THE OUTSTANDING NAVAL GENERAL SERVICE 1793 AWARDED TO A SEAMAN WHO WAS DANGEROUSLY WOUNDED AND TAKEN PRISONER DURING H.M.S. *REINDEER'S* EPIC ACTION WITH THE AMERICAN CORVETTE *WASP.* IN WHAT WAS ONE OF THE BEST-FOUGHT AND BLOODIEST NAVAL DUELS OF THE 1812 WAR



NAVAL GENERAL SERVICE 1793, CLASP, ST. SEBASTIAN 'JAMES WALLIS.'

James Wallis, aged 22, joined the 18-gun brig H.M.S. *Reindeer* as a Landsman on 6 February 1813. Promoted to Ordinary Seaman on 1 July 1813, he served aboard this ship at the siege of St Sebastian and was finally discharged on 23 September 1814. Reason given for discharge; *'wounded in action'*. Wallis was wounded on 28 June 1814, during *Reindeer's* epic action with the American corvette *Wasp.* In what was one of the best-fought and bloodiest naval duels of the 1812 War, the hull of the *Reindeer* was literally cut to pieces in a line with her ports; her upper works, boats, and spare spars, were one complete wreck and her masts were in a tottering state. Out of a crew of 118 with which she commenced the action, her commander, purser and 23 men were killed; 42 others wounded, 2 of whom died of their wounds. Amongst the wounded was James Wallis, who was listed by his American captors as dangerously wounded.

In consequence of the severity and extent of their wounds, the 8 dangerously (2 more having died of their wounds) and 17 severely wounded Officers and men, were put on board a Portuguese brig, called the *Lisbon Packet*, on the third day after the action (1 of July), bound

to Plymouth, England. Those slightly or unwounded, where taken into captivity. Among the dangerously was an as yet unnamed seaman who was wounded in the head by a ramrod;

"which, before it could be extracted, required to be sawed off close to the skull. The man, notwithstanding, recovered. After receiving this desperate wound, he, like his gallant chief, refused to go below ; saying to those who begged him to leave his gun: "If all the wounded of the Reindeer were as well able to fight as I am, we should soon make the American strike."

Given Wallis's date of discharge from the Royal Navy, it seems likely this was as soon as he was discharged from hospital

REINDEER vs WASP

"On 28 June 1814, at daylight, the brig Reindeer, Commander William Manners, bore up before a light breeze from the north-east, in chase of the United States 22-gun corvette Wasp, Captain Johnstone Blakeley. At 3.15 p.m., being within musket shot on the starboard and weather quarter of the American corvette, the Reindeer opened fire from a 12-pounder carronade mounted on her forecastle, and about ten minutes later the Wasp luffed across the Reindeer's bows, firing her starboard guns. The Reindeer then ranged up on the larboard beam of the enemy, and a spirited cannonade ensued, which continued until 5 p.m., when, in consequence of her unmanageable state, the Reindeer fell foul of the Wasp, her bow coming in contact with the enemy's larboard quarter, and in this position became exposed to a destructive raking fire. Captain Manners, who had been badly wounded in the calves of the legs at the commencement of the action, continued at his station encouraging the crew by his heroic example.



Shortly afterwards a canister-shot passed through both his thighs, and he fell on his knees, but quickly sprang up again, and, although bleeding profusely, refused still to go below. By this time the grape and musketry from the Wasp had caused such havoc, that Captain Manners determined on an attempt to board his opponent, and, calling to his crew to follow him, was in the act of ascending the main rigging of the Reindeer with that design, when two musket-balls from the main-top of the Wasp penetrated his skull, and came out beneath his chin. Manners dropped lifeless on his own deck, whereupon the American crew rushed in a body on board the Reindeer and carried her without further resistance. The American victors received possession of their hard-earned trophy from Mr. Richard Collins, the captain's clerk, the senior officer alive on deck.

