

16 May 1942

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U.S.S. GULFPORT

65. M.S. WILLIAM C. McTARNAHAN

U.S. Tanker; built, 1941; 7,306 gross tons; in ballast.
 Departed Charleston, S. Car., 10 May, 1942, for Port Isabel, Texas.
 Torpedoed 16 May, 1942, 0412; 28°52 N.- 90°20 W.
 Weather, hazy; sea, slight; wind, moderate N.E.
 On board, 45; saved, 27.
 Vessel: salvaged.

A suspicious light was seen by the watch officer going off duty at 0400, and reported to the oncoming watch, who was carefully searching the surrounding sea with binoculars when he saw two torpedo tracks converging on the ship. He had barely time to give an order for hard right rudder when they struck in quick succession; the first forward and the second in the engine room. Flames instantaneously issued from the engine room skylight, and the men quartered aft who were able to escape reported noxious fumes and a searing effect on the skin, apparently from the exploding torpedo. The after falls on the two lifeboats carried by this vessel were snapped by the concussion, but the men managed to launch and bail out first one and later the other boat, and to let go 3 rafts.

The submarine, or, according to some testimony, the submarines, commenced shelling the tanker, and the crew members abandoned ship in the two boats and two rafts. At daylight the men on the rafts were transferred to the boats.

The vessel did not sink, and the Master planned to reboard her next day, but the survivors were sighted by a Coast Guard patrol plane and taken ashore at Houma, La., by several shrimp trawlers.

The vessel was taken to New Orleans, then it was decided to tow her to Mobile for repairs. During the passage down the Mississippi, she was grounded making a turn, and several days were consumed in pulling her off the bar. (This was later the cause for some litigation, but the court ruled that no one was deliberately at fault.) Upon arrival at Mobile, she was completely reconditioned, and went back into service under the name of ST. JAMES.

