

Lieutenant William Frederick Hale, O-29980

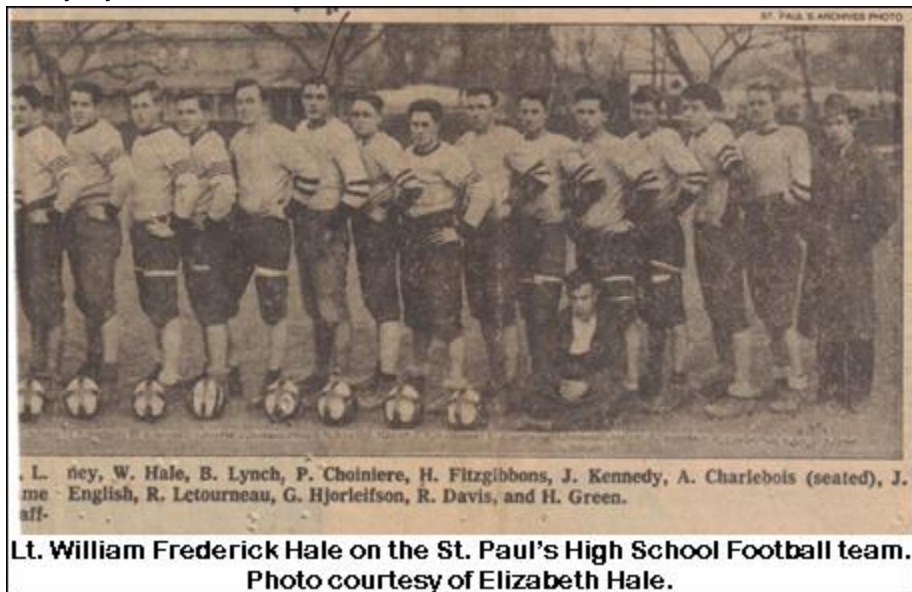


Lieutenant William Frederick Hale.
Photo: forposterityssake.ca

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Winnipeg MB, 1 June 1923**
- **Enlisted: HMCS *Chippawa*, 5 January 1943**
- **Civilian Occupation: Pre-Medicine Student at the University of Manitoba**
- **Death: Killed while fighting a fire in HMC MTB 466 on 14 February 1945**
- **Honours: Mention in Despatches**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 13; Ostend Belgium Naval Memorial; and Hale Lake in Northern Manitoba**

William "Bill" Frederick Hale was born in Winnipeg, MB on 1 June 1923. The middle child of three, he was the second son of Samuel Coffman Hale and Helen Aimie Hale. His older brother was Samuel "Jack" Jackson Hale, and his younger sister was Marcia Ann Hale. Samuel Coffman Hale was an American citizen, born in Chicago on 27 July 1888, who served in the US Army as a corporal between 7 September 1918 and 1 May 1919. He immigrated to Winnipeg and acted as a police officer during the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. Helen Aimie Boxer was an orphan who was raised in Quebec City by Ursuline nuns. The descendant of the famous Rear-Admiral Edward Boxer who died of cholera in 1855 during the Crimean War, she moved to Winnipeg where her sister resided. Both Samuel and Helen were devout Catholics, who were joined in union on 20 August 1919.

They resided in River Heights and enrolled their children in Catholic schools. Both Jack and William attended St. Paul's and Marcia attended St. Mary's. William attended high

