

3 April, 1943

117 S.S. GULF STATE

U.S. Tanker, built 1923; 7,216 gross tons; cargo, crude oil.
Departed Corpus Christi, Texas, 29 March, 1943, for Portland, Me.
Torpedoed, 3 April, 1943, 0315 EWT; 24°22' N.- 80°27' W.
Weather, clear; sea, smooth; wind, light E.
On board, 49; saved, 18.
Vessel: total loss.

The attack on this vessel was characterized by the explosion of two torpedoes in quick succession - one under the bridge, and one in the engine room. The general alarm was sounded, but there was no opportunity to launch boats or rafts, as fire broke out immediately, and the ship sank in five minutes. All licensed personnel, with the exception of the radio operator, were lost. Those who were saved jumped and made their way through burning oil and flotsam to safety. One doughnut raft either was jarred loose or released, and a number of survivors clung to that. At 1040 a blimp sighted the floating men, and a Coast Guard plane dropped two rubber life rafts. Coast Guard planes and rescue craft picked them up about 1230, and, together with several bodies, they were brought ashore at Key West that afternoon.

James F. Harrell, of the SS GULF STATE was posthumously awarded the Merchant Marine Distinguished Service Medal for the heroism which cost his life.

