

THE FINE AND RARE ASHANTEE 1873 TO A ROYAL MARINE LIGHT INFANTRY CAPTAIN, ONE OF THE FEW OFFICERS TO TAKE PART IN THE ENTIRE CAMPAIGN. DURING THE SECOND PHASE ATTACHED TO THE BLACK WATCH AND AS ORDERLY OFFICER TO THE BRIGADE COMMANDER WHERE HE WAS PRESENT AT THE BATTLES OF AMOAFUL, ORDAHSU AND THE CAPTURE OF COOMASSIE BEING AWARDED THE BREVET OF MAJOR FOR HIS SERVICE



ASHANTEE MEDAL 1873, CLASP, COOMASSIE 'CAPT W.E. DESPARD, R.M.L.I., H.M.S. BARRACOUTA 1873-4'

An important medal for the Ashantee War, not just due to unit and rank but because Captain Despard was one of the first men to land on the Gold Coast during the initial disturbances and one of the last to leave. 100 Marines under Colonel Festing and including Captain Despard embarked on HMS Barracuta and were dispatched from the UK, landing at Cape Coast Castle on 7th June 1873. They were joined by the 1st WIR and were to reinforce the 2nd WIR, already on station. They were under express order to defend the forts but not to engage in field operations. However, as often happens events spiraled and the Marines were drawn into the conflict and the British Government realized a full campaign would be needed to solve the Ashantee problem. Thus General Garnet Wolseley led an expeditionary Force which reinforced the Marines and WIR's, landing on the Gold Coast in October 1873. Captain Despard had various roles during the campaign, serving with the 42nd Highlanders and as Orderly officer to General Archibald Alison, who commanded the European Brigade during the conflict. An important position, especially as Alison was given tactical Command during the advance on Coomassie, second only to Wolseley himself. One note states;

'Archibald Alison, Brigadier of the white troops, declares he never came under a fiercer fire in India or the Crimea. Sir Archibald did not spare himself nor his staff officer, Captain Despard, R.M., who was always going backwards and forwards on the road.' Another states by 25th January *'Colonel Festing, Captain Despard, and Lieutenant Allen are the three surviving officers of that marine force which landed in June last.'*

Often overlooked, once reinforcements arrived, this was a relatively short but very hard fought campaign against fierce foe under extremely trying circumstances. Casualties were high, especially among the 42nd. Captain Despard was made Brevet Major on his return to the UK in April 1874, no doubt for services rendered

From Despard's Service record:

'William Edward Despard was born at Clifton and entered the Royal Marines as 2nd Lieutenant in October 1855, becoming Lieutenant in 1859, 2nd Captain in 1867, and Captain in 1873. He served throughout the war on the Gold Coast from the 9th June 1873 until its termination. He was appointed Acting Assistant Commissary at Elmina as a temporary measure, 24 July 1873; was attached to the 42nd Royal Highlanders as Transport Officer and was present at the Battle of Amoaful, where he acted as Orderly Officer to Sir A. Alison, Bart. C.B. (Brigadier-General), the battle of Ordahsu and the capture of Coomassie. He was made brevet Major in April 1874, and had charge of the Royal Marines who were presented with the medal for "Conspicuous Gallantry" by Her Majesty at Windsor Castle on the 3rd December 1874. He was appointed Barrackmaster at Chatham and removed to Half Pay from December 1879, until he retired at his own request in December 1887 as Hon. Lieutenant-Colonel. He died at Blackheath on 24 July 1898'

A photograph of Major Despard is held in the Royal Collection and Sir Archibald Alison's papers, including those for the Ashantee War are held in the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. These are sure to hold more details on Despard's movements during the campaign.

<https://www.rct.uk/collection/search#/page/1#who>

Only 3 Coomassie clasps to H.M.S. Barracouta.



Condition GVF, with copy record of service and other research, ex DNW 2006 (£2000 hammer)