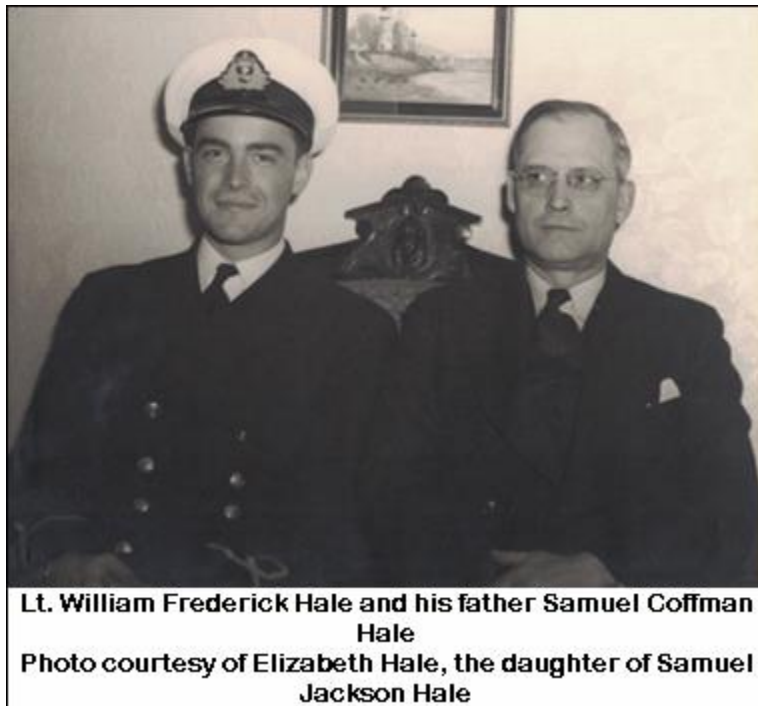


L. ...ey, W. Hale, B. Lynch, P. Choiniere, H. Fitzgibbons, J. Kennedy, A. Charlebois (seated), J. ...me - English, R. Letourneau, G. Hjordleifson, R. Davis, and H. Green.

Lt. William Frederick Hale on the St. Paul's High School Football team.
Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Hale.

school up to Grade 11 before enrolling at the University of Manitoba to commence his studies in pre-medicine. It was his goal to become a physician.

On 1 October 1941, William enlisted in the Canadian Officers Training Corps (COTC) during his studies before it became mandatory in 1942. The program taught military science and tactics and provided academic credits or bonuses for those who joined. He spent two years studying pre-medicine and served in the COTC before enrolling in the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) at HMCS *Chippawa* on 5 January 1943 at 19 years old. Upon enrolment, William was single, 6 feet ¼ inches tall and weighed 169 pounds. He had dark brown hair, brown eyes, and a fair complexion. He was appointed to the rank of Probationary Sub-Lieutenant and attended HMCS *Cornwallis* and HMCS *Kings* in Halifax, NS where he began his formal military training. His brother Jack joined the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, where he served as a Captain. Jack participated in the D-Day landings in France in June 1944 and was wounded a month later.



In Halifax, William's training emphasized anti-submarine operations, navigation, signals, gunnery, and torpedoes in accordance with the Royal Canadian Navy's (RCN) responsibility for escorting convoys in the Atlantic. At the same time, those who would sail the North Atlantic in small ships took part in special instruction for physical and recreational training at *Cornwallis*. The training was both strenuous and comprehensive. Each potential officer at HMCS *Kings* had to prove himself "suitable" in every way to hold a naval officer's commission. Junior officers-in-training had to pass an oral examination board before they graduated and proceeded to their first at-sea appointment. William proved

himself competent in both capability and social capacity. On 12 October 1943, he completed his initial training in Anti-Submarine Warfare for new entry officers.

On 29 November 1943, William was appointed to the rank of Sub-Lieutenant at HMCS *Venture*, the base depot ship for the Atlantic coast in Halifax. At the time, HMCS *Venture* offered various courses in anti-submarine warfare, radar, signals, and gunnery. Additionally, the school conducted sea exercises in minesweeping and anti-submarine warfare that provided practical experience for future officers. Between the period of 29 November to 4 December 1943, William conducted his in-routine at the school.

On 4 December 1943, William was appointed as an officer onboard HMCS ML 073. ML 073 was a Fairmile B-class Motor Launch. This class of launches were 112-foot wooden vessels driven by two 650 horsepower gasoline motors that could manage an emergency speed of 20 knots for only about 15 minutes at a time. Equipped with ASDIC (rudimentary sonar), radar, wireless sets, depth charges, and light guns, they specialized in anti-submarine warfare in coastal home waters. In

barely two months, William was made the Executive Officer of ML 073 on 26 January 1944. For five months, he performed his duties patrolling along the coast of the eastern Atlantic, training and honing his skills and the capabilities of the vessel's sailors until he was once again promoted. He was appointed to the rank of Acting Lieutenant on 10 June 1944. Celebrations of his new rank were short-lived, however, as on 15 July 1944 he was posted to HMCS *Stadacona*, another base depot in Halifax. William was bound for the United Kingdom and he would serve in Europe. While in *Stadacona* awaiting his transport to the UK, William was awarded his first watchkeeping certificate. In conjunction with his new qualification, he became a fully qualified Lieutenant on 20 July 1944.

