

29 April, 1942

52. S.S. MOBIL OIL

U.S. Tanker; built, 1937; 9,860 gross tons; in ballast.  
 Departed New York, 16 April, 1942, for Caripito, Venezuela.  
 Torpedoed and shelled, 29 April, 1942, 0228; 26°10 N.- 66°15 W.  
 Weather, clear; moonlight; sea, calm; wind, moderate N.E.  
 On board, 52; saved, 52.  
 Vessel: total loss.

This vessel was issued routing orders before departure from New York, and these were followed to Norfolk. At Norfolk, conflicting instructions were given the Master, directing him to join an informal escorted convoy down the coast through the submarine danger zone. He questioned this, as the other ships were bound for the Gulf, and his destination was South America, and also because his speed was greater than that of the others. He was told to await further orders, and the following day ordered to proceed at 2300 in company with other vessels and an escort. At the appointed hour no others were there, so he decided to proceed alone on his own responsibility. As no escort materialized, and the waters ahead were reported infested with enemy craft, he took it upon himself to revert to his original routing instructions, and put out to sea.

Three days later, about 0230, a torpedo struck the tanker on the starboard side well forward. The general alarm was rung, and some ballast shifted, but the vessel was able to proceed at full speed within a few minutes.

Fifteen minutes later, they were shelled by two submarines, and the Navy gun crew got into action, scoring two probable hits, and the shelling stopped.

At 0440, another torpedo struck amidships, doing more damage than the first, but still leaving the tanker able to maneuver, and with the coming of daylight, the crew settled to the task of taking her in to Bermuda in safety.

However, at 1040, a third torpedo penetrated aft on the port side, and the ship began to settle rapidly. #1 boat had been destroyed by the second torpedo, but the men prepared to abandon in the other three boats, and, as the Master expressed it, "We abandoned the ship when there was no more ship there, and they didn't climb down to the boats, they just stepped in".

After 3-1/2 days, the boats were picked up by a Naval vessel, and the men taken to Santo Domingo. All hands were saved.

The Master was later tried for misconduct in failing to follow routing instructions, and was found guilty as charged, and his license suspended on probation for six months.

30 April, 1942

U.S. FEDERAL

U.S. Tanker; built, 1901; 2,881 gross tons; in ballast.  
Departed Tampa, Florida, 27 April, 1942, for Bama, Cuba.  
Shelled by submarine, 30 April, 1942, 1205 EWT; 21°12 N. - 76°02 W.  
Weather, clear; sea, moderate; wind, moderate N.E.  
On board, 33; saved, 29.  
Vessel: total loss.

This tanker was proceeding to Cuba in ballast to take on a cargo of molasses, and when not far off shore north of Gibara, Cuba, an object, thought to be a submarine, was sighted near the horizon. The course was changed toward shore, and the object disappeared, but less than an hour later a submarine was sighted surfacing in the FEDERAL's wake. The bridge was notified, but the submarine changed course to parallel the ship, and commenced shelling her from the port quarter. The first shell went through the crew's quarters, killing the Chief Cook and injuring the Second. The fire alarm was rung, and the crew stood by to lower the boats. The life of #3 and #4 were shot away so that these boats could not be launched, but #1 got away safely with 11 men. This was the Master's boat, but he remained aboard to direct the abandonment by the rest in rate. The wooden midship structure was split in two at that time, but all who remained aboard were saved. The submarine came in closer, and continued the shelling until she sank stern first at 11:30. Patrol planes circled the vicinity soon after the ship went down, and small boats were sent to the shore, where the attack had been watched and the lifeboats made it own way to the beach. The man died of wounds after reaching safety.

