

SUNK IN CONVOY

SS *H. H. Rogers*

ALTHOUGH the Panamanian flag tanker *H. H. Rogers* was sunk without warning while in convoy about 600 miles west of the Irish coast, all hands were rescued and eventually returned to the port from which they had sailed.

The *H. H. Rogers* was commanded by Captain Clinton W. Hayes and Chief Engineer Thomas J. O'Brien was in charge of her engine room. She had an American crew of 47 officers and men and a U. S. Navy armed guard of 26 to man her armament—a 5-inch stern gun, a 3-inch gun forward, four 20-mm. anti-aircraft guns forward, one on each side of the bridge and two in the bow, and four 20-mm. guns on the after boat deck.

On January 29, 1943 the vessel completed a voyage from New York to Liverpool to deliver 83,366 barrels of fuel oil and a general cargo of war materiel; this mission ended, she left Liverpool on February 12 in a small convoy, arrived at Belfast on the 13th, and on the following day sailed in a formation of about 40 vessels (including her sistership, the *Beacon*), under escort of four corvettes and a destroyer. Heavy weather was encountered; it so hindered the progress of the convoy that several vessels returned to port. The *H. H. Rogers*, however, stayed in the formation, and the events that followed are described in Captain Hayes' report:

"On the afternoon of February 16 the weather moderated and the convoy was finally formed; the *H. H. Rogers* had been assigned to position 4-2. Fairly heavy seas were still running and I requested and was subsequently ordered, by the commodore of the convoy, to take position 1-3. This put the *H. H. Rogers* in the left hand column. The weather was fair.

Saw Freighter Sink

"About 7:35 p.m. on February 21, I was in my room and heard and felt several explosions coming from a position ahead of my ship; I immediately rushed to the bridge and saw that a Bull Line vessel, which I believe to have been the American flag freighter *Rosario*, in No. 1-1 position, had been torpedoed on the port side and was sinking rapidly; in a few seconds she disappeared.

"The weather was good at the time; the night was dark and partly cloudy, with fairly good visibility. On the bridge of the *H. H. Rogers*, in addition to myself, were Chief Mate William B. Vautrinot, with Able Seaman Francis A. Antonio at the wheel; Able Seaman Charles D. Richardson was lookout on the port wing and Ordinary Seaman Nino Cammellire was on the after end of the bridge. The U. S. Navy gunners, in command of Lieutenant (jg) Edward W. Houghton, were at their stations; the engine room was in charge of First Assistant Engineer John A. Graham.

Struck on Port Side

"About 7:40 p.m. convoy time (2040 GMT) when in Latitude 50°13' North, Longitude 24°48' West (dead reckoning) the *H. H. Rogers* was suddenly struck by a torpedo on the port side in way of No. 10 main tank, rupturing No. 6 summer tank and the decks in the immediate vicinity thereof, also the fire-room bulkhead. As a result, the fireroom and engine-room were flooded; No. 4 lifeboat was dislodged from the davits and lost overboard by the concussion of the explosion; and a small fire, probably from burning fuel oil in No. 6 tank, broke out on deck. The fire, however, was soon extinguished.

"When my ship was torpedoed I instructed Chief Mate Vautrinot to sound the general alarm and then proceed aft and ascertain the extent of the damage. I ordered Radio Operator Thomas B. Thompson to send out an SOS giving my vessel's number and reporting that we had been torpedoed. This was done and the message acknowledged, presumably by the commodore's ship. The engines, in accordance with standing orders, were stopped by First Assistant Engineer Graham. I telephoned the engine room for water pressure to extinguish the small fire previously mentioned; this was accomplished in a few minutes."

Reports to the master by the chief mate and first assistant engineer convinced him that the *H. H. Rogers* was doomed; the explosion resulted in water getting into the fuel, extinguishing the fires, and flooding the engine room and fireroom.

"At about 8:10 p.m., half an hour after the tanker was torpedoed," Captain Hayes said, "I ordered the

H. H. Rogers abandoned. We launched the remaining lifeboats, No. 1 and No. 2 (No. 3 having already left the ship, and No. 4 having been destroyed), and all life rafts. Four men on one of the rafts were picked up by one of the escorting British corvettes, and all others in the two lifeboats and on rafts rowed over to the SS *Rathlin*, to which we had signaled by blinker and which was standing by to take us aboard."

Officer Left Aboard—Rescued

Although it was thought that all hands had abandoned the *H. H. Rogers*, it was later discovered that Third Mate Christopher E. Tompkins was still on board. As stated by Captain Hayes, "He was observed by a British corvette to be using a flashlight in blinker fashion. His predicament was reported to the *Rathlin* and a launch was sent over for him.

