

20 May, 1942

68. S.S. HALO

U.S. Tanker; built, 1921; 6,986 gross tons; cargo, crude oil.

Departed Galveston, Texas, 19 May, 1942, for New Orleans, La.

Torpedoed 20 May, 1942, 0020 CWT; 28°42' N.- 90°08' W.

Weather, clear; sea, calm; wind, light.

On board, 42; saved, 3.

Vessel: total loss.

About 27 miles from Southwest Pass, this tanker, bound for New Orleans, was hit on the starboard side by a torpedo, which exploded under the bridge with terrific force. Another, about ten seconds later, tore the ship apart just aft of the first, and she sank rapidly, going down by the head. The propellor was still turning and the radio transmitter had been turned on and emitted one long dash as she plunged to the bottom in nearly 100 fathoms. 23 men managed to jump, some without life preservers, and huddled together at a safe distance from the film of oil which burned for about 6 hours on the water. Two men climbed aboard a half-burned raft, on which they drifted for seven days without food or water.

The victims floating saw planes pass overhead daily, but could not attract attention to their plight, the seriousness of which increased when wreckage and heavy oil came to the surface as the vessel below was crushed by the tremendous pressure at that depth. The 7 remaining alive at this time tied pieces of wreckage together with strips torn from their life preservers, but when they were finally sighted and taken from the oil-covered water by the Mexican OAXACA, only 3 remained, one of whom was dead, and another of whom died 1/2 hour after reaching safety. The two men on the half-burned raft were picked up unconscious by the British tanker S.S. ORINA and hospitalized in Port Arthur, Texas.

It is considered strange that patrol planes which passed over the area daily made no effort to discover the source of the tremendous oil slick which came to the surface after this vessel was sunk, and which was reported by the Master of the OAXACA to be visible for ten miles.

