

Able Seaman John Robert Hall V-18166



Able Seaman John R. Hall. Photo:
Canadian Virtual War Memorial

- **Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve**
- **Born: Brockville ON, 3 September 1914**
- **Enlisted: Kingston Division RCNVR, 4 October 1940**
- **Civilian Occupation: Molder, Canada Foundry**
- **Lost at sea when HMCS *Spikenard* was torpedoed and sank on 10 February 1942**
- **Commemorated: Halifax Memorial, Panel 8; Brockville First and Second World Wars Roll of Honour at the Brockville Civic Centre; and Honour Roll of Brockville Collegiate Institute**

John Robert Hall was born in Brockville, Ontario on 3 September 1914. He was the eldest of four children: a brother, Allan George; and two sisters, Isabella Cecelia and Helen Elisabeth. John's parents were George and Celia (nee Belmont). George was a "letter carrier". The family were Roman Catholic and lived at 186 George Street in Brockville. John was baptized at St. Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Church in Brockville on 27 September 1914.

Before his employment as a 'molder' at the Canada Foundry in Brockville, John attended Brockville Collegiate Institute and Vocational School.

In August 1940, John joined the Brockville Rifles of the "Non-Permanent Active Militia in Canada". Then, on 4 October 1940, John transferred from the Brockville Rifles to the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve at the Kingston Division (later known as HMCS *Cataraqui*). On enlistment John, 26 years old, was recorded as 5 feet 5 1/4 inches tall, 136 1/2 pounds, brown hair, blue eyes, and a scar on his right cheek. John Robert Hall was not married.

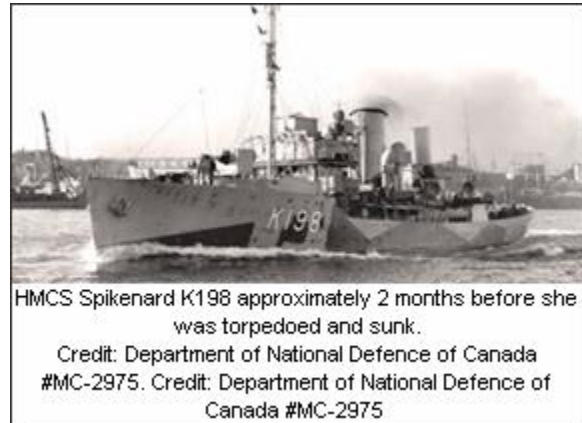
John started his active service on 17 November 1940, remaining at Kingston Division until 24 April 1941 when he reported to HMCS *Stadacona* in Halifax. He continued with his training as an Ordinary Seaman at *Stadacona* until 30 June 1941.

A "Certificate of Progress of Boys and Ordinary Seamen" completed for "Hall, John Robert", but not dated, showed his scores in 'Boat work' = 98% and 'Gunnery & Disciplinary Training' = 65%. An RCNVR "Passing Certificate" dated 1 April 1941 indicated that Ordinary Seaman John Robert Hall, V-18166 passed "The Educational Test, I" held on 11-12 March 1941, 'For Advancement to Petty Officer'.

On 28 June 1941, John qualified as a 'submarine detector' after completing the war-shortened Anti-Submarine Course at the school in Halifax. He qualified with a mark of 83.6%. Some of that

training appears to have included some sea time aboard HMCS *Saskatoon*, K-158, a Flower-class corvette.

Ordinary Seaman Hall was finally drafted to his first and only ship, HMCS *Spikenard*, a Flower-class corvette, on 1 July 1941. *Spikenard* was a veteran of eight convoys by that time and she would escort seven more convoys before she was torpedoed and sank. The ship was part of the Newfoundland Escort Force and was based in St. John's, Newfoundland. *Spikenard's* crew along with other escorts successfully delivered 284 merchant ships to their destination between July 1941 and early January 1942. Ordinary Seaman Hall, having successfully performed his tasks, was rated Able Seaman on 30 October 1941.



HMCS *Spikenard* K198 approximately 2 months before she was torpedoed and sunk.
 Credit: Department of National Defence of Canada #MC-2975. Credit: Department of National Defence of Canada #MC-2975

On 1 February 1942, *Spikenard* led convoy SC-67 as the senior escort ship. This was a slow convoy of 28 ships headed to the United Kingdom. Ships assigned to a slow convoy had to maintain 6-8 knots of speed (10-15 km/hr). Given their slow speed, they were easy targets for German U-Boats. All went well until just before 2300 on 10 February 1942. The convoy was due south of Iceland when HMCS *Chilliwack*, a Flower-class corvette and part of the escort force, attacked a submerged contact. Another escort at the rear of the convoy spotted the wake of a torpedo running down her port side and *Spikenard* was on the starboard side of the convoy when another torpedo struck the nearby MV *Heina*, a Norwegian flagged tanker. The convoy was under a coordinated U-Boat attack.



Honour Roll Brockville Collegiate Institute,
 Photo: National Inventory Canadian Memorials

Seconds later, a torpedo struck *Spikenard*. It ripped through the forward part of the ship, destroyed the bridge and the radio. It is thought that *Spikenard* may have become aware of *U-136* in the few minutes before she was hit because action stations had been sounded and the ship's speed increased. As there was no one from *Spikenard's* bridge who survived the attack, it will remain unknown if the crew was aware of *U-136's* presence. In a few minutes, *Spikenard* sank by the fore. As *Spikenard* had been torpedoed at approximately the same time as the tanker and sank so quickly, the other escorts did not realize she was gone until morning. Able Seaman Hall and 76 of his shipmates were killed, their bodies were not recovered. Able Seaman Hall was 28 years old. Only eight men survived, who were found by a westbound British ship the next day.

Able Seaman Hall's posthumous awards include: The 1939-45 Star, Atlantic Star, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal with Clasp and War Medal. Able Seaman John Robert Hall is memorialized on the Halifax Memorial, Panel 8; on the Honour Roll of Brockville Collegiate Institute; and the Brockville First and Second World Wars Roll of Honour at the Brockville Civic Centre.

Prepared By:

Rudi Wycliffe, former Naval Reserve officer at HMCS *Star* during my university days, and Citizen Sailors Virtual Cenotaph researcher.



Sources:

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- Library and Archives Canada Service file for AB John Robert Hall
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