

16 December, 1943

135 S.S. McDOWELL

U.S. Tanker; built 1943; 10,195 gross tons; in ballast.

Departed New York for Aruba, N.W.I.

Torpedoed 16 December, 1943, 0528 EWT, 13°08' N - 70°02' W.

Weather, cloudy; wind, light NE; sea, choppy.

On board, 73; saved, 71.

Vessel: total loss.

The moon in its third quarter was visible when the first torpedo struck the McDOWELL astern on the port side, ripping a large hole, and disabling the main and auxiliary engines, steering gear and radio system. The automatic torpedo detector did not function until after the ship had been hit, and she commenced at once to settle aft. General alarm was sounded, and all water-tight doors and hatches were dogged down to check the flooding. At 0535, the 5" gun was fired at a light, thought to be on the submarine, but which was probably the water light on a raft shaken loose by the explosion.

The tanker drifted helplessly for an hour, then was struck about sunrise by a second torpedo on the port quarter. The Master ordered the ship abandoned, but before this operation was completed, a third exploded almost amidships and she began to go down rapidly. One injured man was thrown from one of the after lifeboats and drowned, and another, who went below to get his personal effects, presumably went down with the ship. All others escaped safely in five lifeboats, although one injured man died ashore on 22 December.

At 0710 a plane was sighted, and directed the SS FAIRFAX, which rescued 63 men, and later in the morning, the USS YMS-56 took on 8 more and landed them at Aruba.

The tanker went down within five minutes after the third torpedo hit.

