



Wilcot, Oare World War I Casualty Biographies

Hermione Angela Rogers

Nurse, Died 31 Dec. 1917, age 22, Voluntary Aid Detachment.
Daughter of Francis Edward Newman Rogers and Louisa Annie Rogers, of Rainscombe, Marlborough,
Wilts.

Buried at Alexandria (Hadra) War Memorial Cemetery, Egypt.



Photo : Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Hermione Angela Rogers was born on 1st November 1895, in Gloucestershire.

The 1901 census shows the family living at Wilcot, in the parish of Oare Holy Cross, at Rainscombe Park. Hermione's father Francis E. H. Rogers, 32, born in London, is a Justice of the Peace, and her Mother Louisa A, 32, was born in Brecknockshire. Hermione is 5, her sister Sylvia A. is 1 and both girls' birthplace is given as Clifton, Bristol. There are 4 servants also living in the household, including a nurse.



Rainscombe Park, the family home of Hermione Rogers

In the 1911 census, Hermione Rogers, aged 15, is listed in London at South Kensington, and her occupation is student.

Her family are at Rainscombe Park, Father Francis Edward Newman Rogers, 42, mother Louisa Annie Rogers, 42, born in Breconshire, sister Sylvia Agnes, 11, brother Francis Henry Newman Rogers, aged 7.

Hermione was a pupil at Grassendale School, and there is a memorial to her at the school, which reads: "Hermione Angela Rogers, Oare, Wilts. A Grassendale girl who gave her life in the service of King and Country, Dec 31 1917."



Memorial plaque to Hermione Rogers at Grassendale School



H. Rogers, V.A.D. who was
drowned through enemy action
in the Mediterranean. 31.12.17



Hermione joined the V. A. D. The Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) was a voluntary organisation providing field nursing services. They operated mainly in hospitals, in the UK and various other countries in the British Empire. The organisation's important periods of operation were during World War I and World War II. Hermione enlisted in 1914 and her medal index card shows that in September 1916 she was serving at the Military Hospital at Sutton Veny.

Report of the Deaths in the Nursing Journal

“ACCIDENTALLY DROWNED.

NURSING SERVICE.

Compton, Sister F. D., Q.A.I.M.N.S.R.
 Tindall, Sister F., Q.A.I.M.N.S.R.
 Welfofd, Sister A., Q.A.I.M.N.S.R.
 Faithfull, Miss F. M., V.A.D.
 Roberts, Staff Nurse M. D., Q.A.I.M.N.S.R.

Ball, Miss C., V.A.D.
 Brown, Miss W. M., V.A.D.
 Bytheway, Miss G., V.A.D.
 Duncanson, Miss V., V.A.D.
 Hawley, Miss N., Special Military Probationer.
 Midwood, Miss L., V.A.D.
 Rogers, Miss E., V.A.D.

The most distressing tragedy of these deaths emphasises the risks continually taken, with the utmost courage and coolness, by the members of the various Nursing Services, who well know that they go at the peril of their lives, whether on hospital ships or on transports in the seas sown with mines and infested with submarines. Nevertheless, not a Sister but thinks it an honour to brave the peril to place her skilled help at the service of our sick and wounded men, and when death confronts her she meets it with unflinching courage. The two ships sunk in the Eastern Mediterranean were the transport Aragon, which was torpedoed and the Osmawieh, which was sunk by a mine the following day on the same spot. There were 40 or 50 Sisters on the Aragon, who were all saved, Captain Bateman giving the order, “Women first.” In fifteen minutes the transport had disappeared. Many of the men on board were picked up by the destroyer accompanying her only to be torpedoed once again. One survivor relates how four nurses pulled him over the side of the trawler to which they had been transferred from the life-boat, but for their help he would have fallen back into the water. The loss of life amongst the nurses occurred on the following day, when the Osmawieh was mined. The nurses - forty to fifty - were thrown into the water, and eight of them, unhappily, were drowned. As the disaster occurred near to land they were taken to the mortuary of a hospital on shore, where we may be sure that every honour and respect which could be

accorded them was paid to them. The members of the nursing profession to whose traditions they were faithful unto death, will assuredly ever honour their memory and strive to follow their example."

The British Journal of Nursing, 9 February 1918

The Story of the Sinking of the Osmanieh by a Survivor:

The following is a transcript of the handwritten account written by my grandmother, VAD Dorothy Edith Morfey, who survived the sinking of the Osmanieh. I've included some words which were crossed out, and underlining exactly as she wrote them. It's worth noting that at the time this was written, she cautiously didn't include the name of the ship - this was added later.

Source: Janette D.

