

## Cook Nickoli Rogers V-49425



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- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Carbon AB, 10 March 1925**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Tecumseh*, 17 October 1942**
- **Civilian Occupation: Baker's Helper, Joe Miller Bakery in East Coulee, AB**
- **Lost at sea when HMCS *Alberni* was torpedoed and sank on 21 August 1944**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13; HMCS Alberni Museum and Archive, Drumheller AB Legion. Halifax Memorial & Second World War Book of Remembrance**

Nickoli Rogers was one of five sons born to Samuel Rogers and Annie Rogers (nee Romanchuk). Records show that his parents emigrated from Austria. His father was a miner first in the Lethbridge area and later in the mining and farming community of Carbon, before moving to nearby East Coulee. East Coulee was a hard scrabble mining town deep in the Alberta badlands. Both Carbon and East Coulee are near Drumheller, an area known for its valuable coal deposits. Coal was essential to the railway of the day. Nickoli's father died when he was 10 years old. From service records it appears that his mother remarried, and she had several more children including Peter, and Emily Starchuk. His older brothers all joined the Canadian Forces: John in the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN), William in the Army, and Stephen in the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR). The family were Roman Catholics.

Nick attended school in East Coulee, leaving school after Grade 9 as so many did in those days. He was mentioned in the Calgary Herald newspaper 3 July 1937, where it was reported that he placed 3rd in the "Under Age 12 Dash" at the Annual East Coulee Sports Day. Nick played hockey and was on a Championship baseball team. Both hockey and baseball were highly competitive between towns and villages on the prairies. After leaving school, Nick became a Baker's Helper in East Coulee, at the Joe Miller Bakery.

Nick followed his siblings into naval and army service. Despite the military pedigree of his brothers, Nick was subjected to a "Loyalty Check" request to the RCMP before he could be enrolled into the RCNVR. On file is the report on 'discreet enquires' made of some of East Coulee's leading citizens including a teacher, and two merchants. All reported favourably with expressions including: "...never been in any trouble whatsoever ... a good, loyal, British subject." And "...although the Rogers family were of foreign extraction, Canada, and Canadian ways were all that the boy knew..." The teacher reported that Rogers was always active in sports and that

"... in his opinion, a good, clean type of youth born in Canada and used to Canadian ways...a good loyal British subject."

Having passed his loyalty check, Nick was enrolled as an Acting Cook at HMCS *Tecumseh* in Calgary on 17 October 1942. Enrolment documents describe Nick as 5'7 and 3/4 " with black hair, brown eyes, and a 'fresh' complexion. Nick waited until March 1943 to be placed on Active Service. He completed his Basic Training at *Tecumseh* before heading to HMCS *Naden*, the Navy base in Esquimalt British Columbia in late April 1943. There he passed his first technical Cook course before being posted in June 1943 to HMCS *Stadacona*, in Halifax Nova Scotia for additional training as a cook. His course reports say that he was of average ability, of good character, that he was a good worker and tried hard. In July was sent to HMCS *Hochelaga II* which was a Naval Control of Shipping office and a manning depot for Corvettes near Montreal.

A/Cook Rogers was soon posted to ML Q104 on 3 August 1943. ML Q104 was one of the many fast Fairmile motor launches. He was now cooking for a crew of 18. This meant very early mornings to have a hot breakfast ready, then both a substantial noon day meal and evening meal too for a youthful crew's appetite. Then there was after meal cleanup and prep for the next day's meals and also readying coffee and sustenance for those on the midnight and early morning Watches. The Fairmiles were wooden hulled ships but of a similar, albeit smaller scaled destroyer design. They were frequently used in submarine hunting, mine sweeping and coastal convoy duties in the St. Lawrence River and along the east coast as far south as Bermuda. It was while serving in ML Q104 that Nick was promoted to Cook then sent ashore 7 December 1944 to take up Galley duties back in HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax. It was in nearby Dartmouth Nova Scotia, that he married Kathleen Elizabeth Edwards of Halifax, on 12 April 1944, a few days before his posting to HMCS *Alberni* K103 and the ship's departure for England on 24 Apr 1944.



