one of those remaining was dog driver and interpreter Niels Christian Petersen, whose punch lettered metal grave marker included George Porter’s memorial (Figure 6):

George Porter
Gunner RMA
Aged 27
Of HM Sledge Victoria
Who Laid Down His Life in the Service of His Country
8 June 1876
And was Buried on the Floe in Latitude 82.41
Thou Shall wash me and I shall be Whiter than Snow.

Another tangible memorial to the artilleryman’s service in the white desert was created when the name Porter Bay was applied to an arm of the sea on Ellesmere’s northern coast.

Creation of the Arctic Medal 1875-76

Alert and Discovery reached Portsmouth on November 2, 1876, and amid all the public celebration, official thoughts soon turned to medallic matters. An opportunity now presents itself for the author to clarify and supplement a 1994 article presented in the OMRS Journal that in part dealt with the creation of the Arctic Medal 1875-76.

Figure 5: George Porter’s funeral on the ice, 82°41’N (The Illustrated London News, Nov. 11, 1876).

The 15 men in the Northern Sled Party were absent from the ship for 72 days, with only Markham and three others were capable of walking, the rest had to be carried by sledge back to the Alert. Wrote Surgeon Moss, “It was difficult to recognize any of the men, their faces were so swollen and peeled, and their voices so changed.”

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On November 25, Wyon wrote to Fremantle: “I send a sketch for the Arctic medal. Will you be so kind as to return it to me if it is approved? I must also beg for the photograph again, that I may make the model as exact as possible.” (Mint 16/76) This must be a very early and rare example of a medal’s design being credited, in part, to a camera!

Wyon’s decision to represent the Arctic through the camera’s eye may not have been entirely a personal choice. With bureaucratic wheels set in motion, there may have been a time factor at work. In fact, the earliest noted delivery of an Arctic Medal was April 20, 1877—fewer than six months after the Mint was first made aware of the Queen’s desire for a medal.

The first Arctic Medal was octagonal, but the second issue reverted to the traditional circular shape. This gives the feel of a telescopic view of Alert in the vast polar landscape, punctuated by broken ice, with heavy clouds above. Notably, the scene is devoid of human life, further adding to the reality of isolation and starkness in an ocean of chaotic ice and snow.

There were only 167 medals known to have been issued: 155 original issues, plus 12 duplicates. Of that total, 89 are extant (to include one original issue and duplicate to the same recipient) - a 53% survival rate thus far.

Curiously, according to collector David J. Scheeres’ observations over the years, there were at least four differing reverse dies, with changes relating to the sizes and positioning of the clouds. It has been suggested by former Master of the Royal Mint Joe Cussen that the changes centered around the milled rim (which provides a nautical accent reminiscent of a roped border effect).

The Mint may have encountered a lot of problems with the dies because the milling caused the die edges to keep breaking. This feature was only applied to one other medal, the short-lived Naval Engineers’ Good Conduct Medal (1842-46) and was never used again.

A 1996 letter to the author from Scheeres provides additional information from the curator of the Royal Mint:

The Curator of the mint informed me that they also have examples in their collection which have correct naming in a variety of styles which have both beaded [i.e., milled] and unbeaded edges, but of greater interest to you is the fact that there are various dies variations, one of which has the standard reverse, but without clouds (i.e.: a clear sky and horizon). They also have a
die variation in which the engraver’s initials are missing from the nape of the Queen’s neck.

Turning to naming, the 1988 and 2006 editions of British Battles & Medals are somewhat vague on this point, so clarification here is well placed. The medals were engraved in medium serified capitals - identical to the Ashantee 1873-74 to the Navy - and blacked-in (though over time this may have come away). I have inspected about a dozen second Arctic medals through the years and this naming style is consistent for all three ships (Alert, Discovery and the steam yacht Pandora). One falsely engraved example to a genuine recipient (T.H. Simpson, AB, H.M.S. Alert) features taller and thinner letters that are not blacked-in; it also lacks the milled rim.

In the end, one wonder’s what Engineer George White felt when he saw his work translated from a glass negative to silver relief? Indeed, how did Mary Ann Porter feel when she gazed upon the engraved edge of her son’s only medals entitlement?