Transcript of the handwritten account by VAD Dorothy Edith Morfey, survivor of the sinking of the "Osmanieh" on 31 Dec 1917 during World War I. This account was written down on 9 January 1918, less than 2 weeks after the incident; in March 1918 she typed up an account for her parents. This account is written on paper with the letterhead:

*BRITISH RED CROSS CONVALESCENT HOME FOR NURSES No 9
BULKELEY - ALEXANDRIA*

Wednesday 9.1.18

This account of the sinking of our ship must necessarily be rather a personal one, as from the time it happened till I was picked up by the TBD I recognised practically no one, & have no idea what the various objects round were.

To begin at the beginning, we spent one night in harbour after going on board & had a very jolly impromptu concert. The next afternoon we sailed - a Friday!! & it was not long before ~~we~~ (sic) most of us retired with mal de mer. Our ship was supposed to be the fastest in the Mediterranean so we expected to arrive the following Monday. I spent Saturday & nearly all Sunday in my bunk & went up on deck in the evenings. Then we heard that we have changed our course on account of submarines. Our little party had a sing-song on deck & were very pleased at the thought of landing next day. Each morning at 5.30 or so, we had the boat drill alarm, but the nurses only had to attend the first morning & after only if we had guns. I was allotted to No 6 Boat with Midwood. Dunford was in No 4, I think. The Boat Station alarm used to scare me awfully; it was a horrible crashing on the ship's gong, followed by a regular stampede of the men, making for their positions. The boat was packed with them.

Monday was fine & sunny & the sea quite smooth. Humphreys and I, who had been ill all the time, had breakfast on deck & ~~most of~~ (sic) everyone who could came out to watch the land getting clearer and clearer. Afterwards most of our little party sat on the seat together with two or three friends we made sitting around on the deck; we were all talking gaily when ~~we~~ (sic) crash! & we were thrown off the seat, which collapsed under us. We looked instinctively to the left & saw a cloud of grey smoke & water & flying bits of wreckage. At the same moment we were soaked by the water pouring down over us. All this was instantaneous, but it takes much longer to write. The explosion was on the starboard side, quite close to where we were, & the ship took a violent list in that direction at once. My boat was on the port side in the stern, & after slithering about trying to get up the slope, I managed to get round to it. Fortunately for me I saw a life belt lying on the deck, so put it on & a soldier tied it up for me. We hadn't troubled to put them on that morning, being so near the harbour, but practically everyone got one at that time thank goodness!

I was called into the boat & recognised in it Midwood, Ball & Mr Pennington, who was in charge. As soon as I got in I knew it would never get away, but couldn't do anything as I was pinned up against the oarsman yelled to lower the boat, then there was a rush & before I knew anything more we were in the

water, going down in a whirl & tangle. I couldn't swim, it was a physical impossibility, but I kicked & kicked without stopping.

When I was really getting clear & had hopes of eventually reaching the surface, something else came down on top & down I went again! Perhaps it was the big boat going down, I don't know - but the mess was awful. Once something caught me around the neck & I practically gave up, but set off kicking again & quite suddenly found myself looking at a crowd of soldiers who were hanging on to something. By this time I had to drunk half the sea ~~but~~ (*sic*) & found it rather hard to breathe. The men were topping to me. One of them called out "Come on dear! Hang on to my belt" - this I was jolly thankful to do. He had hold of a boat, I believe, & it kept me from getting carried away again. Then a small boat manned by a small foreign sailors ["Japs" (*sic*) *inserted later*] appeared on the scene & there was a scramble to get me on. The men kept yelling out that I was a woman & at last they understood & called me in. To my delight Dunford was there too, but I didn't know anyone else. After some time I was drawn up into the TBD & taken into the foc's'le (?) (*sic*) & found crowds of the men there & Mr Pennington, who'd come through without a lifebelt at all. He gave his to a sister before we went down. The men were just fine to us & were so delighted to see us safe. You never saw such objects in your life! Hair all down, clothes torn & black faces. They tied a bandage round my head too, to make matters worse. I only had a scratch though, from one of the bits in the explosion, I think. Some game, I can tell you! Several incidents were really funny, only we've not had a chance to realise it yet. They sent the nurses & some offices down to the ward room & brought brandy & stuff round. I hope we never in our lives feel so ill again! The funny part was that most of us were simply not a scrap afraid till we were on the TBD, & then we confessed afterwards to having had "the wind up" for fear of hitting another mine. However all was well, & we were taken into a red x place & given dry undies & dressing gowns & sand shoes. Also hot tea! The people on the quay & in various big buildings had watched the ship go, so everything was ready for us. Some tommies gave us pressing invitations to drink brandy neat, of which they had a huge bottle for us. They were all dears & everyone cheered us ~~gener~~ (*sic*) as we walked off. I had no shoes at all, as I was not wearing lace ones. Cheerio! (*sic*) We must have looked funny! After this we were taken in ambulances to the hospital, and where everyone was kindness itself. Matron helped me down to the ward & saw me into bed & we were fussed up generally. My shoulder was a nuisance, but the bone wasn't broken - it's nearly well now.

