

Memorial: (WMR 88176) Halling, Kent

PETTY OFFICER STOKER

EDWARD STEVENS

Service Number: 292987
Regiment & Unit/Ship: Royal Navy
H.M.S. "Natal."
Date of Death: Died 30 December 1915
Age 34 years old
Buried/commemorated at: CHATHAM NAVAL MEMORIAL
11.
United Kingdom
Additional Info: Husband of E. H. Stevens, of 5, Marion Terrace,
Kent Rd., Halling, Rochester.



Birth – Burham, Kent.

1907 Marriage to Emily Harriett Shaw

THE LOSS OF HMS NATAL

HMS Natal was a 'Warrior' type cruiser of 13,550 tons. On 30 December 1915 while anchored at Cromarty, there was an explosion aboard caused, as determined by a court of enquiry, by faulty ammunition. The Captain was hosting a film party and had invited a number of guests including his wife and children. While a number of the crew were ashore at a football match, the explosion and the subsequent sinking of the Natal resulted in the deaths of 422 crew and visitors. Of these 415 are currently remembered here. The other seven were the wives of Captain Back and Lieutenant Bennett, and Mr & Mrs Dodds and their 3 children who had been invited aboard.



Commemorated on the Chatham Naval Memorial. Panel 11, as shown above. At the time of the 1901 census, Edward was serving as a Seaman on the 5,600 ton Orlando class armoured cruiser H.M.S. Galatea, at Chatham Dockyard, Kent. Edward was brother of fellow Wouldham Royal Navy Great War casualty, Stoker 1st Class John Stevens, who is also commemorated on the Chatham Naval Memorial, and the Wouldham civic war memorial. For additional brief details appertaining to the Stevens family when the 1901 census was conducted, please also see John's commemoration. H.M.S. Natal, on which Edward was serving at the time of his death, was a Royal Navy 13,550 ton Warrior class armoured cruiser which was commissioned in 1907. She was at anchor in the Cromarty Firth when she quite literally exploded at about 1520 hours on the afternoon of Thursday 30 December 1915. A series of violent internal explosions tore through the ship, and within five minutes she capsized a blazing wreck. At the time of her loss, the ships 24 commander Captain, Eric P.C. Back R.N., and his wife were hosting a party onboard the ship, which included nurses, civilians and children, all of whom were

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among the 388 who lost their lives when the ship blew-up. Those bodies which were recovered from the sea were interred in Rosskeen Churchyard Extensions, (or Burial Ground) Invergordon, Ross-shire, Scotland, and are included amongst the 150 Commonwealth burials from both world wars at rest at Rosskeen. Following the loss of H.M.S. Natal an Admiralty Board of Enquiry was convened; the official result from same was that the explosion onboard H.M.S. Natal was due to the deterioration of cordite in the ships magazine. For many years following the tragedy there was a story circulating in many quarters about the ship having been sabotaged. This apparently was based on 'the fact' that the Dreadnought battleship H.M.S. Vanguard had also exploded mysteriously after being visited by a particular Ordnance Chargehand, who also went into the magazine of H.M.S. Natal just before she too exploded and sank. The man in question is reputed to have then disappeared without trace; an obvious explanation accounting for his disappearance was that he too was lost when H.M.S. Natal exploded. For comprehensive details about the ship, probably the best book to consult is "They Called It Accident" by A. Cecil Hampshire which tells the story of H.M.S Natal from when she was launched until her tragic loss.

[Source Wouldham War Memorial – Wouldham Historical Society]