

THE EXCEPTIONAL AND EXTREMELY RARE EGYPT 1882 MEDAL AWARDED TO CAPTAIN WARDELL, ROYAL MARINE LIGHT INFANTRY, WHO WAS MENTIONED FOR HIS GALLANTRY DURING THE CAPTURE OF 2 KRUPP GUNS AT THE BATTLE OF KASSASSIN, FOUR DAYS LATER HE WAS KILLED IN ACTION LEADING HIS MEN THROUGH THE ENEMY TRENCHES AT TEL-EL-KEBIR. HIS BROTHER HAD BEEN KILLED 3 YEARS EARLIER LEADING A COMPANY OF THE 24TH FOOT AT THE BATTLE OF ISANDHLWANA



EGYPT AND SUDAN 1882-89, DATED REVERSE, CLASP, TEL-EL-KEBIR 'CAPT. J. C. WARDELL, R.M.L.I.'

John Charles Wardell was born in Quebec, Canada, the son of William Wardell, a Major in the Royal Canadian Rifles; one of his brothers, George, commanded a company of the 24th Foot and was killed in action at Isandhlwana on 22 January 1879.

John Wardell was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the Royal Marine Light Infantry in June 1865 and advanced to Lieutenant in August 1867. In the period leading up to his active employment in Egypt, he enjoyed a spate of seagoing appointments, among them H.M.S. Liverpool (1869-70), Valiant (1872-74) and Valorous (1876-78). After the disaster at Isandhlwana in January 1879, reinforcements were called for and among those formed was a battalion of Royal Marine Light

Infantry, which in June, embarked in the troopship Jumna for South Africa. Lieutenant Wardell was one of those selected to join the battalion and was no doubt hell bent on avenging his brother's death, however the battalion arrived too late to see any action during the war and returned home to Portsmouth.



Advanced to Captain in June 1880, in June 1882, with war with Egypt inevitable, a battalion of Royal Marines was formed and embarked on H.M.S. Orontes for Egypt. The battalion, consisted of 500 Royal Marine Light Infantry and 300 Royal Marine Artillery, Captain Wardell commanding one of the Light Infantry companies. During the campaign that followed, the Royal Marine battalion played a significant role, being present at all the major battles and sustaining far greater casualties than any other battalion to serve during the conflict.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Egyptian_War

Captain Wardell would distinguish himself in the action at the second battle of Kassassin, 9 September 1882, when with great skill he captured two of the enemy's German-supplied Krupp guns. Likely due to his death shortly after, it seems Wardell's role in the capture of these two guns (which were later gifted to Queen Victoria) was officially muted, though not as far as the Royal Marines were concerned. A most interesting letter published in the Army and Navy Gazette, 6 January 1883 gives the following:

WHO CAPTURED THE GUNS?

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE ARMY AND NAVY GAZETTE."

SIR,—Will you allow me, as a civilian, to bring before the public a matter of an individual and general character which a service man, no matter how strong his feeling on the subject may be, would be unable to do, for reasons which will be understood by the majority of your readers? As a near relative of the late Capt. Wardell, R.M.L.I., I have watched with deep interest everything that has been published relating to the late campaign in Egypt, and am at a loss to understand how it is that no mention has been made in the public despatches of the undoubted share Capt. Wardell had in the capture of the two Krupp guns in the second action at Kassassin, and for which the Royal Marine Battalion got so much *kudos*. These guns, I see by the *Standard* of the 18th inst., have arrived in England, and her Majesty has graciously consented to accept them from the hands of the corps. That Wardell was mainly instrumental in taking of guns is well known through private correspondence, and is acknowledged by every member of the battalion with whom he served. Why this has not also been acknowledged in official quarters is not for me to say; but, as a lover of justice, it seems to me wrong that, because a man has fallen in the service of his Queen and country, his share in gallant deeds should be overlooked, while those who survive receive the praise and rewards. I append an extract from Capt. Wardell's journal, which can be vouched by many officers of distinction. One commanding officer, writing home as to the taking of these guns, says it was "through the clever management of poor Wardell." Again, while on the subject of justice, is it fair or right that Capt. Wardell's widow should only be receiving a pension of £80 per annum, when the widow of an officer of the same rank in any *Line* regiment, who may have fallen by his side, receives £100? Nor does the inequality of reward end here, for, as I am informed, the allowance per annum for the children of him through whose gallantry the above-mentioned guns fell into our hands (the youngest of which children was born the same day his father died at the head of his men before the trenches of Tel-el-Kebir), is £2 per head less than in the case of the children of a *Linesman*. Is this the way in which the gallant corps, of which the country has lately heard so much, is rewarded for the unfailing good qualities which have brought it into such prominence?—I am, &c., DILLON R. L. LOWE.