"Crew members of the *H. H. Rogers* who had abandoned her in No. 3 lifeboat picked up several survivors of the *Rosario*.

"In the course of half an hour after we left the *H. H. Rogers* all hands, except the four men picked up by the British corvette, were aboard the *Rathlin*, which thereafter continued with the convoy. We reached Halifax on March 6. The four men rescued by the corvette were landed at St. John's, Newfoundland, on March 1, and arrived in New York on March 6. The 43 members of the crew who were landed at Halifax returned to New York March 9.

"Many of the men donned and made good use of the rubber lifesaving suits which we had aboard.

"When we left the *H. H. Rogers* she was settling by the stern but we did not actually see her go down."

It was later confirmed by the Navy that the *H. H. Rogers* sank in one hour.

An eye-witness of the sinking was Captain Andrew W. Ray, master of the *Beacon*. In an interview for this history Captain Ray stated:

"The *H. H. Rogers* was hit by a torpedo while the *Beacon* was about 600 feet astern of her. We were fueling a destroyer at the time and the *H. H. Rogers* was on the outside of the convoy. The destroyer disengaged the pump line and dropped many depth charges in search of the submarine."

Other Incidents

The *H. H. Rogers*, when commanded by Captain Ernest C. Kelson, was in a convoy in which several vessels were hit by torpedoes. Captain Kelson described these incidents after his return to the United States.

"On July 25, 1942," he said, "the *H. H. Rogers* sailed from a United States Gulf port under adequate escort protection. With a merchant crew of 43 officers and men and 19 U. S. Navy gunners, we carried a full cargo of fuel oil destined for a United Kingdom port.

In accordance with routing instructions, we proceeded on various courses toward Halifax, had fine weather and smooth sea all the way, and left there August 22 in convoy under a naval escort. The crossing was uneventful until the 31st, when at about 6:30 a.m. certain ships in the immediate vicinity of the *H. H. Rogers* were hit within a 10 minute period.

Shaken by Concussion

"The alarm was sounded and all hands proceeded to their stations; the vessels which had been torpedoed sent up rockets and the escorting ships went into action. A number of corvettes and destroyers immediately closed in and dropped depth charges, some in the vicinity of the *H. H. Rogers*, which was badly shaken as a result of the violent concussions. On one occasion the shock was so severe and close that the engineer on watch, suspecting that the tanker had been hit by a torpedo, stopped the engine in accordance with standing instructions; telegraphed orders were given from the bridge to continue speed.

"During the entire day of August 31 and all night the escorts kept dropping depth bombs throughout the convoy."

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The SS *H. H. Rogers* was built in 1916 by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company at Newport News, Va. She was a sistership of the *Charles Pratt* (lost December 21, 1940), *F. Q. Barstow*, *Wm. G. Warden*, and *Beacon*.