That's all I know from my own experience, but I've heard a lot since from various people. None of the boats got away at all. No 1 was blown away by the explosion, No. 3 was smashed on the ship & No. 5 capsized almost at once. On the port side, something went wrong with No. 2 - I don't know what - No. 4 was lowered at one end only so that everyone fell out & No. 6, the one I was in, smashed to bits & we all fell through the bottom. You see, the boat went altogether in 4 minutes, & I'm told that any self-respecting ship takes at least from 1/4-1/2 hour. So naturally things were a little uncomfortable. We were awfully lucky to be so close in & also to have as many ships around & a calm sea. The rafts were fine, I believe, & saved numbers. They say that numbers of men were sitting on one shouting "Are we downhearted?" Can quite believe it of them too! The masts of the ship are still just showing, so we weren't in very deep water. I hear now that the ship has been blown up, as it was * blocking the harbour. Poor old thing, it did it's (*sic*) best! Requiescat!

To add some more detail - this is the typed account Dorothy Edith Morfey sent to her parents some time later. This account is dated March 1918. The name of the ship was omitted, but later added in Dorothy's handwriting.

21st General Hospital,
Alexandria.
23/2/18.

The promised story of our mishap, Mother dear,
Much love,
Dorothy.

The mining of a certain ship on Dec. 31, 1917.

("Osmanieh") *[added by hand]*

Perhaps it is a little unnecessary, this omission of the ill-fated vessel's name, but in writing this account I am purposely leaving out all names & numbers, as one never knows into whose hands the story may fall. I must apologise for making at least half the story a description of my personal experiences, but practically from the moment of the explosion, we all had a feeling of complete isolation, and cannot remember noticing much that happened to other people. I will fill in gaps afterwards.

To begin at the beginning, we went on board on the morning of Thursday, Dec.27, and lay at anchor the rest of that day & night. By "we", I mean the first two detachments to arrive at the rest camp, about 60 nurses in all, mostly V.A.D's.

In Taranto Harbour, S. Italy. *[added by hand]*

We had a concert that night on board & began to feel quite at home, & were rather sorry next day on learning that 21 nurses from our detachment - the 2nd - were to be withdrawn to another ship, to await the arrival of more nurses and our heavy luggage. Thus 9 were left on the ship, which for the sake of convenience I'll call the "-----" ("Osmanieh") *[added by hand]* attached to the first party. The 9 consisted of our travelling 6, two other V.A.D's and a Staff Nurse in charge of us. We sailed at 3.30 p.m. on Friday Dec. 28th & expected to arrive on Monday morning.

We had the usual boat drill before we left & each following morning about 6 a.m. We only had to attend the first morning, for which I was devoutly thankful, having been obliged to retire with mal de mer. The alarm terrified me each morning, though I knew quite well things were all right.

We were awakened by a terrible crashing on the ship's gong, followed by an officer shouting "Boat Stations, ladies!" as he did the round of our cabins. Then the clatter of the men as they made a rush for their positions! The boat was small and simply packed with Tommies; we slept 4 in a tiny cabin ourselves!

Sunday night was perfect, so I struggled up on deck, and we had a little sing-song & felt so pleased at the thought of landing next day. We had to alter our course on account of submarines that evening, but had no idea that another trooper had gone down in the morning with its would-be rescuer. Next morning I went up on deck to breakfast & afterwards our little party sat together, watching the land get nearer and very delighted to see other ships again.

All of a sudden there was a dull explosion to the left of us, the ship staggered and lurched, & we found ourselves struggling to our feet, the seat having collapsed under us.

At the same moment, we looked round towards the sound & saw a cloud of water and grey smoke & flying bits, & before we could move, we were drenched with water pouring down on us. The explosion was in the bow on the starboard side, quite near us, and the ship took a violent list in that direction, so much so, that in trying to get up the deck, I simply slithered down to the railings again. However, I managed it the second time, and quite by accident saw a life-belt on the deck, so thought I might as well have it on. One of the soldiers tied it on for me as I couldn't find the strings anyhow.

I made for my boat, No. 6, in the stern on the port side and scrambled in according to orders. In the boat, I recognised Midwood, Ball, & another girl, & Mr. Pennington who was in charge. Directly I got in, I knew we couldn't get off, but was absolutely helpless, being pinned down over the oars face downwards, so that I simply couldn't move. A sister named Hutton got in, but insisted on being pulled off again – the last thing I saw.

