

2 November, 1944

144 S.S. FORT LEE

U.S. Tanker, built 1943; 10,198 gross tons; cargo, fuel oil.
 Departed Abadan, Iran, 20 October, 1944, for Brisbane, Australia.
 Torpedoed 2 November, 1944, 2002 L.A.T.; 27°35 S.- 83°11 E.
 Weather, cloudy; sea, slight; wind, light S.E.
 On Board, 75; saved, 50
 Vessel: total loss

At 2002 a torpedo struck on the port side aft, penetrating the fireroom and exploding there. The automatic torpedo detecting device sounded off immediately after the hit. The power went off, and quarters aft were filled with live steam and ammonia fumes. The #6 boat was manned, and got away from the ship without specific orders. #3 and #5 boats were in process of being lowered when a second torpedo crashed just between them, demolishing one completely and breaking the other in two, spilling the men into the water. There was a sheet of flame 200 feet high when this exploded, but it lasted only 5 to 10 seconds, and there was no further fire apparent. Boats #1, #2 and #4 were then launched on the Master's orders, and the surviving crew members abandoned ship after releasing the rafts. The survivors from the broken boat were picked up, and also one man who had been on the engine room watch and had dived out through the hole made by the torpedo.

The ship settled by the stern, and dived stern first at 2115. The submarine surfaced and made inquiries of the men in one boat, and from the accent, it was concluded that they were German. The boats remained together through the next day, and equalized their crews, so that two had 17 men each, and two, 16. They later became separated, and three were picked up at different places and times, and the fourth is unreported.

#2 boat was picked up by MV ERNEBANK, 7 November, and the men landed at Fremantle, 14 November. #6 boat was sighted and the survivors picked up 9 November by SS TUMACORI, an American tanker. They landed, also 14 November, at Albany, Australia. #1 boat sighted a ship on 16 November, and had the harrowing experience of being fired upon by her, until she identified them, and steamed in their direction. She was the SS MARY BALL, and took the men to Colombo, where they were put ashore 24 November. #4 lifeboat is missing and presumed lost.

