Martin H. Rogers

Professor and Chair
Recreation and Leisure
(1945-1977)

[Excerpts from the memoirs of Brockport College Emeritus Martin Rogers shared by Susan Edmunds bracketed material provided by Bud Meade. A copy of the memoirs has been placed in the Rose Archives, Drake Memorial Library]

[This is a story about how a job at a war plant in Ohio while he was waiting to begin training after enlisting ended the WWII career of emeritus Martin Rogers before he could begin it.]

THE ACCIDENT

Since he didn't return from Turkey until October 1941, the job that he was coming back to was no longer there. Your Grandpa was able to get a job at the end of January filling in for the physical education and reading teacher at the East Palestine Junior High School. Your Grandmother's brother, Pat, was already in the Navy and the next summer, your Grandpa, rather than waiting to be drafted, decided to enlist too. He passed the physical and was approved to be a trainee as Lt. Junior grade. While he was awaiting orders to go for training in Hollywood, Florida he took a job on the night shift in a war plant in Elyria, Ohio. He was assigned to work on a press bench – a machine that puts crimps in sheet metal, which would be used to make gas tanks for Navy PT boats. The second night, close to break time, the strip of metal he was working on slipped over the safety stop and his hand slid into the machine as the press came down. Thus ended his industrial and his Navy career! After the accident, one of his Psychology Professors at Oberlin gave him advice that was very helpful including "Don't try to become left handed." Several years later he found he was able to return the favor when, because of diabetes, this professor had to have his leg amputated. He shared with him what he had learned from his experience.



Before enlisting in the Navy, your Grandpa had also applied and been accepted at Buffalo State. After the accident, he called and told them that, since his application, he had been injured. The response was "You can still teach can't you?" After arriving at the College he served on a committee that screened students to make sure they were physically and mentally able to teach. Your Grandpa pointed out that it was strange that a handicapped person should be making a judgment on others with handicaps. After that the committee was disbanded and qualified people, who would otherwise have been denied, were accepted into the college's program.

[When Martin Rogers could not serve because of the accident, he chose to volunteer with the Coast Guard and these are a few of his stories.]

COAST GUARD DUTY

One of your Grandpa's students at Buffalo State was a member of the Coast Guard Temporary auxiliary. This was a group of volunteers who were taking the place of the regular Coast Guard that had been sent to the Pacific during World War II. This student knew your Grandpa had taught hand-to-hand combat (dirty fighting) in Turkey so he asked him to come to train his group. (Their only protection was Billy clubs.) After your Grandpa had done the training sessions, he got a note of thanks and an invitation to join the group -- which he did.

The group consisted of amateur boaters. They patrolled the Buffalo Harbor and Lake Erie to Dunkirk and the Niagara River and Black River to the Erie Canal keeping an eye on the many grain silos to be sure that the dust wouldn't build up and explode. Also, they kept watch on ships, which came into the harbor. It became evident that your Grandpa knew how to handle a boat (many of the volunteers were summer Sunday sailors who owned boats but didn't know how to dock them) so he became the Commander of one of the boats with a crew of three. He spent 24 hours a week on watches that lasted 6 or 12 hours. Sometimes he would teach a class at Buffalo State after having spent 12 hours on the water.

Several times your Grandpa was assigned to the Watch Tower which overlooked the harbor. One night he noticed a boat with four people pull out from the dock. A little way out the boat suddenly overturned throwing everyone into the water. He called the incident down to the crew at the bottom of the tower and within a minute they were on their way to rescue the people. Later that night the commander called him to tell him that he would get a commendation for his action. He says he never understood why he should be commended for doing that which he was supposed to do.

One duty included guarding a boxcar of dried cranberries. The government bought up tons of cranberries for Thanksgiving dinner for the troops in the whole Eastern US. Three Million dollars of dehydrated cranberries were packed in one boxcar. Since it was government property, the Coast Guard got the job of protecting it for 24 hours until it could be moved out of the rail yard.

The most harrowing experience he remembers was going out into the harbor to pick up a sick sailor. The water was rough and he had to hold the boat steady, exactly four feet from the big ship, while a crewman climbed down a wood ladder with the sick man slung over his shoulder. Any deviation from four feet could have landed the men in the water.

Your Grandpa [Martin] points out "No one ever invaded the United States on his watch."