There were yells from the men to lower the boat! but no one could - then a sudden rush - an awful falling - and the next thing I knew, I was down beneath wreckage and people drinking the sea up in gallons, but quite unable to get to the top. The mess was awful! Swimming was out of the question, but I kept on kicking with might and main.

Just as I seemed to be getting clear & had some hope of reaching the surface, down came something else on top - presumably the ship itself, - & under we went again, this time in a worse mess than ever. "Foaming waters swirling wild" wasn't in it! I was twisted and twirled in all directions, clutching at things and letting go again for fear of being held under. Still I couldn't get up, & then, to add insult to injury, something caught me tight round the throat - I suppose some wreckage caught in my belt. I got clear of that & then began to feel sleepy & stopped kicking.

Only then did it occur to me that I might not be rescued, and I tried to imagine what it would be like supposing I shouldn't get home again. Thanks to my conceit, the idea struck me as so impossible & absurd that I had to laugh as best I could, kicked some more, and suddenly found myself staring at a crowd of heads and a rope to which I tried to cling.

What a relief it was to see the sky again! I couldn't hold the rope or keep my head up, but the men saw my plight, called out "come on dear! stick it dear!" and one made me hold on to his belt. They were ripping to me, - don't know what I'd have done alone.

Soon there was a commotion near by & a little boat from one of our escort appeared on the scene. The sailors were not English & the men had some job to make them understand I was a woman. at last, I was called in, & to my intense delight, saw Dunford there.

Japanese Escort. TBD [*added by hand*]

After some terrible moments of tossing up & down, to such an extent that it seemed the boat MUST (*underline*) capsize, we were hauled onto the T.B.D. & taken to the foc'sle (?) [*sic*] where the men did their best to help us. Noses were like so many taps with the washers broken - you can't imagine what objects we were! Hair all down, faced [*sic*] dirty, teeth chattering. Some one put a bandage round my head, which didn't improve matters.

Mr. Pennington was on board too, & he fetched thick blankets, & pinned them round me so that I couldn't move the sheer weight. They tried to make us take rum and whisky & horrible stuff, but we couldn't. May we never again feel so deadly ill as we did then! Soon they took us & some of the officers down to the Ward-room & brought us cigarettes & biscuits.

Here's a funny thing, that I think was the same with several of us - from the moment the explosion occurred, I felt just as calm as if the whole thing were an everyday affair, but as soon as I was picked up, & particularly on the T.B.D. I was terrified till we were alongside the quay for fear anything else might go wrong. No one said anything at the time, of course, but we were all as frightened as anything when it was over.

While lying in the little boat, I saw all that was left of the poor old "-----", just the top of her masts. ("Osmanieh") [*added by hand*]. You know, we were awfully lucky to be so close in & to have so many ships round us & a calm sea, as the whole thing went in 4 minutes. I learnt more details from the others later. None of the boats got away at all. On the starboard side, No. 1 was blown to bits by the explosion, No. 3 was smashed on the ship, No. 5 was capsized by the ship sinking. On the port side, No. 2 capsized through people jumping for her, I think, No. 4 was lowered end foremost, so that everyone fell out (Dunford was on it) & ours was smashed by the sudden rush, so that we fell through the bottom.

One or two officers stayed on deck to the last moment, cutting loose rafts & these saved many lives. The boats were so many deaths-traps, though, in my humble estimation. There wasn't time for anything, & the ship was at such an angle, that was really impossible to lower them safely. The sister who was pulled back off No. 6 had a narrow shave. When the boat went, a soldier simply hurled her into the water & jumped in after her. He managed to find some wreckage & rope, & lashed both her and himself to it. Eventually they were picked up, but she was only brought in at 8 p.m. that night, about 5 hours after us.

When we reach the quay, crowds were waiting for us, many people having watched the whole affair. They saw it from the windows of this hospital.

We were hustled into a sort of shed, & given hot tea, dry undies & dressing gowns, & shoes of sorts - I lost mine in the water - & were then taken in Ambulances to the 19th General Hospital, where we had a very warm welcome. Matron herself helped me down the corridor to the ward, & everyone was awfully kind.

The rest you will know from my other letters, some of which I hope arrived safely. That's all there is to it, & I'm devoutly thankful to have got off so lightly. But oh! I do wish the others could have been saved! Two from my boat & cabin were lost, besides others, and many men.

I believe the mast of the poor old ---- are still to be seen, but I've not tried to find them myself. Poor old ship! It really wasn't her fault, she did her best to get us in.

A disastrous ending to the year, wasn't it? Let's hope 1918 will see the finish of all this horror!

P.S. The explosion was at 10.30 a.m.; Dunford and I were picked up about an hour later, as far as I can judge.

Source: Janette D.