

The Man behind the Medal

171125 A.B. (Able Seaman) G. Kewell – H.M.S. Terrible
2 Bars – Relief of Ladysmith, Tugela Heights



George Kewell was born in West Wittering, Sussex on 27 January 1877. A 'gardener' by occupation, he enlisted in the Royal Navy, at Portsmouth, as a 'Boy 2nd Class' on H.M.S. St. Vincent in January 1893 and was advanced to 'Boy 1st Class' on the same training ship in March 1894.

He was promoted to Ordinary Seaman on the H.M.S. Active in January 1895 and Able Seaman on the H.M.S. Royal Sovereign in September 1896. In March 1898 he was posted to the H.M.S. Terrible and served in the South African War (1899-1902) with the Naval Brigade.

He was involved in battles leading up to the Relief of Ladysmith and was present when the town was relieved. Whilst in service on the ship, after the Relief of Ladysmith, he was advanced to Leading Seaman in April 1900 and Petty Officer 2nd Class in June the same year.

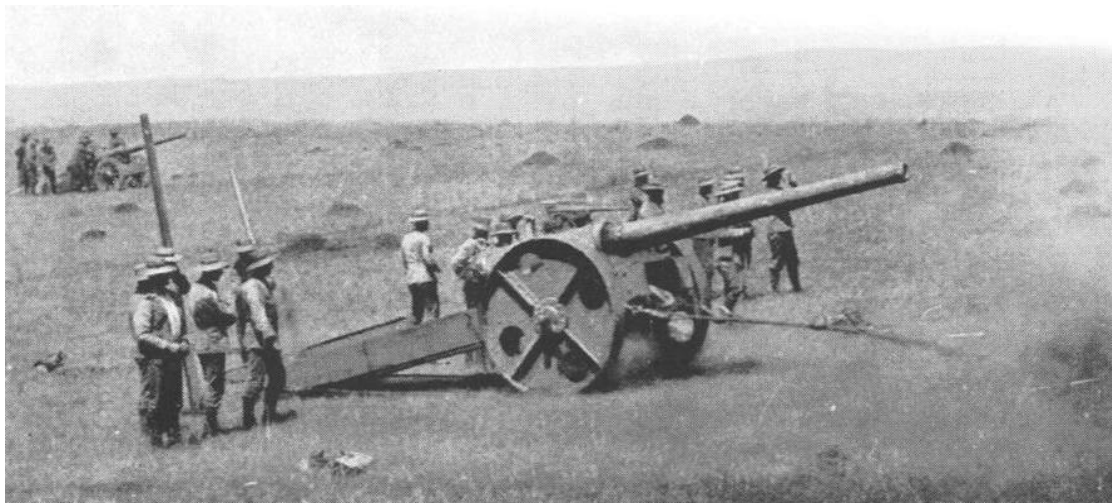
On the same ship, after the South African War, he served in the Third China War and was awarded the China Medal with the clasp for the Relief of Peking. He was promoted to Petty Officer 1st Class when on the H.M.S. Excellent in April 1903. Having been appointed a Chief Petty Officer in 1912, he served throughout the Great War based at H.M.S. Victory 1 and was demobilized in 1920.



The H.M.S. Terrible played a huge role in the South African War (1899-1902), specifically in the Relief of Ladysmith.

H.M.S. Terrible had left Plymouth in September 1899, bound for China to relieve her sister ship H.M.S. Powerful. However, with rumblings of war in South Africa, both ships were ordered to Simon's Town, with H.M.S. Powerful arriving on 14 October 1899 and H.M.S. Terrible arriving a day later. H.M.S. Terrible left Simon's Town on 3 November 1899, arriving in Durban on 6 November.

When the Siege of Ladysmith seemed imminent, General White, the Commander of the garrison in the town, requested guns. Captain Percy Scott, Commander of H.M.S. Terrible, being faced with the request decided to use the guns from a number of British ships in the area, H.M.S. Terrible being one of them, as 'land' guns and proceeded to take them off the ships and mount them for transport, and use, in Ladysmith.



