

VIRGINIA (May 12, 1942)

"On 12 May 1942, while subject vessel was awaiting a Pilot just off the entrance to Southwest Pass, it was struck by a torpedo on the port side. A few seconds later another torpedo found its mark and an explosion occurred on the loaded vessel. Flames enveloped the vessel immediately and it sank within a few minutes, so quickly that the lifeboats or life rafts were not even launched. Twenty-seven members of the crew perished in the fire and fourteen members, who jumped overboard into the water and swam away, were rescued by a Navy patrol boat.

"Among various suggestions received from crew members were the following: Mike Kuzma, Ordinary Seaman, recommends greasing of life raft skids, and putting lifeboats amidships (in addition to those aft); Trinity Collazo, Engineer, recommends more lifeboats, and the carrying of a life raft on dead center extreme after end of ship; Harry M. Weston, Oiler, recommends that on gasoline ships the rafts be removed from above cargo tanks, also placed aft of engine room."

Vessel was struck by a torpedo on the port side and the crew went on the boat deck and started to swing out the lifeboats on the starboard side and then awaited orders to abandon ship. About two minutes after the first torpedo struck, a second and a third torpedo struck, and the vessel caught fire. The crew then abandoned ship the best way they could. No lifeboats or life rafts were launched.

Ordinary seaman Kuzma said there were no life preservers on deck where they should have been.

Chief Engineer testified that the engine was stopped before he left the engine room.

Oiler Weston stated that on this vessel "they had the rafts tied with 1-1/4" rope and if you didn't happen to have a knife you couldn't get it overboard. They could rig it with chain or wire cable with some kind of outfit that a ring could slip down over and knock that off. That would hold just as fast and it would go overboard."

Stated that he had been on the vessel for three trips from Baton Rouge to Baytown and that there had been no drills conducted during this time.

Fireman Macpherson recommended very strongly that cork life preservers should be discarded.