

**A VERY SCARCE NAVAL GENERAL SERVICE 1793, CLASP, ST. DOMINGO TO THE GUNNER OF H.M.S. KINGFISHER WHO SAW A GOOD DEAL OF ACTION ABOARD THIS SHIP IN THE WEST INDIES, CHANNEL AND MEDITERRANEAN 1805-10. KINGFISHER WAS HIGHLY COMMENDED FOR HER SERVICES AT THE BATTLE ST. DOMINGO AND FURTHER HONOURED WHEN CHOSEN TO TAKE OF THE OFFICIAL DESPATCHES OF THE BATTLE BACK TO BRITAIN**



**NAVAL GENERAL SERVICE 1793, CLASP, ST. DOMINGO 'WILLIAM STEWART, GUNNER.'**

Gunner William Stewart entered *Kingfisher* 'per warrant from Rr Adml Cochrane' on 30 January 1805 and served with this 18 gun ship sloop for a further five and a half years, seeing a great deal of action in the West Indies, Channel and Mediterranean.

A very scarce rank on the Naval General Service medal, a Gunner was, along with The Carpenter and Boatswain, the three Standing Officers aboard a Royal Navy ship. Appointed by Warrant, as opposed Commission, they were normally 'Steady men', promoted as the pick of the gun crews or from Gunner's Mates and were generally one of the most respected men aboard ship. His duties related to all matters concerning the ships guns, for which he had a quite a large crew of Mates, the armourer, one Quarter Gunners for every four guns and other seaman under his command. He was also responsible for the welfare of the youngest of the young gentlemen would be Officers; Fist Class Volunteers and Captain's servants, all 'living' in the Gun Room.

**H.M.S. KINGFISHER 1805-1810**

Initially serving in the West Indies under Commander R W Cribb and then Commander N D Cochrane, *Kingfisher* saw a fair amount of action, capturing various enemy ships at sea and cutting out others with her boats. On 1 February 1806, it was *Kingfisher* that brought intelligence to Admiral Duckworth that a French squadron of three sail of the line had been seen steering towards the city of Santo Domingo and subsequently took part in the battle of St Domingo on the 6th. *Kingfisher* was highly commended for her services in the aftermath of the action, the boats of which having assisted in completing the destruction of two French line-of-battle ships and bringing off their crews in tremendous seas. Further honour was given when *Kingfisher* was chosen to take of the official despatches of the battle back to Britain; for which Cochrane was Posted Captain. See the following for more details on the battle of St Domingo:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_San\\_Domingo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_San_Domingo)



On Cochrane being Posted, he was succeeded by Commander G F Seymour who had been severely wounded at San Domingo, having been struck by a grape-shot which had penetrated his. Serving in the Channel,

On 12 May 1806, *Kingfisher* joined two frigates, *Indefatigable* and *Pallas*, in the roads of Aix, trying to tempt out a French squadron. *Pallas* ran the French *Minerva* on board carrying away her own jib-boom, fore and main top sail yards. *Minerva* was rescued by the other French ships and *Kingfisher* had to take *Pallas* in tow. Seymour was Posted on July 1806 and was replaced by Commander W Hepenstall and on 27 September 1806 she was with Sir Thomas Louis's squadron when the French frigate *Presidente* struck to *Dispatch*.

Next serving in the Mediterranean, on 27 June 1808, off the southern coast of Turkey *Kingfisher* sighted a large sail to the South West and immediately went in chase, using his sweeps because the wind was very light. At about midday he caught up with a ship which hoisted French colours and opened fire. After a running fight of an hour she struck. She was the *Hercule*, a letter of marquee, armed with 12 guns, 18's, 12's and 8's, and manned by 57 men of whom one was killed and two wounded. *Kingfisher* only had one man slightly wounded but her yards and running rigging were badly damaged.

On 12 March 1809, *Kingfisher* was in company with the 38-gun *Topaze* when *Topaze* engaged in an inconclusive action with the 40-gun *Flore* and the 44-gun *Danae*. *Topaze* sustained no casualties or meaningful damage. On October *Kingfisher* joined a squadron off Zante. On 3 October a British force under General Oswald and Commodore Spranger captured the port, followed by Cephalonia, Ithaca, Santa Maura and Cerigo. On board *Kingfisher* at this time was the Thomas Sutcliffe, the later to be famed soldier of fortune, who was sent with a captured prize but would be captured when he was forced by weather to lead for land. See the following for more details on *Kingfisher*:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS\\_Kingfisher\\_\(1804\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Kingfisher_(1804))

Musters show Stewart served aboard *Kingfisher* until he was discharged on 17 July 1810, 'Superseded'. Stewart's service pre 1805 has as yet to be traced but given his rank, he would have served in the Royal Navy for some years previous to 1805. Post 1810, again service has not been traced.



Just 396 clasps for St Domingo, 10 being awarded to *Kingfisher*, Stewart being confirmed on the rolls as a 'Gunner', which is a very scarce rank to find on the Naval General Service medal, indeed among the very scarcest with just 79 medals being issued with this rank out of 17,408 medals.

Condition light contact marks, otherwise GVF. Sold with some research including copied Admiralty roll entry. A very scarce Gunner ranked NGS medal. Ex Christies, November 1985; Dix Noonan Webb, June 2020