

William Hall, VC

The son of Jacob and Lucy Hall, former American slaves who fled to Nova Scotia following the war of 1812, William Nielson Hall was born on April 25, 1827 in Horton, Nova Scotia.

Before joining the American merchant marine, he worked in the shipyards at Hantsport, building wooden ships for the merchant marine. In 1852 he enlisted in the Royal Navy and served as an Able Seaman on board HMS *Rodney*. During his time on the *Rodney*, Hall was called upon to serve as a member of a naval brigade during the Crimean War. Hall was decorated with both British and Turkish medals during this campaign.

After serving on the *Rodney*, Hall served on the receiving ship HMS *Victory*. His next posting was aboard HMS *Shannon*. While the *Shannon* was in Hong Kong, a mutiny started in India and under the direction of Admiral Seymour the *Shannon* and other Royal Navy ships were dispatched to Calcutta to assist in the quelling of the mutiny. Once they arrived about 400 officers and men, Hall one of them made the journey inland to Cawnpore

and eventually to Lucknow. It was at Lucknow that Hall earned his Victoria Cross. With only Hall and his injured Lieutenant manning a gun continuously reloading, firing and running the gun forward. Hall was quoted as saying that "After each round we ran our gun forward until at last my gun's crew were actually in danger of being hurt by splinters of brick and stone torn by the round shot from



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The walls we were bombarding."

The Captain of the *Shannon* recommended Hall and the lieutenant for the Victoria Cross for their "gallant conduct at a twenty-four pounder gun ... at Lucknow on the 16th November 1857".

On October 28, 1859 William Hall received his Victoria Cross aboard HMS *Donegal*.

Hall continued his naval career serving aboard the *Bellerophon*, *Hero*, *Impregnable*, *Petrel* and *Royal Adelaide*. He retired from the Royal Navy as a Quartermaster in 1876 and returned home to Nova Scotia. He lived with his sisters in Avonport, where he lived as a modest farmer. It wasn't until 1901, when Hall attended a parade of British Veterans that his exploits were made known. In 1904 William Hall died and was buried in an unmarked grave. In 1937 a campaign was launched to have the Royal Canadian Legion recognize Hall's valour. Eight years later, Hall was reburied on the grounds of Hantsport Baptist Church and a monument erected to honour him.

William Nielson Hall was the first black, the first Nova Scotian and Canada's first naval recipient of the Victoria Cross.

Sources:

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