RARE 3 CLASP NGS 1793 OFFICERS MEDAL. MASTER OF HMS CARNATION WHEN THIS SHIP WAS MUCH DAMAGED DURING THE INFAMOUS ACTION AGAINST THE AMERICAN PRIVATEER GENERAL ARMSTRONG. THIS THE BLOODIEST BOAT ACTION OF THE 1812

NGS 1793, 3 CLASPS, 4\textsuperscript{th} NOV\textsuperscript{r} 1805, MARTINIQUE, GUADALOUPE ‘WM FARLEY MASTERS MATE’

William Farley had a long and interesting career, serving with HMS Hero at Strachan’s action on 4\textsuperscript{th} Nov 1805, here Hero suffered the brunt of the casualties, indeed double that of the next highest! Farley was severely wounded in the aftermath of a gallant boat action whilst on HMS Fawn (no clasp authorised). As Master of HMS Carnation, he took part in one of the most Bloody and disastrous actions fought by the Royal Navy of that era; the attack on the US Privateer General Armstrong. During this action British boats were repulsed after sustaining an appalling number of casualties and Carnation was much damaged. There interestingly he seemed to have a strong friendship with Carnation’s Commander, George Bentham. As Midshipman (the later being promoted Lieutenant), they served together on HMS Hero for a couple
of years between 1805 and 1807. Farley later became Master under Bentham on Carnation and subsequently moved to HMS North Star when Bentham transferred his Command. Other appointments included pirate hunting in Revolutionarie 1818-22 under Captain the Hon. Fleetwood Pellew Recommendations from Bentham and Pellew, along with other Captains in Farley’s Service papers, confirm the very high esteem he was held in by all that served with him. Farley served in 13 ships during his service of 27 years, all bar 3 in service as opposed to harbour.

Farley Wounded:

On the 28th May 1808, Mr. Robertson acting lieutenant, commanded two of Fawn’s boats at the capture of a large Spanish privateer schooner and three merchant vessels, one of the latter armed, under two batteries at the N. E. end of Porto Rico; of this truly gallant affair, performed in open day, under the very muzzles of the enemy's guns on shore, and a continued fire of musketry from the surrounding, bushes into which the privateer's men had escaped after running their vessel aground and scuttling her in the bows, no mention whatever is made in the London gazette, nor indeed is there, to our knowledge, any published account extant.

On obtaining possession of the schooner, the sea being perfectly smooth, Mr. Robertson determined to tow her off; and after nailing sheet lead over the holes in the bows, succeeded in getting her afloat and fairly under way. He then directed her guns to be turned upon the enemy; but this had scarcely been effected when her magazine exploded, and all on board except himself and two seamen were blown into the water.; the loss sustained on this occasion was one warrant officer, the carpenter of the Fawn, killed; and Mr. Farley, master'smate, a quarter-master, and two marines severely scorched and wounded: at the moment of the accident taking place, acting lieutenant Robertson was, fortunately for him, standing before the fore-mast, cheering and encouraging the people in the boats a-head to give way.

In the evening of the same day, Mr. Robertson rejoined the Fawn, with his four gallantly obtained prizes; and the schooner was then partially repaired: on the following day, however, she went down in a squall, by which disaster five men perished

Fawn’s boats took part in several more actions during Farley’s service, a clasp for the NGS medal: ‘25 July Boat Service 1809’ was announced for another action that Fawn’s boats took part in. In the event their were no applications but it is tempting to think that since a much larger action received the same dated clasp, there was some confusion regarding applicants from Fawn.

The action in which Carnation took part in 1814 is surely one of the bloodiest assaults that Royal Navy took part in during this period. The Royal Navy casualties were horrendous:

On the 26th of September 1814, while the US privateer-schooner General Armstrong of New York, Captain Samuel C. Reid of 10 guns and 90 men, was lying at anchor in the road of Fayal, a British squadron, composed of the Plantagenet (74), Rota(38) and Carnation (18), all under Captain Robert Floyd, hove in sight. The boats from Carnation were sent in by the British, to ‘supposedly’ reconnoitre the schooner, as
they later asserted, or, according to the American accounts, to carry her by force. At any rate, after repeatedly warning them off, the privateer fired into them, and they withdrew suffering numerous casualties. Captain Reid then anchored nearer shore, to await another expected attack, which was not long deferred. At 8 P. M., boats of the squadron under the command of Lieutenant William Matterface, first of the Rota, pulled in toward the road, while the Carnation accompanied them to attack the schooner if she got under way. The boats pulled in under cover of a small reef of rocks, where they lay for some time, and about midnight made the attack. The Americans opened with their guns, while the boat replied with their cannonades, and, pulling spiritedly on amid a terrific fire of musketry from both sides, laid the schooner aboard on her bow and starboard quarter. The struggle was savage enough, the British hacking at the nettings and trying to clamber up on deck, while the Americans fired their muskets and pistols in the faces of their assailants and thrust the foremost through with their long pikes. The boats on the quarter were driven off, but on the forecastle all three of the American lieutenants were killed or disabled, and the men were giving back when Captain Reid led all the after-division up and drove the British back into their boats. This put an end to the assault.

Two boats were sunk, most of the wounded being saved as the shore was so near; 2 others were captured and but three of the scattered flotilla returned to the ship. Of the Americans, 2 were killed, and 7 were wounded. Of the British, 34 were killed and 86 were wounded were ‘Officially’ admitted, however most eyewitnesses say at least 120 men were killed and 90 wounded! The schooner’s long 24 had been knocked off its carriage by a carronade shot but it was replaced and the deck cleared for another action.
Next day the Carnation moved in close to attempt to destroy the privateer. A heavy fire opened between the two antagonists and after three hours, Carnation moved out again, her main topmast down, her bowsprit shattered, and fifteen of her men dead. The General Armstrong was also much damaged and Captain Reid decided to scuttle Her. This was not fully affected but when boats from Carnation pulled up to find the Privateer abandoned, they boarded and set fire to Her.

At the time this action caused huge problems for the British and the rights and wrongs were debated in the Courts of Law for years to come, with the result that much has been written about the Action. The British certainly wanted to keep the casualty figures down as low as possible and you won’t find a sniff of the action mentioned in the London Gazette and very little in the usual British accounts of the time. Casualties were comparable to several Fleet Actions!

Condition VF, EK to rim, sold with service papers (31 pages!) and much research and a copy of ‘The Case Of the Privateer General Armstrong’ all on CD