

In Memoriam:

Robert J. Hall, MD

(1926–2018)

Robert J. Hall, MD, died on 3 July 2018 at the age of 92. He was the esteemed medical director at the Texas Heart Institute (THI) for 33 years (1969–2002).

Born in June 1926 in Buffalo, New York, Robert Hall completed his pre-medical studies at Canisius College and then graduated from the medical school at the University of Buffalo at age 22. He married his wife, Dorothy, a month later.

After medical school, Dr. Hall joined the United States Army Medical Corps, primarily to defray his educational expenses. He initially intended to spend only a brief time in the military. His first assignment was at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, DC. Twenty-one years later, he retired as a full colonel after a prestigious military medical career.

His military history included an assignment to a medical evacuation hospital in 1952, in support of several mobile Army surgical hospital units in Korea. His next 3 years were spent on duty in Japan. He then returned to the U.S. to serve at Walter Reed Hospital and at Sam Houston Hospital in San Antonio, Texas. From 1966 to 1969, as Chief of Cardiology at Walter Reed Hospital, he was personally responsible for the care of former U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower during the president's extended illnesses. He also cared for other governmental dignitaries and various celebrities during that time.

After President Eisenhower's death in 1969, Dr. Hall retired from the Army and was recruited by Dr. Denton A. Cooley to become the first Medical Director and Chief of Cardiology at THI. The Institute had been chartered for the express purposes of research and education, and Dr. Hall was a perfect choice for championing these pursuits. He was nationally recognized for aspiring to instill in his students the principles of physical diagnosis with an emphasis on observation and direct inquiry of patients. His popular annual symposium on the identification and characterization of heart sounds and murmurs attracted renowned speakers and attendees. Dr. Hall ultimately acquired a remarkable and complex indexed library of auscultation recordings and various physiologic tracings, which he made available to the public in several innovative electronic modes that he personally oversaw. In addition, Dr. Hall was instrumental in forming THI's weekly and daily cardiology rounds. His constant attention to detail ensured their quality. He frequently joined in rounds with the students and house staff, all of whom relished the experience.

The timing of Dr. Hall's arrival at THI was propitious, given the extraordinary clinical load generated by the cardiovascular surgical group that included Dr. Cooley. Although the patient census on the cardiology service was extraordinarily high and the breadth of necessary cardiovascular services was massive, Dr. Hall and his colleagues



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readily rose to the challenge. Dr. Cooley accurately observed that Dr. Hall “was a strong early proponent of precise diagnosis, especially in the use of the newly developed techniques of coronary arteriography.”¹ He also noted Dr. Hall’s early advocacy of “aggressive myocardial revascularization by surgical and interventional techniques,”¹ which enabled notable progress and improvements in interventional cardiology and cardiovascular surgical technology.

In 1982, Dr. Hall converted THI’s in-house journal of research and clinical findings, called *Cardiovascular Diseases, Bulletin of the Texas Heart Institute*, into the *Texas Heart Institute Journal*. Under his editorship, the *THI Journal* underwent modifications in appearance, content, and methods of distribution, and it was accepted for indexing in *Index Medicus* and MEDLINE®. By the time Dr. Hall retired as editor-in-chief in 2002, the *Journal* had gained an international audience of readers and contributors.¹

Dr. Hall headed many committees and projects that were fundamental to THI’s continued functioning. He had teaching appointments at Baylor College of Medicine and the University of Texas Medical School at Houston. Among his many accolades were the Legion of Merit of the United States Army (1969) and the Ray C. Fish Award for Scientific Achievement in Cardiovascular Disease (1989). He was a member of the U.S. president’s advisory panel on heart disease, Chairman of the Board of Governors and Trustees for the American College of Cardiology, and consultant to the Surgeon General of the Army. He authored or co-authored more than 150 articles and book chapters.

Dr. Hall had various scientific and other interests. For example, he was an advisor on NASA’s Mercury and Gemini missions, and he helped to evaluate the health of the astronauts after their space ventures.

Amid dedication to his profession, Dr. Hall enjoyed a balanced life. He was married for 61 years to his devoted wife, Dorothy. They had 5 children, 12 grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren. His dedication to his family was obvious and exemplary.

Dr. Hall’s nickname was “the gentle giant.” His influence on students, residents, fellows, colleagues, and patients was gargantuan. His disarming sense of humor complemented his relaxed teaching style. Nevertheless, he challenged students and house officers to live up to their potential. His personal sense of integrity was contagious. A teacher’s teacher, he left a legacy of more than 300 expertly trained clinical cardiology fellows, who became cardiologists and who had learned the importance of placing the patient’s welfare first and foremost.

Dr. Hall was a genuinely beloved friend, confidant, mentor, and colleague. His tradition of caring for patients and striving to deliver superior clinical care will live on, and his integrity and compassion will endure in all who were privileged to have him as a teacher and role model.

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References

1. Cooley DA, Bagg JE Jr. Editor-in-chief, Robert J. Hall, retires. *Tex Heart Inst J* 2002;29(3):159-60. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC124752/pdf/20020900s00001p159.pdf>.