

31 August, 1943

132 S.S. W. S. RHEEM

U. S. Tanker; built, 1921; 10,872 gross tons; cargo, fuel oil.
Departed Pago Pago, Samoa, 24 August, 1943, for Havana Harbor, New Hebrides.
Torpedoed 31 August, 1943, 1535, in Bougainville Straits.
Weather, clear; wind, light easterly; sea, slight.
On board, 74; saved, 74.
Vessel not abandoned; salvaged.

This tanker was attacked when just emerging from Bougainville Straits. The Master was on the bridge, and watching what appeared to be a whale or large porpoise breaking water on a course parallel to that of the ship, when suddenly the "whale" made a right angle turn and headed directly for the vessel. The Captain then realized that it was a torpedo, and ordered the wheel put hard right, and as she swung, the torpedo passed close ahead, but another struck almost immediately, deep in the water, and well forward on the port side, causing the dry cargo space, forepeak and chain locker to fill, and the vessel to settle by the head. Almost simultaneously, the wake of a third torpedo was observed crossing the ship's stern, and the Master thinks that a pattern of three was fired so that no possible turn could have avoided a hit by one.

Several thousand barrels of oil were transferred to #10 cargo tanks in order to bring the propellor down into the water, after which the damaged tanker was able to proceed under her own power into Espiritu Santo harbor.