**Royal Marine Artillery Arctic Medal 1818-1855**

**Roll**

1) **BAINBIRDGE, Thomas** - Bombardier 3rd Class/Resolute (1852-54)
Sent to Tribune April 20, 1857. Resolute’s Muster List shows the above rank, but noted as ‘Corporal’ on the medal roll (without noting R.M. or R.M.A.), so was evidently promoted upon his return home.

2) **DAVIES, John** - Bombardier/Resolute (1850-54)
Sent to Gosport Headquarters June 3, 1857. Known (The Royal Marines Museum).
Medal named: SERGEANT J. DAVIS, RM, HMS RESOLUTE. It is known that Davies was later promoted to sergeant, and since there are no other marine Arctic recipients with the first initial ‘J’ and the surname Davis/Davies, the museum’s medal must have been issued to this man. He was also awarded the Crimea Medal with clasp SEBASTOPOL, Baltic Medal and Turkish Crimea Medal.

3) **EDEY, George** - Bombardier/Assistance (1852-54)
Sent to Gosport Headquarters June 5, 1857.
Bombardier to October 21, 1852, then demoted Gunner to June 30, 1853. Later he was ‘Specially reinstated on the recommendation of Lieut Osborn for subsequent good conduct and exertions in Travelling operations.’

4) **ELLIOTT, John** - Bombardier 1st Class/Assistance (1850-51)
Sent June 5, 1857. As ‘Elliot’ on Medal Roll.

5) **HENSON, Philip** - Bombardier/North Star (1852-54)
Sent to Gosport Headquarters June 3, 1857. Known (private collection).
Bombardier 3rd Class to October 11, 1852, then Bombardier (unclassed). Engraved in small sans serif capitals: P. BENSON R.M.A. H.M.S NORT STAR. Note the differing first letter of the surname, which appears as ‘Henson’ on the Muster List and Medal Roll.

6) **MORGAN, Thomas** - Corporal 3rd Class/Assistance (1850-51)
Sent to Gosport Headquarters June 3, 1857.
Appointed for duty on Intrepid (tender to Assistance).

7) **MUNDEN, Gwilym T.** - Bombardier (unclassed)/Assistance (1852-54)
Sent May 12, 1857.
Discharged October 17, 1854, as Bombardier, but shown as Corporal, R.M.A. on the Arctic Roll. Interestingly, Corporal 1st Class Nicholas Middleton, R.M., is listed directly after Munden on the Medal Roll, but he is incorrectly shown as Corporal R.M.A. It appears to have been a mix-up while compiling the Roll.

8) **ROSS, David** - Bombardier/Resolute (1852-54)
Sent to Gosport Headquarters June 3, 1857.
Resolute’s Muster List shows he was discharged October 17, 1854, as Bombardier, but he is incorrectly shown as Corporal, R.M., on the Medal Roll.

**Note:** There is a Henry Briant, Musician, on the Muster Lists for the Assistance and Resolute (1852-54). Most interestingly, Briant appears on the Muster of the Assistance “for service of galvanic apparatus.” As the bombardiers trained on galvanic batteries in relation to tubes of gunpowder, it is possible Briant was directly connected with ice blasting. He may have also been involved in the operation of the electric telegraph set up by Lieutenant R.V. Hamilton (Resolute), which ran between the Resolute and Intrepid. Briant’s medal is listed under the Resolute and was sent December 27, 1858.

**Royal Marine Artillery Arctic Medal 1875-76**

**Roll**

1) **HILL, Elias** - Gunner/Alert
Sent May 18, 1877. Known.

2) **OAKLEY, Thomas** - Gunner/Alert
Sent May 24, 1877. Known (Royal Naval Museum).
Shown as ‘Oakley’ in both of Poulson’s books, but as ‘Oakley’ on medal, medal roll, official despatches, and in Nares’ and Markham’s books. Also, Poulson and Myres lists him as a bombardier, as does the medal roll, but ‘GUNR.’ is engraved on the medal (according to information provided by the Royal