

**NORTH SEA DISASTER (22<sup>nd</sup> SEPTEMBER 1914)**

**THREE CRUISERS SUNK**

**ABLE SEAMAN CHARLES ALDERTON ROYAL NAVY**

Charles Alderton was born on the 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1877 at Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, the son of Robert and Mary Alderton. Living at 16 Raingate Street, Bury St Edmunds, the household members were in 1881, Robert (father) an iron works labourer aged 49, his wife Mary aged 38, daughters, Elizabeth aged 15, Margaret aged 13, Sarah aged 10, Emma aged 8, Caroline aged 6, Louisa aged 1 year and sons Robert and Charles aged 5 and 3 years respectively. At the age of 14 Charles was lodging with the Baxter family at 68 Raingate Street. He was recorded on the 1891 Census as an 'Errand Boy'. Two years later at the age of 15, he joined the Royal Navy at Chatham as a Boy 2<sup>nd</sup> Class and from the age of 18 for a twelve year engagement.

Charles was described at the age of 15 as being 5ft 1¼-inched in height, with dark brown hair, brown eyes, a dark complexion and had a distinguishing mark on the back of his right hand. On reaching the age of 18 he had grown to 5ft 4-inches in height. His service details were as follows:

<u>Ship</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Period of Service</u>		<u>Character</u>
		<u>From</u>	<u>To</u>	
Impregnable	Boy 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	24 Oct 1893	27 Oct 1893	
Ganges	Boy 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	28 Oct 1893	14 Sep 1894	
Boscawen	Boy 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	15 Sep 1894		
Boscawen	Boy 1 <sup>st</sup> Class	1 Oct 1894	29 Jan 1895	
Pembroke	Boy 1 <sup>st</sup> Class	30 Jan 1895	14 Mar 1895	
Orlando	Boy 1 <sup>st</sup> Class	15 Mar 1895		
Orlando	Ordinary Seaman	26 Dec 1895		
Orlando	Able Seaman	15 Mar 1897	12 May 1898	
Pembroke	Able Seaman	13 May 1898	5 Jul 1898	
Wildfire	Able Seaman	6 Jul 1898	26 Oct 1898	
Pembroke	Able Seaman	27 Oct 1898	31 Oct 1898	

Champion	Able Seaman	1 Nov 1898		
Champion	Leading Seaman	3 Sep 1899	30 Oct 1899	
Minerva	Leading Seaman	31 Oct 1899		
Minerva	P.O. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	13 Jan 1900		
Minerva	Able Seaman	22 May 1900	18 Sep 1900	
Pembroke I	Able Seaman	19 Sep 1900	23 Oct 1900	
Wildfire	Able Seaman	24 Oct 1900	16 Jan 1901	
Pembroke I	Able Seaman	17 Jan 1901	6 Mar 1901	
Perseus	Able Seaman	7 Mar 1901		
Perseus	Leading Seaman	15 May 1902		
Perseus	P.O. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	1 Apr 1902	22 Feb 1904	
Hyacinth	P.O. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	23 Feb 1904		
Mohawk	P.O. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	23 Apr 1904	9 Jun 1904	
Pembroke	P.O. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	10 Jun 1904	21 Feb 1905	
Hecla	P.O. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	22 Feb 1905	8 Jun 1905	
Vengeance	P.O. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Class	9 Jun 1905		
Vengeance	Able Seaman	20 Jul 1905	27 Aug 1905	
Pembroke	Able Seaman	28 Aug 1905	15 Sep 1905	Shore R.F.R.

Joined Royal Fleet Reserve (B3310) 16<sup>th</sup> September 1905

Re-enrolled 1<sup>st</sup> October 1910 to serve to 16<sup>th</sup> September 1915

Charles' character was marked as 'Very Good' and he was awarded his first Good Conduct Badge on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 1900, the second on the 25<sup>th</sup> December 1903 and was deprived of one on the 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1905. From the details on his service record he gained promotion to Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class on two occasions, only to be reverted to Able Seaman. His loss of one Good Conduct Badge coincided with him being dis-rated from Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class to Able Seaman

in June/July 1905. There is no indication on his record as to why he was reduced in rank or for the loss of the Good Conduct Badge.

