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HONOURS AND AWARDS

ARMY DEPARTMENT

CENTRAL CHANCERY OF THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD

St. James's Palace, London S.W.1

9th February 1988

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the Queen's Gallantry Medal to the undermentioned:

Captain (acting Major) Robert George Russell HALL (502435),
Corps of Royal Engineers.

24168279 Staff Sergeant Nigel Howard DALY, Corps of Royal
Engineers.

24687732 Sapper (now Lance Corporal) John Paul WRIGHT,
Corps of Royal Engineers.

On 21st November 1986 at Beckton Gas Works, East London, a civilian maintenance diver located what was thought to be a bomb under 40 feet of water inside a large gasometer. The bomb appeared to be obstructing the working of the gas holder. Major Hall, a trained diver, was sent with a team of bomb disposal divers to Beckton. They entered the gas holder through a small air lock on the top and were lowered 100 feet by winch to the surface of the water. The interior was pitch black, the atmosphere was heavy with gas and fumes and the water had become extremely stagnant and polluted with poisons after more than 50 years' use. Even if time had allowed, the millions of gallons of water involved could not have been pumped out since it would have severely contaminated the River Thames and would have required neighbouring gasometers which were still full of gas to be taken out of service. There was no visibility in the water and all work was conducted by touch alone.

After a quick search the nose section of a very large bomb containing decomposing explosive was found and a sample was sent

for analysis. This showed that it was active explosive indicating that the bomb had not exploded. The team was now faced with a major bomb disposal incident. On 24th November Major Hall, Staff Sergeant Daly and Sapper Wright dived to recover the nose section. It was identified as a German World War II 500 kg bomb that had entered through a hole in the crown of the gasometer which was patched up at the time.

Early on 26th November they began a systematic search of the sloping floor of the gasometer working up to 50 feet below the surface to attempt to locate the rest of the bomb. At 1300 hours they discovered the crumpled fins and at 1400 hours the main section of the bomb. Major Hall confirmed by feel that the fuze was intact but could not be identified as it was facing down into the mud. It became clear that the defusing operation, normally the task of the Bomb Disposal Officer alone, would require the presence of two men underwater and one on the surface to supervise the diving equipment and lifting tackle. At 1800 hours the 3-man team returned and dived down to the bomb which was now known to be extremely dangerous. Shackles were attached and with great difficulty the bomb prised from the mud, winched to the surface and manhandled into a rubber dinghy. At this stage all 3 men were in intimate contact with the bomb. The Bomb Disposal Officer then set about defusing the bomb, whilst Sapper Wright held the torch and Staff Sergeant Daly steadied the dinghy. The hiss as the hand drill pierced the vacuum in the fuze indicated that it was in perfect working order, as had been feared. After a further hour the bomb was completely defused.

The half-ton bomb still had to be removed from the gasometer. It was winched up to the top of the gasometer, eased through a very small airlock and lowered 100 feet down the outside. This was a period of 4 hours of extreme physical effort by the tired team. They were constantly at risk of being crushed by the swinging bomb or of falling off the structure. Eventually at 0130 hours they delivered the bomb to others to be steamed out.

The courage, selfless dedication to duty and professionalism displayed by Major Hall and his team were in the highest traditions of the Service.

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