On arrival in the UK, William was assigned to HMCS *Niobe* in Greenock, Scotland, which served as the parent ship to all HMC ships in UK waters and functioned as an accounting base, manning pool, and hospitalization centre for all RCN personnel in the UK. For one week, he spent his time completing his in-routine before being assigned to the Canadian 29th Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla (MTB) as a spare officer.



**Motor torpedo boats of the Canadian-manned 29th MTB Flotilla.
Photo: Library and Archives Canada Photo, MIKAN No. 3204516**

The MTBs of the 29th MTB Flotilla, or the "Fighting Sea Fleas", were 71.5-foot 'hard-chine' craft built by the British Power Boat Company at Hythe, Southampton. They were equipped with the Mark VIII Submarine Torpedo, one 6-pounder or one 40mm "Pom Pom", and either a .5-inch or .303-inch Vickers machine gun. The MTBs hunted enemy coastal convoys, E-boats,

trawlers, and flak-ships. Operating in the English Channel, the MTBs offered little comfort. Designed as purely fighting ships, the sailors were at action stations most of the time, as they stationed themselves outside of enemy ports, often two or three hundred yards off the enemy breakwater, while they waited for enemy ships to come out. The boats provided security for the Allies participating in D-Day, 6 June 1944, and the ensuing operations, and the boats harassed German and Italian convoys, thereby, crippling the Axis war machine. A position in the 29th MTB Flotilla guaranteed excitement, as well as long days and nights.

On 23 September 1944, William was temporarily assigned as the Executive Officer of MTB 465 for six days before being replaced. He then served as an additional officer and watchkeeper for a month aboard MTB 465. Finally, on 19 October 1944, he once again assumed the duties and position of Executive Officer, this time in MTB 466. William would earn his second watchkeeping certificate for the MTBs on 7 November 1944.

On 14 February 1945, in the harbour of Ostend, Belgium, a terrible accident occurred. One hundred and ninety litres of highly volatile gasoline leaked into the harbour during refuelling operations. The 29th MTB Flotilla, which had been in continuous action in the English Channel since 6 June 1944, was refuelling and rearming in preparation for another night patrol duty along the Belgian coast. Many of the sailors were asleep, taking a rest from the patrols they had conducted the previous night. The water surface, slicked with fuel, caught fire, and before an

alarm could be sounded, the fire became an inferno that spread amongst the closely-moored vessels. Fuel and ammunition exploded as boat after boat caught fire. Many sailors could not escape as the water's surface was aflame. The wooden MTBs stood no chance.

In the midst of the fire, William ordered the evacuation of MTB 466. He was last seen attacking the fire aboard his boat with a handheld fire extinguisher before being engulfed in an explosion. In total, the disaster claimed 35 Royal Navy and 29 RCN sailors, as well as twelve MTBs. Lieutenant William Frederick Hale was 21 years old when he died.

For his action on 14 Feb 1945, Lieutenant William Frederick Hale was posthumously Mentioned in Despatches. For his war service, he was awarded: the 1939-1945 Star, the France & Germany Star & Clasp, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal & Clasp, and the War Medal. His Mother, Helen, was awarded the Memorial Cross.

Lieutenant William Frederick Hale is commemorated on Panel 13 of the Halifax Memorial at Point Pleasant Park, Halifax, NS; on the Ostend Naval Memorial to the Canadian 29th Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla at Ostend, Belgium; in the Second World War Book of Remembrance, Page 521, at the Centre Block Houses of Parliament, Ottawa; and Hale Lake in northern Manitoba is named in his memory.

His legacy and memory live on in his brother and sister's descendants.

Prepared By:

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