The Royal Fleet Reserve was established under the authority of 'The Naval Reserve Act 1900' and of 'The Naval Forces Act 1903' to provide a reserve of trained men for service in His Majesty's Fleet in time of emergency. The reserve was comprised of:

#### CLASS A

Life pensioners who drew no retainer but received a Reserve Pension of 5d per day at 50 years of age in addition to their Life Pension.

#### CLASS B & IMMEDIATE CLASS

Men who had served 5 years or more in the Fleet but who were not receipt of a Life Pension. Class B reservists received a retainer of 6d per day and a gratuity of £50 on reaching the age of 40 years and had completed 20 years' service in the Fleet and Royal Fleet Reserve combined.

The Immediate Class received a retainer of 1s per day and a gratuity of £50 under the same conditions as Class B.

Men belonging to Class A and B were required to perform one week's drill at their Home Port each year. Men belonging to the Immediate Class were required to do 28 day's service in the Fleet each year during manoeuvres. Those in Class A and B were permitted to serve in any merchant ships which regularly called at home ports in the United Kingdom. Voyages of six months or longer, permission had to be granted by the Royal Fleet Reserve Registrar.

Enrolment into the Royal Fleet Reserve was for a period of five years and men could re-enrol for an additional five year period up to the age of 40, with some exceptions.

Charles Alderton enrolled into the Royal Fleet Reserve under Class B conditions.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1899 Charles married at Wyke Regis, Nellie Florence Jeanes. She had been born at Yeovil on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1879. After their marriage Nellie lodged with the Shortts family in Weymouth, most probably because Charles was serving with the fleet and the couple had not been able to set up a family home. At the time of the 1901 Census, Charles was serving on HMS Perseus, and was recorded on the 'List of Officers, Crew, Royal Marines and all Other Persons



Chatham Naval Memorial

on Board on the night of Sunday, March 31<sup>st</sup> 1901' at Chatham Dockyard. HMS Perseus, was a Pelorous-class protected cruiser, completed in 1901 and commissioned in March of the same year for service with the East Indies Fleet.

Charles and Nellie subsequently had six children, four daughters and two sons: John born in May 1902, Nellie born in August 1906, Alice born in 1908, Gladys born in September 1909, Charles born in June 1912, and Mable born in February 1914. Alice who was baptised in June 1908 died the following year. The 1911 Census recorded that the family were living at 20 Chickerall Road, Weymouth.

After Charles had enrolled into the Royal Fleet Reserve, he continued his seagoing career in the Mercantile Marine. He is recorded in the 1911 Census serving as a seaman with the Great Western Railway Companies Steamships. The name of the ship which was berthed at Birkenhead had been 'blacked out' on the census form.

When the First World War broke out Nellie and her children were living at 2 John's Road, Weymouth and Charles had been recalled for active service with the fleet and joining the cruiser HMS Cressy. She was one of six Cressy Class armoured cruisers ordered under the 1898 Naval building programme. Her technical details were as follows:

Builder ~ Fairfield Shipbuilding Company, Govan.

Laid Down ~ 12<sup>th</sup> October 1898; Launched 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1899, Completed 28<sup>th</sup> May, 1901;

Displacement ~ 12,000-tons.

Dimension ~ Length Overall 472-ft; Length at Waterline 454-ft; Beam 69-ft; Maximum Draught 28-ft.

Guns ~ 2 x 9.2-inch Mk VIII, 40 Calibre; 12 x 6-inch Mk VII, 45 Calibre; 12 x 2-Pounders (12-cwt); 1 x 2-Pounder (8-cwt); 3 x 3-Pounders; 2 x 18-inch Torpedo Tubes (Submerged).

Armour ~ Belt 2-inch to 6-inch, 11½-ft wide x 230-ft long (5-ft of it below waterline); Decks 1-inch to 3-inch, Barbettes 6-inch, Turrets 6-inch, Conning Tower 12-inch, Bulkheads 5-inch.

Machinery ~ Two sets of 4-Cylinder Vertical Triple Expansion Steam Engines; Twin Screw; 30 x Belleville Boilers.

