

16 July, 1942

90. S.S. WILLIAM F. HUMPHREY

U.S. Tanker, built 1921; 7,938 gross tons; 1 ballast.  
Departed Capetown, S. Africa, for Trinidad, N.I.  
Shelled and sunk, 16 July, 1942; 2142 GCT; 05°37' S.- 00°56' E.  
Weather, clear; sea, smooth; wind, fresh S.E.  
On board, 46; saved, 37.  
Vessel: total loss.

This tanker was attacked by shellfire and torpedoes from a surface raider near the African coast. The attack commenced about 2140, the only advance warning being a white light reported to have flashed off the port bow. The attacker poured shells from her heavy guns - 5" or 6" - as well as machine gun and tracer bullets, followed by three torpedoes into the helpless ship. The Master believes that a small torpedo boat assisted the larger raider, as the attack seemed to come from both sides simultaneously. The tanker's after gun was manned, and three shots fired before it was put out of action, and "abandon ship" ordered. The starboard lifeboats were destroyed by shell fire, as was the starboard after liferaft, but a large portion of the complement got off in #2 and #4 boats and #1, #2 and #4 rafts. A voice was heard from the raider, saying, in excellent English, "come alongside, boys, and we will save you", and the two lifeboats were found floating empty next day, so it was supposed that the men from these were taken aboard the enemy craft and interned. The tanker sank a few minutes after being abandoned.

Eleven men, including the Master, were picked up six days later by the Norwegian MS TRITON and landed at Freetown on 26 Jul., where some of the survivors were hospitalized. Twenty-six were later found to have been interned in Japanese camps, where two of them died before repatriation.

