

8 April, 1942

43. S.S. ESSO BATON ROUGE
(See also Group 6; 23 February, 1943)

U.S. Tanker; built, 1938; 7,989 gross tons; cargo, lube oil.
Departed Texas for New York City.
Torpedoed 8 April, 1942, 0250; 31°13' N. - 80°05' W.
Weather, clear; sea, calm; wind, slight S.E.
On board, 39; saved, 36.
Vessel: salvaged.

The vessel, unarmed, was zigzagging off the coast of Georgia, with a half moon just rising, when several unidentified white lights were seen off the starboard bow. The tanker OKLAHOMA had overtaken the ESSO BATON ROUGE about an hour previously, and passed to starboard. Suddenly a torpedo hit the port quarter, and exploded in the engine room. All the lights went out, and the crew's quarters were flooded as the ship began to settle rapidly. Two men on watch in the engine room were killed by the blast, but the others all got off safely in two lifeboats, and made for the light of the Brunswick, Ga., air beacon, visible on the horizon. Several flares were sent up, and were answered by other boats, and it was realized that there were lifeboats from another ship in the vicinity (later found to be the OKLAHOMA). One crew member, a naturalized German, jumped overboard in a rubber suit. Some of the crew claimed to have heard a voice, possibly from the submarine, say in broken English: "Come over here and we will save you", and the floating crewman was not seen again.

About 10:00 next morning, the lifeboats were picked up by a Coast Guard Cutter, and towed into the Coast Guard Station on St. Simon Island, where they received refreshments, and clothing was provided for those in need of it.

The vessel was towed to port, and a considerable part of the cargo salvaged. She was completely overhauled, and replaced in active service the last of November, 1942, under the same Master, James S. Poche.