HMCS *Alberni* was a Flower Class corvette that had seen extensive service in convoy duties first in the North Atlantic, then the Mediterranean, and back in the North Atlantic. After an extensive refit in Lunenburg NS, she sailed for the U.K. in support of Operation Neptune, the landings at Normandy for D-Day. In June and July 1944, she escorted ships between Southampton, England and artificial harbours called Mulberrys on the Normandy beaches. Vessels escorted included landing craft, barges, tugs and merchant ships.

On July 28, 1944, HMCS *Alberni* narrowly missed an aircraft-laid mine. This occurred when an *Alberni* depth charge was dropped over a submarine contact detected by *Alberni's* ASDIC (sonar). As sometimes happened, the depth charge set off another mine 200 yards off *Alberni's* starboard beam. The explosion could have damaged the ship severely, but they were spared. ASDIC was an early version of sonar that send an underwater 'ping' noise that would bounce off a submarine and back to the ship if a submarine was present.

After a brief maintenance period at Southampton, *Alberni* was ordered to patrol for U-boats to the eastward of the swept channel leading to the Normandy beaches. At 1137 on August 21, she was steaming south. "Hands to Dinner" had just been piped so Cook Nick Rogers was likely very busy. Four minutes later, with no warning whatsoever, *Alberni* was hit by an acoustic torpedo fired from submarine *U-480*. The submarine was employing new technology, a rubber coating that

absorbed sonar signals. HMCS *Alberni* was the first Allied ship to be sunk by a U-Boat using the new technology.

German records captured *Alberni's* final moments. Oberleutnant zur See Hans-Joachim Förster the Captain of *U-480*, reported that the ship they attacked was sunk at 1141, 25 miles SE of St. Catherine's Point, Isle of Wight, England. In less than 10 seconds *Alberni* was awash from the funnel aft, listing to port and sinking fast. In another twenty seconds she was gone, sinking stern first. There hadn't been time to launch lifeboats nor Carley Float rafts.

For forty-five minutes survivors struggled to keep from drowning or giving up in heavy seas. Rescue was on its way. Motor Torpedo Boats 469 and 470, returning from duties off Normandy saw the explosion and the disappearance of the corvette on their horizon. The MTBs altered course to investigate. Thirty-one members of the ship's company were rescued. Fifty-nine members of her crew lost their lives including Cook Nickoli Rogers. He was 19 years old.

In August 1944, the *Alberni* Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Commander Ian Bell RCNVR wrote to Nick's widow, stating that Cook Rogers, "... *had done an excellent job of cooking, making delicious meals out of very little...He was very well liked by all the officers and men and appeared to be quite happy aboard.*" He went on to say, "*The only minor comfort I can give you is that he was down below at the time the ship was hit and as the ship sank instantly I am sure he did not suffer any pain.*"

For his service, Cook Nickoli Rogers was awarded the 1939-45 Star, the France & Germany Star and Clasp, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp, and the War Medal. His wife, Kathleen was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Cook Nickoli Rogers is remembered in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, the Memorial Plaque in HMCS *Tecumseh*, and the Second World War Book of Remembrance. He is also remembered on the Halifax Memorial, the Drumheller Legion Honour Roll, the Calgary Field of Crosses, and the HMCS *Alberni* Museum and Memorial in Courtney BC.

#### Prepared By:

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#### Sources:

- Commonwealth War Graves Commission Database – profile for Cook Nickoli Rogers
- Second World War Book of Remembrance, p. 431
- Library and Archives Canada - Service file for Cook Nickoli Rogers
- Drumheller Legion Honour Roll
- <https://www.fieldofcrosses.com/interesting-facts/list-of-soldiers-in-field-of-crosses/>
- <https://www.alberniproject.org/the-ships/hmcs-alberni.html>
- [http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS\\_ALBERNI\\_K103.htm](http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/HMCS_ALBERNI_K103.htm)

- <http://www.forposterityssake.ca/Navy/MLQ104.htm>