

ROWLANDS, Sir HUGH (1828 - 1909), general, and the first Welshman to be awarded the Victoria Cross

Name: Hugh Rowlands
Date of birth: 1828
Date of death: 1909
Spouse: Isabella Jane Rowlands (née Barrow)
Child: Hugh Barrow Rowlands
Parent: Elizabeth Rowlands
Parent: John Rowlands
Gender: Male
Occupation: general, and the first Welshman to be awarded the Victoria Cross
Area of activity: Military
Author: William Alister Williams

Born on 6 May 1828 at Plastirion, Llanrug, Caernarfonshire, the second son of John and Elizabeth Rowlands. His father was the heir to the Plastirion estate which amounted to approx. 1,200 acres. The family claimed descent from **Bleddyn ap Cynfyn**, prince of Powys and were also descended from **Dafydd**, brother of **Llywelyn ap Gruffydd**; they had resided in the Caernarfon area for nearly two hundred years. Hugh was educated at Beaumaris Grammar School and, at the age of 21, purchased a commission in the 41st Foot, the Welch Regiment. He served with the regiment in Ireland, the Ionian Islands and Malta before going to Turkey in 1854 for the Eastern Campaign against Russia. From there he went to Varna and then, as Captain of the Grenadier Company took part in the invasion of the Crimea. He first saw action at the Battle of the Alma but it was at Inkerman on 5 November that his name first came to prominence. For his action during that battle, in which he was severely wounded in the arm, he was later awarded the Victoria Cross, the first Welshman to be so decorated. He served throughout the siege of Sebastopol and took part in both attacks on the Redan. During the first attack he was again nominated for the Victoria Cross, but the regulations at the time made a second award impossible. At the end of the hostilities he was promoted Brevet Major, in recognition of his services, appointed Town Major of Sebastopol and later Brigade Major to the 2nd Brigade of the 2nd Division. He was created a Knight of the Legion of Honour by the French and a Knight of the Order of the Medjidie by the Turks. He also received the Crimean Medal with three clasps and the Turkish Crimean Medal. During the course of the war his name appeared in despatches on numerous occasions and one officer, when asked to name one person who did more than any other during the war, named Hugh Rowlands of the 41st. On his return from the war he received a civic reception from the people of Caernarfon who also presented him with a handsome Sword of Honour in the castle. He served afterwards in the West Indies, England, Scotland and Ireland before embarking for India where, in 1865, he took command of the Welch Regiment. Two years later he married Isabella Jane Barrow, the grand-daughter of William Glynne Griffith of Rhosfawr and Bodegroes, Pwllheli and they had two children.

In 1875 he returned to Britain and had command of the 34th Foot, the Border Regiment and then returned to India where he remained until 1878 when he was sent as a special service officer to Cape Colony. In Africa he first served as ADC to Lt. General Thesiger (later Lord Chelmsford) and was then appointed inspector of forces in the Transvaal. In July he was appointed commandant of the Transvaal and immediately led an abortive assault on the Bapedi Chief, Sekukuni. During this campaign he came into conflict with Redvers Buller and Evelyn Wood, two of the most dominant officers of the late 19th century. In early 1879 Rowlands took command of the town of Pretoria which was being threatened by several thousand Boers who were demanding independence. The defences were such that the threat passed without any violence (only to reappear the following year as the First Boer War). He was then promoted to local Brigadier General and given the command of a brigade in Zululand where he remained until the end of that war when he returned to Britain and another great welcome from the people of Caernarfon. Rowlands was given various commands (Aldershot and Peshawar on the northwest frontier of India) before being appointed to command the Bangalore Division of the Madras Army in 1884 (having been promoted Major General three years earlier). He remained in this post until 1889 when he left India for the last time and returned to Britain. In 1890 he was promoted Lieutenant General and in 1893 was appointed Lieutenant of the Tower of London by the Queen. The following year he took up his last command as C-in-C Scottish District where he remained until retiring in 1896 with the rank of General.

On retiring he returned to Plastirion, Llanrug, where he lived until his death in 1909. Amongst the honours which he received after 1896 was the rank of Knight Military Commander of the Order of the Bath in 1898 and Colonel of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment in 1897. He was also created a Deputy Lieutenant for Caernarfonshire and J.P. (he had already been a J.P. for the Transvaal).

His only son, Hugh Barrow Rowlands, died of wounds received in Somaliland where he was serving as a major in the King's African Rifles in 1903.

Sir Hugh Rowlands died on 1 August 1909 and was buried in the parish churchyard at Llanrug.

Author

William Alister Williams

Sources

Y Genedl Gymreig, 3 August 1909

personal research

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Hugh Rowlands](#)

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