1 December 1948



*AFB/cco
Serial 3116
22 Nov. 1948*

*Serial 3877
Nov. 30*

*From
207*

~~SECRET~~

From: Navy Department Board of Decorations and Medals.
The Judge Advocate General.

Award of Purple Heart Medal to Personnel lost with the
U.S.S. SERPENS (AK097) - Determination of eligibility
for:

- (A) Board of Decorations and Medals Serial 1081 dated 23 April 1948.
- (A) Record of Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry into the loss of the U.S.S. SERPENS at Guadalcanal in January 1945.
- (B) Copy of Navy Department Board of Decorations and Medals Serial 3877 dated 3 November 1948.

1. The Board has completed the adjudication of this case and Enclosure (A), requested by Reference (a), is returned herewith.

2. A copy of the recommendation of the Board, with the Secretary of the Navy's action thereon, is contained in Enclosure (B).

P. W. Steinhagen
P. W. STEINHAGEN
By direction.

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Room 2057	
<i>JAB</i> 6 DEC 1948	
File No. (SC)	<i>PL5/AKO-97</i>
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OB/AFB/cab
Serial 3116
22 Nov, 1948

Ind-1 on ComNav Far East
Ser. 3877 ltr dtd 3 Nov. 1948

From: Navy Department Board of Decorations and Medals.
To: The Secretary of the Navy.
Subj: Award of the Purple Heart Medal to Personnel lost with
the U.S.S. SERPENS (AK-97) - Determination of eligibility
for.
Encl: (A) Commander Naval Forces, Far East, Serial 3877 dated
3 November 1948 and enclosure thereto.

1. In the basic letter the Commandant, U. S. Coast Guard, requested that a categorial determination be made as regards the eligibility of personnel of the U.S.S. SERPENS for the award of the Purple Heart Medal. The U.S.S. SERPENS, a Coast Guard manned Navy ammunition ship, exploded off Guadalcanal on 29 January 1945 and of all personnel aboard at the time of the explosion, only two survived.

2. Executive Order No. 9277 of December 3, 1942, provides, in part, as follows:

"(1) The Secretary of the Navy is authorized and directed to award the Purple Heart in the name of the President of the United States to persons who, while heretofore or hereafter serving in any capacity with the Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard of the United States, are wounded in action against an enemy of the United States, or as a result of an act of such enemy, provided such wound necessitates treatment by a medical officer."

"(3) The Secretary of the Navy is further authorized and directed to award the Purple Heart posthumously, in the name of the President of the United States, to any persons who, while serving in any capacity with the Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard of the United States, since December 6, 1941, are killed in action or who die as a direct result of wounds received in action with an enemy of the United States, or as a result of an act of such enemy....."

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3. A careful study of the Naval Court of Inquiry into the loss of the SERPENS, and the endorsements thereto (particularly that by the Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance), indicates that the explosion was probably not caused by enemy action. This opinion is further substantiated by information received from the Commander Naval Forces, Far East, Enclosure (A) to this endorsement, which indicates that no operational movement was carried out by any of the Japanese Naval Operational Units in the vicinity of Guadalcanal on 29 January 1945.

4. In view of the foregoing and after careful study, the Board is of the opinion that the loss of the SERPENS and her crew was not in action with the enemy nor as a result of enemy action. The Board, therefore is constrained to recommend that subject personnel be found not eligible for the award of the Purple Heart.

V. H. SCHAEFFER.

Navy Department

APPROVED: 30 NOV 1948

JOHN NICHOLAS BROWN
Secretary of the Navy.

cc: USCG