Designed HP ~ 21,000 = 21-knots,

Coal ~ Normal – 800-tons; Maximum 1,600-tons.

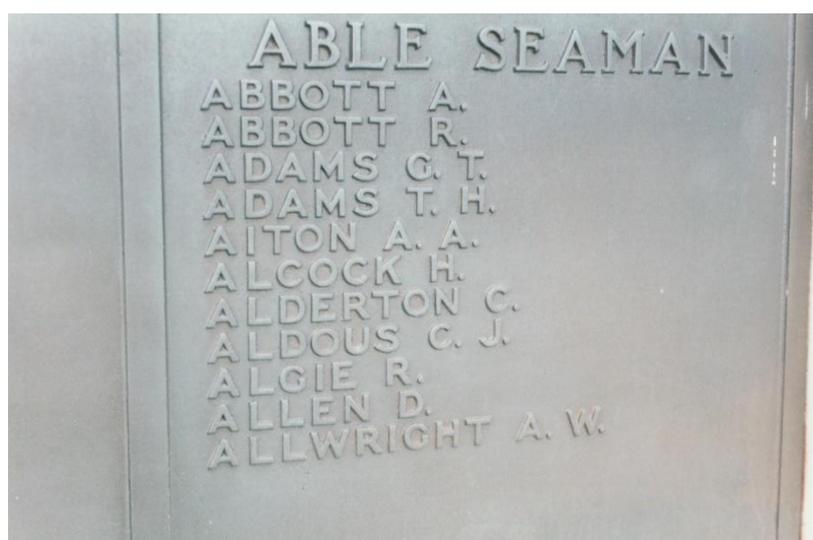
Coal Consumption ~ At 21,000 HP 18 to 19-tons/hour; At 16,000 HP 13-tons/hour.

Complement ~ 700-745 Officers and Men.

Building Cost/Ship ~ £800,000

On completion of her sea trials HMS Cressy was initially assigned to the Fleet Reserve in May 1901 at Portsmouth and then commissioned later in the same month for service on the China Station. Problems with her steering gear delayed her departure to the Far East. She left the United Kingdom in early October 1901 and arrived at Singapore in mid-November. In 1907 HMS Cressy was transferred to the North America and West Indies Station for a two year period and then returned home and placed in reserve.

In August 1914, after the declaration of war on Germany, HMS Cressy was assigned to the 7<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron for duties in the North Sea. During the Battle of Heligoland Bight on the 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1914 HMS Cressy was part of Cruiser Force 'C', in reserve off the Dutch coast, but was not involved in action. After the battle she took aboard 165 German survivors and transported them to the United Kingdom.



Able Seaman Charles Alderton Royal Navy

Name Inscribed On The Chatham Naval Memorial

Rear-Admiral Arthur Christian commanded the Southern Force composed of his flagship HMS Euryalus, the light cruiser HMS Amethyst, the 7<sup>th</sup> Cruiser Squadron – HMS Cressy, HMS Aboukir, HMS Hogue, HMS Bacchante and HMS Euryalus (nicknamed the ‘live bait squadron’) – the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Destroyer Flotillas, 10 submarines of the 8<sup>th</sup> overseas Flotilla and the scout-cruiser HMS Fearless. The Southern Force had the task of patrolling the North Sea, supporting destroyers and submarines of the Harwich Force to guard against a sudden raid by the Imperial German Navy into the English Channel. The Admiralty had concerns that the warships of the Southern Force were outdated and vulnerable compared to the more modern German cruisers. The War Orders of the 28<sup>th</sup> July 1914 remained extant, acknowledging pre-war assumptions about attacks by destroyers rather than submarines. The Admiralty ordered the warships to patrol “South of the 54<sup>th</sup> parallel clear of German torpedo craft and destroyers” supported by

Cruiser Force 'C' during the day. The Harwich patrol guarded the Dogger Bank and the Broad Fourteens further south. Normally the cruisers were to the north closer to the Dogger Bank and sailed south during the night. They moved to the Broad Fourteens to reinforce the Fourth Cruiser Squadron during troop movements from the United Kingdom to France. Patrolling further to the south brought the warships closer to German ports and the danger of submarine attack.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> September, 1914, Rear-Admiral Christian was given permission to keep two cruisers to the south and one at the Broad Fourteens, but had instead kept them together in a central position enabling him to support operations in both areas. On the 17<sup>th</sup> the destroyers had to withdraw due to bad weather which prevented the other warships resuming their allotted patrolling formations. The Admiralty ordered the warships to suspend the Dogger Bank Patrol and cover the Broad Fourteens until the weather improved. HMS Euryalus had to withdraw on the 20<sup>th</sup> and returned to port to re-coal.