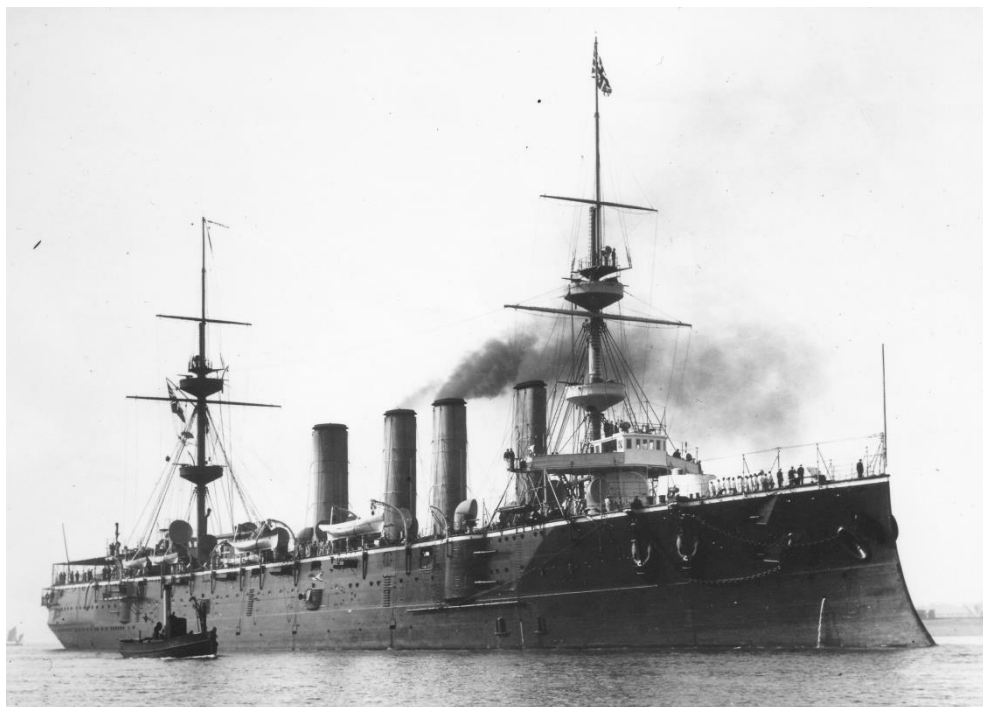
Picture: One of the 4.7 Inch Naval Guns used as 'land guns'

Owen Coetzer in his book, 'Road to Infamy' states (page 29) – *"the Boers were nearing Ladysmith and the British needed guns, big guns, urgently."* Scott had already taken the 12 pounders from the ships and made them mobile. He then saw an opportunity for the massive 4.7 inch guns, and proceeded to have them removed from H.M.S. Terrible and made manoeuvrable. All this had been taking place in Cape Town, working 24 hour shifts. The guns, two 4.7 inch and four 12 pounders, were put on board H.M.S. Powerful and sent to Durban. Once in Durban they were loaded onto a train, which arrived in Ladysmith almost as the siege commenced. Boer General Botha told Scott after the war, that – *"If it wasn't for your guns, the Vierkleur would have flown over Durban"* - Coetzer (page 30).

When General Buller arrived in Natal he was made aware of the gun's capabilities and he immediately ordered two 4.7 inch's and four 12 pounders to be sent to the front. These guns, both in Ladysmith, and with Buller's force trying to relieve the town, were used to counter the Boer's Long Tom and other artillery pieces.



Scott's job was not complete. With General White now being 'locked up' in Ladysmith, communications with the town had also been cut off. Scott came up with a solution – he removed search lights from H.M.S. Terrible, mounted them on carriages, and sent them to the front. The 'Flasher' as it was christened was used every night to communicate with Ladysmith.



Picture: H.M.S. Terrible

George Kewell was one of the Able Seamen who served with Buller's force, as part of the Naval Brigade manning the guns provided by Scott, to counter the Boer's Long Tom artillery, and for this service he was awarded the bars Relief of Ladysmith and Tugela Heights on his Queen South Africa medal. Only 292 Relief of Ladysmith bars and 274 Tugela Heights bars were awarded to H.M.S. Terrible sailors for the eventual relief of the town. In total 1 086 QSA's were awarded to sailors from H.M.S. Terrible, with only 261 having two bars. Coetzer records in his book (page 32) – *"The H.M.S. Terrible's men left Ladysmith after its relief, on 11 March 1900 and arrived in Durban the next day to a tumultuous welcome."*

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Allan Gordon