

6 April, 1942

TANKERS SUNK OR DAMAGED BY ENEMY ACTION 8 APRIL 1942 - 13 MAY 1942

41. M.S. BIDWELL

NAME	BUILT TONS	FIRE DATE	TIME	LOCATION	OR SAVER	APRIL - 1942
41 BIDWELL	6,837					
42 OKLAHOMA (1)						
43 ESSO HATON ROUGH						
44 ALTA	1,137	X				

U.S. Tanker; built, 1920; 6,837 gross tons; load, fuel oil.
 Departed Corpus Christi, Texas, 29 March, 1942, for New York.
 Torpedoed 6 April, 0200 EWT: 30 miles east of Cape Lookout.
 Weather, clear, moon almost full; sea, choppy; wind, light.
 On board, 33: saved, 32.
 Vessel: made port under own power.

Zigzagging on a northeasterly course, the BIDWELL received an enemy torpedo, which hit the port side between the engine room and the bridge. A fine spray of oil was ignited and burned intensely for a few seconds, then went out. The Second Mate, on watch on the bridge, was showered with burning oil, jumped overboard and was lost. A broken steam line barred effective communication between bridge and the 26 men aft, and the Master and deck officers, seeing the men aft lowering #3 boat, hastily lowered #1 and left the ship. The engines, however, were still functioning, and the Chief Engineer directed the connecting of the emergency steering gear, and ordered the men to stay by the vessel.

About 0300, two destroyers appeared and offered assistance, but none was required. The Captain's boat later returned to the ship, which proceeded to Hampton Roads and discharged her cargo before going into drydock for repairs.

The Master was afterwards tried on a charge of neglect of duty, but the board found him guilty only of an error in judgment and recommended that the case be closed without further action.

William Dalton, the Chief Engineer, was awarded the Merchant Marine Distinguished Service Medal for his action in bringing the fire under control and thereby making it possible to bring the ship safely to port.

56 AURORA	1,080					
57 VIRGINIA	1,071	X				
60 ESSO HOUSTON	1,898	X				

PERIOD COVERED - 37 DAYS
 AVERAGES - 1 TANKER HIT EVERY 1.8 DAYS
 25% SALVAGED (6 loaded)
 68% CAUGHT FIRE (2 Salvaged)
 8.3 LIVES LOST PER DAY
 8.3 LIVES LOST PER CASUALTY
 (-) All Hands Saved

