



Darrell Hall

(Photograph: Mrs Sue Hall)

Darrell Dickon Hall 1928 – 1996

Darrell Hall was born in Johannesburg and attended school at Highbury and Michaelhouse.

He realised a boyhood ambition when, in 1946, he joined the British army. He became a Junior Under Officer in the Waterloo Company at Sandhurst, then volunteered for the parachute course, which he passed with flying colours, and joined the 33 Para Field Regiment. He was involved in many of the parachute brigade's visits to the Middle East, and being a keen (and outstanding) photographer, he produced some brilliant photographic and cine records of his experiences. His expertise was recognised by his commanding officer who 'volunteered' him on one occasion to entertain none other than King Hussein with a photographic presentation.

Darrell travelled extensively with the British army and saw active service in the Suez Canal and Borneo. Having served with the Royal Artillery in the Royal Marine Commando, and also in the Parachute Brigade, he must have been one of the few officers able to wear both the red and green berets. He later became an assistant attaché in Vietnam, and then 2 I/C of the Commando Regiment, serving in Singapore. He retired from the British army in 1968 and returned to South Africa to join the family

fruit processing business. He started its Natal operation and was later transferred to Johannesburg as managing director of H.L Hall & Sons (Pty) Ltd.

Darrell's deep interest in history resulted in his uncovering astonishing detail. He relished retracing historical steps, such as those of his grandfather, Hugh Lanion Hall, who had a close shave as a transport rider in Colonel Pearson's coastal column at the battle of Nyezane during the Anglo-Zulu War, and his uncle Wilfred Hall, killed on the Western Front in France. Not for Darrell to visit the battlefield alone. His research into his uncle's background revealed an amazing series of coincidences and was transformed into a moving slide presentation.

Darrell served as national chairman of the Gunners' Association (of which he was elected an Honorary Life Vice-President). Upon his retirement, he was appointed chairman of the British war graves sub-section of the National Monuments Council. He tackled his responsibilities with vigour, and almost immediately made himself an authority on the subject.

In recent years Darrell tried his hand at writing and produced two books: *Halt! Action front*, a detailed account of the drama of Colonel Long's guns at the battle of Colenso, and *Long Tom*, the first detailed account of these legendary Boer guns. The former was so well researched that Darrell was able to put names to the gun detachments and introduce visitors to Colenso to the precise spot where gunner so-and-so was killed or wounded. These two books won him international acclaim and copies have been lodged in the libraries of military institutions from Sandhurst to Woolwich.

Darrell was also an accomplished genealogist, and became an active member of the Genealogical Society. When his devoted wife Sue (née Venter) expressed an interest, Darrell offered to trace her family history. His research took them to the Cape, and to the ruins of a family farm dating back to the late 1600s. From there, Darrell and Sue astonished members of the Venter tribe with amazing details of this old South African family, and ended up giving a slide show at a Venter *byeenkoms*, attended by dozens of family members, many of whom had travelled hundreds of kilometres to listen to *die Engelse oom*.

Members of the Military History Society will miss not only his kindness as a person, but especially his 'military magazine' – short talks before the main speaker's address – and their immense variety in content, which reflected both his vast knowledge of military history and his mischievous sense of humour. In future these will be known as the 'Darrell Hall Memorial Lecture' in tribute to one of the country's most outstanding military historians.