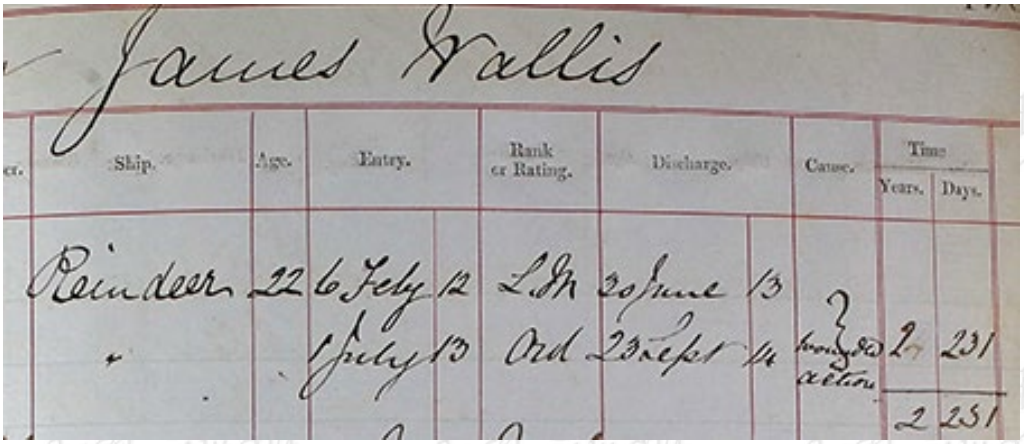
The hull of the Reindeer was literally cut to pieces, and her masts were in a tottering state. Out of ninety-eight men and twenty boys with which she commenced the action, her commander, purser and 23 men were killed; her only lieutenant and 41 others wounded. The Wasp, which was a significantly ship sloop, armed with 22-gun and a crew of 173 men, lost 11 killed and 15 wounded. The Americans destroyed the Reindeer and arrived at L'Orient with her captives on 8 July to refit. On the 1st of July, 1st Lieutenant Thomas Chambers, the Acting Master and 23 ratings, all being wounded in the action with the Wasp, had been placed by that ship on board the Portuguese packet Lisbon bound for Plymouth. "

The following link contains a good American account of the action, which includes a casualty roll, this entitled *'Capture of the Reindeer and other vessels, by the Wasp. Communicated to the senate, October 17, 1814';*

https://www.ibiblio.org/pha/USN/1814/18141013Reindeer.html



James Wallis's surname is spelt 'Wallace' in error on the original Admiralty medal roll (ADM 171/1). However, he appears as 'Wallis' on the ship's Pay Lists/musters throughout his service. Critically, these Pay Lists do not list anyone by the name of 'Wallace' aboard the ship during the period 1813-14.



James Wallis

Ship.	Age.	Entry.	Rank or Rating.	Discharge.	Cause.	Time Years.	Time Days.
Reindeer	22	6 July 12	L.M.	20 June 13			
"		4 July 13	Ord	23 Sept 14	wounded in action	2	231
						2	231

Additionally, his record of service gives the spelling Wallis, which also confirms he was wounded whilst serving aboard H.M.S. Reindeer. This absolutely leaving no doubting the correct spelling is ‘Wallis’

The Naval General Service medals with the clasp St Sebastian was awarded to just 4 Officers and men of H.M.S. Reindeer (including Wallis), all 4 unique names and all of whom were still with the ship during the action with Wasp. Of the other 3 medals, the medal awarded to Richard Johns, acting Master, was sold at Noonans, 17 September 2004 and the medals to Lieutenant Robert Loney and Joshua Carson are in museums. As such Wallis and Johns medals are the only medals likely to be on the market for this well known naval action.

Of additional interest, an extremely rare U.S. medal struck to commemorate the action was sold by the Noonans in September 2024



Condition minor EK’s and contact wear with a little pitting to high points of reverse, VF, fitted with an original ribbon. Ex Sotheby, June 1985. Sold with research (all digital) which includes Pay lists for the entire crew of Reindeer for the period of St Sebastian in 1813 and the Wasp action in 1814.

An exceptional and extremely rare Naval General Service medal relating to one of the best known naval actions of the war of 1812