

12 May, 1942

AT 60. S.S. ESSO HOUSTON

U.S. Tanker; built, 1938; 7,698 gross tons; cargo, fuel oil. U.S. Tanker
 Departed Aruba, N.W.I., 9 May, 1942, for Montevideo, Uruguay. Departed
 Torpedoed 12 May, 1942, 2035; 12°12 N. - 57°25 W. Torpedoed 12 May, 1942,
 Weather, clear; sea, choppy. Weather, clear; sea, calm; slight breeze.
 On board, 42; saved, 41. On board, 41; saved, 41.
 Vessel: total loss. Vessel: total loss.

When about 150 miles east of Barbados, the first torpedo struck this tanker about 25 feet aft of the bridge, and another followed in almost the same place, spraying oil all over the after end of the ship. There was a flash of fire, but the cargo did not ignite. The submarine had been seen crossing the ship's bow about 400 ft. away, and the wheel put hard right, causing the torpedo to hit the port instead of the starboard side. The gun was manned, but the vessel took such a list that it could not be brought to bear on the target. A survey of the damage revealed to the Master that the ship's back was broken, and the order was given to abandon. The Chief Officer released all the life rafts before he and the Captain left in the #1 boat. One raft had several men on it, and some were taken from the water into the Master's boat.

The submarine approached the lifeboat and an officer asked numerous questions in broken English. He later returned to report that one of the lifeboats was in a sinking condition near the tanker's stern, and the Master went to its assistance, transferring the men to his boat. The 41 survivors were taken aboard by a Norwegian and a Yugoslavian vessel, and eventually made their way to New York, arriving within one day of each other. One Navy gunner was lost.

The tanker was last seen at 2200 with the midship section under water, and bow and stern high, and is presumed to have foundered within the hour.