[Extract from Capt. Wardell's Journal.]

"Saturday, Sept. 9. . . . Lying down some time. Artillery duel going on over our heads. Advanced, and at last got within range of infantry and guns, and opened fire. Frampton then called to me, and pointed out that just over hill in front guns were blazing at us; so I got my nearest half-company and dashed for hill. Halted at foot, and crept up and found ourselves in beautiful distance of two guns blazing away. I opened fire at once as hot as I could, and a section of the next company coming up under a lieutenant, I ordered him to wheel to right and open fire on infantry who might try to enfilade us. Our fire was so hot that in a short time right-about went the Egyptians, leaving their two guns behind. Frampton jumped on his pony, and dashed to the front to claim the guns for us. I advanced with my half-company, but finding Coffin (captain of company in rear) had come up, and was making for guns too, I wheeled my company to left, and advanced against two guns blazing at our field battery behind us. I put a few shots at 900 to 1,000 yards, and the two guns limbered up and retired. . . . Col. Jones told me I had done well with my company. Major Scott said I was to be mentioned. . . . [Then follows an account of the guns being claimed by others, rage of brother-officers, explanation by same to major, and matter referred to colonel.] Don't know what upshot of it will be."

Four days later, Wardell would lead his company at the battle of Tel-El-Kebir. The following extracted from *The Royal Navy, A History from the Earliest Times to the Present, Volume 7*:

"..on the night of September 12th, Sir Garnet Wolseley moved forward the bulk of his army over the intervening six and a quarter miles, marching in the gloom of a moonless night; and early in the morning of the 13th he surprised Arabi's army in its positions eastward of Tel el Kebir; and, attacking it at once, defeated it with great slaughter.

The Naval Brigade on that day moved along the railway A battalion of Royal Marine Artillery, under Lieut.-Colonel Henry Brasnell Tuson, and another of Royal Marine Light Infantry, under Lieut.-Colonels Howard Sutton Jones, and Samuel James Graham, also took part in the action, the latter especially distinguishing itself. It formed the left of Major General Graham's (2nd) brigade of Lieut.-General Willis's (1st) division. After a long march, the brigade, as dawn was breaking, found itself 1200 yards from the front of the northern portion of the Tel el Kebir lines, but, having mistaken its way in the darkness, it was facing in the wrong direction. While a change of front was being effected the enemy opened fire, and ere the brigade was properly formed the fire had become heavy. Lieut.-Colonel Jones sent forward three companies into the firing line, and kept three in support, and two more in reserve, and so attacked over ground which afforded absolutely no cover. But the men moved forward with extraordinary steadiness, mounted the glacis, and reserved their fire until they were within little more than 100 yards of the ditch. The reserves, under Lieut.-Colonel Graham, then came up, and the whole force dashed into the ditch with a cheer, scrambled over the eight foot parapet on the other side, and engaged the Egyptians at hand grips. The enemy, after a brief resistance, broke and fled and was pursued for about four miles..."



"TEL-EL-KEBIR THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN WARDELL R.M.L.I."

Entering the enemy trenches at the head of his men, Captain Wardell was shot in the head as he crossed the parapet:

'Lieutenant Luke, who was a subaltern of his company, avenged his gallant officer's death a few

moments after he fell. Watching the Egyptian who shot him, he closed in, and by one stroke he severed his head from his body. Captain Wardell's sword and other relics of him were brought to England to his widow, in custody of his servant.'

British losses were 9 Officers killed, 27 wounded, 48 men killed, 356 wounded and 30 missing. Of this number, the Royal Marine Light Infantry casualties were 2 Officers and 3 men killed, 1 Officer and 52 wounded and a further 21 posted missing. A higher number of casualties than even any of the Highland Brigade regiments that suffered so severely.

<https://www.britishbattles.com/war-in-egypt-and-sudan/battle-of-tel-el-kebir/>

Back home at East Stonehouse, Wardell's widow, Frederica, gave birth to Charles, her second son, on the same day that her husband was killed in action. She also had a one-year-old daughter, Nora, and appears to have sought refuge and solace at her father's residence in Shanagolden in Co. Limerick.



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A very rare Officer killed in action during the Egyptian campaign, being one of 11 killed in action, 9 of which were at Tel-El-Kebir