

REMEMBERING LT. FRANK CONSTANT HALL

When duty calls me I must go
To stand and face another foe
But part of me will always stray
Over the hills and far away

English Traditional folk song – Lyric by John Tam

In the entrance foyer at Victoria High School there are two memorials to the students and teachers killed on active service during World War I and World War II. Below the simple brass plaque that lists the 115 names of men who died in the Second World War is a small additional plaque that has on it three names. One of these names is Frank Hall, and this is his story.

Like a young and pretty film heroine, Mrs. Patricia Hall stood on a platform, tears in her eyes, waving good-bye to her handsome young husband, Lieutenant Frank Constant Hall. "He went overseas," she said, "and he never came back.... He had enlisted when war was declared, to fight tyranny and maintain the order of law."

Patricia Hall was born Patricia Porter in Strongfield, Saskatchewan, in 1913, and moved to Victoria BC with her family. She attended Norfolk House School, and upon graduation she toured Europe. When she returned she met the handsome young son of barrister and future Provincial Court Judge Henry Charles Hall on a blind date. "He told me he had fallen in love with me at first sight."

They married in 1937 and he practised law in Vancouver until his enlistment with the Seaforth Highlanders at the outbreak of hostilities in Europe. "He had tried to join the navy but he couldn't because he was too short-sighted."

"Frank wrote me a great many wonderful letters." He quoted the poet Thomas Macaulay, and once discussed the possibility of his dying. "Please don't wear the



widow's weeds too long if I go west," he wrote. "Death doesn't mean a thing beyond getting rid of the encumbering fogs and fumes of the body." In August 1943, the worst news possible arrived at his mother's home in Victoria.

Climbing a ridge, during an attack on an Axis position in Sicily, Lt. Frank Hall was struck by a bullet. Dismissing aid, he ordered his unit to continue pressing their advantage. He bled to death before they could return to assist him.

Following Frank's death, Mrs. Hall enlisted as a home sister with the Royal Canadian Medical Corps, and spent time in Canada and England until the end of the war. She returned home and met and married John Hedley, an electrical engineer with BC Hydro, and they married and had two children. They retired to Deep Cove on the Saanich Peninsula in 1976.

Sixty years after Lt. Hall's death she attended a gathering at Victoria High School, her first husband's Alma Mater, where she noticed the memorials in the school's foyer. She read through the list of names and was shocked to find her husband's name excluded. She checked again and then notified the school's Alumni Association. The VHS Alumni contacted Principal Keith McCallion. With assistance from Vice Principal Barrie Rawlston, Keith arranged for an additional plaque to be added with the names of Frank Hall and two other former students who were missed in the original accounting.

Mrs. Evelyn Ella Patricia Hedley died on April 19, 2011 at the age of 98, after a "life lived fully and with great enthusiasm." To her lasting credit, before she passed she managed to ensure that the memory of her first husband was enshrined on the veterans' memorial in the foyer of Vic High so that "future students could read his name and wonder who he was and what he had done."

SAVING LIEUTENANT HALL

The story above is an abridged version of an original article, "An Old Warrior That Won't Be Forgotten" by Tom Hawthorne, that appeared in the *Globe and Mail* on November 10, 2010.

The current alumni were so touched by this story they felt it should be retold on the VHS website with some additional facts and dates. The first bit of research was to determine Frank Hall's graduation year; however, it soon became apparent that the

passageway to Lt. Hall's past was a maze. We searched birth records – nothing. Taking into account that Lt. Hall had practised law before the war, we realized he wasn't a teenager, and began to dig through student registrations and year books from 1908 to 1928 – still nothing!

At no time doubting the facts of Mr. Hawthorne's, story we decided to work backwards. An initial search of the Department of National Defense website provided us nothing. This matter of Lt. Hall became both curious and most intriguing. Before our imaginations took over, we decided to coax our very able student researcher Krysteena White with the task of finding a death certificate. Off she went. Back she came. Frank Constant Hall died in Italy, August 5, 1943. Age 32. We tried the internet again, Department of Veterans

Affairs, and there he was, Lieutenant Frank Constant Hall, killed during action in Sicily on August 5, 1943. He is buried in the beautiful Canadian War Cemetery in Agira, Grave reference – BE 204.

During a follow-up phone call to the Honorary Lt. Colonel of the Seaforth Highlanders, Rod Hoffmiester, I was assured that he had stood by Frank Hall's grave while the unit chaplain prayed, and that a memorial marker had been placed in the exact spot where he had died on the sun bleached soil of Sicily, "over the hills and far away."



Unfortunately, no academic records existed. We did however, have his age when he died and that narrowed our search regarding student records. Still we had no luck. Debbie Blackie, our stalwart archivist, asked her friend and researcher Leona Taylor to tackle our unusual problem. A day later Leona produced the marriage

certificate for Patricia Porter and Frank Hall and the “registered” death certificate for Frank Constant Hall signed, in Victoria, by his barrister father Henry Charles Hall.

I trundled off to the BC Archives and with their instructions I searched the city census records in the Vancouver Public Library, Victoria, 1928: Mr. Henry Charles Hall, Barrister, 1528 Richardson Street. The address was certainly within the school’s boundaries but there was no mention of Frank. I moved on to 1929. Finally, rising like a bubble from the depths of a still dark sea was Frank Constant Hall, student, Victoria College, 1528 Richardson Street. In 1929, Victoria College was directly affiliated with Victoria High, and Debbie Blackie. seizing the moment made the pronouncement, “He’s ours!”

We can’t legally add or change student records, therefore those records will be left as they were; however, we can now complete our World War II files that describe and record the lives of students and staff that died on Active Service. Future students will now have an accurate record “of who Frank Hall was and what he had done.”

It was a privilege to research this project. The spirits of Frank Hall and Patricia Hedley shone brightly in the Alumni Archives, in Room 100 at Vic High, during the weeks it took to compile our information. We’ll miss their spiritual presence, for it seemed for a few weeks they were very much alive. Their spirits may slip away again; however, by finding and saving their records, their memories will never be lost or forgotten.

