

23 February, 1943

112 S.S. ESSO BATON ROUGE
(See also Group 3; 8 April, 1942)

U.S. Tanker, built 1938; 7,989 gross tons; in ballast.
Departed Swansea, Wales, for Curacao.
Torpedoed 23 February, 1943, 1920; 31°15 N. - 27°22 W.
On board, 68; saved, 65.
Vessel: total loss.

As she was returning in water ballast with a convoy from Wales to the West Indies, she was again attacked, the torpedo penetrating the engine room from the starboard side this time. There was a terrific flash and a puff of smoke, but no fire ensued, and the ship was abandoned in three lifeboats, and two rafts were also released but not used. 65 of the 68 men on board were saved, the engineering officer and fireman on watch below being lost, and one member of the gun crew. The ship went down stern first about 3 hours later.

The survivors were picked up by the British HMS TOTLAND, where the burned and injured were cared for. A galleyman from the ESSO BATON ROUGE, a former physician, was instrumental in saving the life of one of the badly injured gun crew when he was given up by the ship's surgeon on the TOTLAND. The injured were put ashore at Antigua on 4 March, and the other survivors transferred to a Dutch ship, and taken to Trinidad and Curacao for repatriation.

Russell O. Wirtz, of the ESSO BATON ROUGE, by his skill and devotion saved several lives and received the Merchant Marine Distinguished Service Medal.