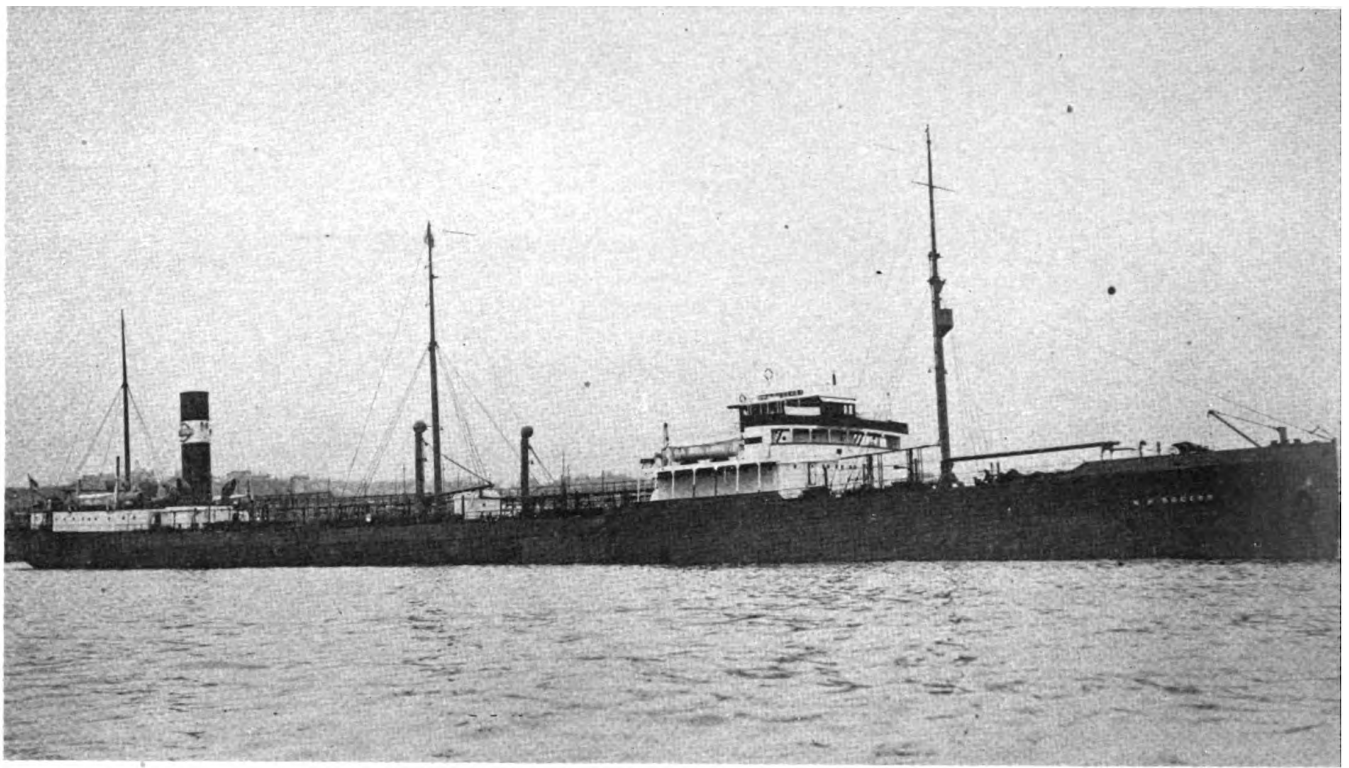
A twin-screw vessel of 15,955 deadweight tons capacity on international summer draft of 28 feet, 6½ inches, the *H. H. Rogers* had an overall length of 516 feet, 5 inches, a length between perpendiculars of 500 feet, a moulded breadth of 68 feet, and a depth moulded of 38 feet, 3½ inches. With a cargo carrying capacity of 119,390 barrels, she had an assigned pumping rate of 4,000 barrels an hour.

Her triple expansion engines, supplied with steam by three Scotch boilers, developed 3,000 indicated horsepower and gave her a classification certified speed of 9.5 knots.

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As an Esso tanker from the outbreak of the war in Europe until she was sold to the Panama Transport Company the following November 9, at Boston, the *H. H. Rogers* carried four cargoes of crude oil from Caribbean and Gulf ports to New York and Boston. Sailing for the rest of the year under the Panamanian flag, she delivered three more cargoes of crude oil from the Caribbean—one to Aruba, one to Halifax, and one to Southampton.

In 1940, in addition to transporting a cargo of crude oil from Caripito to Aruba, the *H. H. Rogers* made several voyages from Cartagena to Le Havre, Halifax, Brest, Milford Haven, and Montreal. She joined the tied-up fleet in the Patuxent River on July



SS "H. H. Rogers", sunk off Irish coast, all hands saved

22, 1940, remaining there until October 25. Following this period of tie-up the *H. H. Rogers* took one cargo from Caripito to Aruba, there loaded fuel oil for Freetown, Sierra Leone, and made one more voyage from Caripito to New York.

During 1941 the tanker took 13 cargoes of Diesel and fuel oil from Caribbean ports, one each to Ponta Delgada, Freetown, and the United Kingdom, and 10 to Atlantic east coast ports.

Continuing in 1942 to load fuel, crude, and Diesel oils, the *H. H. Rogers* carried one cargo from Trinidad to Freetown, one from Puerto La Cruz to Curacao, and two to Glasgow—from Texas City and New York.

It was on the return leg of her first voyage in 1943, en route from Liverpool to New York, that the *H. H. Rogers* was torpedoed.

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The wartime oil transportation record of the *H. H. Rogers* was in summary as follows:

Year	Voyages (Cargoes)	Barrels
1939	7	753,750
1940	7	709,987
1941	13	1,342,223
1942	4	377,905
1943	1	83,366
	—	—
	32	3,267,231

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The American masters of the *H. H. Rogers* during World War II were Captains Harry E. Heffelfinger, Nils Borgeson, Charles J. Stadelman, Chester S. Swanner, Carden Dwyer, Ernest C. Kelson, Aage Petersen, and Clinton W. Hayes.

In charge of her engine room were Chief Engineers George H. Ulmer, Emil Enstrom, Joseph M. Farrell, Anton Hogelin, George A. Proctor, Alexander J. G. Maitland, Rudolph Fenslau, Alvah B. Strout, William C. Wells, and Thomas J. O'Brien.

Captains A. C. Goodwin and J. K. Macartney were her masters during the period of the vessel's British registry from September, 1941 to June, 1942. Captain Joseph T. Stuart commanded her, and Chief Engineer Arthur C. Beresford was in charge of her engine room from the time she first flew the Panamanian flag until she was tied up in the Patuxent.

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Captain Clinton W. Hayes joined the Company as a third mate on July 8, 1929 and has been a master continuously since September 18, 1941. He is a lieutenant in the Naval Reserve.

Chief Engineer Thomas J. O'Brien entered the Company service as a second assistant engineer on September 11, 1928 and has been a chief engineer continuously since February 20, 1941.

Five members of the crew of the *H. H. Rogers* on February 21, 1943 were survivors of other tanker casualties: Able Seaman Charles D. Richardson (*Esso Bolivar*, March 8, 1942); Ordinary Seaman Joseph J. Sokolowski (*Esso Bolivar*, March 8, 1942, and *J. A. Mowinckel*, July 10, 1942); Oiler Leonard C. Reeling (*Heinrich v. Riedemann*, April 16, 1942); Galleyman Frederick E. Baker (ordinary seaman, *Esso Manhattan*, March 29, 1943, *Esso Harrisburg*, July 6, 1944); and Utilityman Peter B. McCloskey (*Esso Bolivar*, March 8, 1942).

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*Merchant Crew Survivors of the "H. H. Rogers"—
February 21, 1943*

Clinton W. Hayes.....	Master	Julian R. Rowland.....	Mach.
William B. Vautrinot.....	Ch. Mate	Thomas P. Mankin.....	Oiler
Harold L. Gordon.....	2nd Mate	Alex W. Zarczynski.....	Oiler
Christopher E. Tompkins.....	3rd Mate	Thomas J. Fletcher.....	Oiler
Thomas J. O'Brien.....	Ch. Engr.	Leonard C. Reeling.....	Oiler
John A. Graham.....	1st Asst.	Ralph B. Schnyer.....	Oiler
Edward J. Doherty.....	2nd Asst.	Robert G. Halmage.....	Oiler
Walter H. Berg.....	3rd Asst.	Harold F. Holmes.....	Stkpr.
Thomas B. Thompson.....	Radio Op.	Ossia Kaitaru.....	Fire.
Peter Gomes.....	Steward	Philip D. Lynch.....	Fire.
Howard F. Bates.....	Ch. Cook	Frank V. Conley.....	Fire.
John Gala.....	Bos'n	Vincent Zaleck.....	Wiper
Bernhardt F. Neumeyer.....	Pumpman	Frank Pirnik.....	Wiper
Lawrence Furnback.....	A.B.	Leon C. Baker.....	Wiper
Thomas A. Bloxham.....	A.B.	Joseph Purpura.....	2nd Cook
William L. Martin.....	A.B.	Frederick E. Baker.....	Galleyman
Francis A. Antonio.....	A.B.	Charles M. McNaughton.....	O.M.
Charles D. Richardson.....	A.B.	Tadeusz S. Wroblewski.....	M.M.
Edwin C. McKew.....	A.B.	Chester Miller.....	M.M.
Earl L. Seay.....	A.B.	Walter Zimick.....	M.M.
Nino Cammellire.....	O.S.	Donald M. Yennello.....	P.O.M.
George J. Meyer.....	O.S.	Elmer Clarke, Jr.....	Gun C.M.
Joseph J. Sokolowski.....	O.S.	Peter B. McCloskey.....	U.M.
		Roger W. Shotwell.....	Deck Cadet

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*U. S. Navy Armed Guard Survivors of the
"H. H. Rogers"*

Edward W. Houghton.....	Lt. (jg)	John J. Schlagel.....	Slc
John Beardsmore, Jr.....	Slc	William E. Schmill.....	Slc
Harold K. Billson.....	Slc	Arthur W. Schulte.....	Slc
William A. Garlin.....	Slc	Edward J. Schultz.....	Slc
John Kooklin, Jr.....	Slc	William Schultz, Jr.....	Slc
David H. Lamp.....	Slc	Alfred E. Schur.....	Slc
Anthony T. Lavelle.....	Slc	Gerhardt E. Schroeder.....	Slc
Hugh H. Lennon.....	Slc	Edwin Sedłacek.....	Slc
Patrick J. Long.....	Slc	James A. Simmons.....	GM3c
Michael J. Mahoney, Jr.....	Slc	Wayne W. Sloneker.....	Slc
Armanti Mancini.....	Cox.	Edward E. Vaughn.....	Slc
Harry L. Martin.....	Slc	Donald E. Walsh.....	Slc
Earl Priester.....	Slc	Robert F. Webb.....	Slc (SM)