In the first six weeks of war the U-boat arm of the Imperial German Navy had deployed ten submarines, two of which were lost and no enemy ships sunk. During the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup> September, Kapitänleutnant Otto Weddigen in U-9 was passing through the Broad Fourteens on his way back to Germany, when he observed three Royal Navy cruisers, HMS Aboukir, HMS Hogue and HMS Cressy.

By 0600 hours the bad weather had abated and HMS Aboukir, HMS Hogue and HMS Cressy were patrolling at 10-knots, in line abreast and approximately two miles apart under the command of Captain J.E. Drummond in HMS Aboukir. Lookouts had been posted for enemy warships and submarines. One gun on the port and starboard side were manned for action. The U-9 had been ordered to attack British transports at Ostend but the bad weather forced the submarine to submerge and seek shelter.

Kapitänleutnant Otto Weddigen surfaced in the Broad Fourteens and prepared to launch his attack against the three British warships. At 0620 hours he fired at the middle ship, HMS Aboukir from a distance of approximately 550 yards and struck the warship on the starboard side, flooding the engine room which caused a loss of power. As no submarines had been sighted Captain Drummond assumed that his ship had struck a mine and ordered the other two cruisers to close on him and render assistance. About twenty-five minutes later HMS Aboukir sank. One lifeboat had been launched but due to the damage caused by the explosion the steam winches could not be used to launch other boats. Captain Wilmot Nicolson of HMS Hogue realized that HMS Aboukir had been attacked by a submarine and signalled HMS Cressy to look

out for a periscope. The U-9 had submerged after firing the torpedo at HMS Aboukir and from periscope depth Kapitänleutnant Otto Weddigen saw the other British cruisers rescuing men from the disabled and sinking warship. He fired two torpedoes at HMS Hogue from 300 yards. As he did so the bow of U-9 rose above the surface of the water and HMS Hogue opened fire as the U-9 submerged. Both torpedoes hit HMS Hogue and within minutes her captain gave the order to abandon ship. At 0715 hours she slipped below the cold waters of the North Sea.

Lookouts on HMS Cressy had also seen the U-9 and opened fire and made an attempt to ram her. She then turned about to begin the task of rescuing survivors. At 0720 hours U-9 fired two torpedoes at HMS Cressy from her stern tubes and at a range of 1000 yards. One torpedo missed. Kapitänleutnant Otto Weddigen brought the U-9 around and fired his remaining bow torpedo from 550 yards. The first torpedo struck the starboard side and second one the port side of HMS Cressy. She capsized to starboard and floated upside down until a few minutes before 0800 hours and then disappeared beneath the waves.



Weymouth War Memorial

Commodore Tyrwhitt had received distress calls and was at sea with his destroyers as the weather had improved. A Dutch ship, the Flora cautiously approached the scene of the disaster fearing mines and rescued 286 men. Another ship the Titan rescued 147 and two trawlers other survivors before the destroyers arrived at 1045 hours. The destroyers undertook a search for the U-9 which had submerged and returned to Germany on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, where the crew were greeted as heroes. Kapitänleutnant Otto Weddigen received the Iron Cross first and second class, the crew the Iron Cross second class. A total of 837 men were rescued, while 62 officers and 1,397 men, mainly of the Royal Naval Reserve perished. Among the latter was Able Seaman Charles Alderton. He was 37 years of age. The 28 officers and 258 men rescued by the Flora were landed at IJmuiden and repatriated on the 26<sup>th</sup> September.

Public concerns were aroused over the loss of HMS Aboukir, HMS Hogue and HMS Cressy. The Admiralty's previous casual and dismissive attitude of the danger posed by submarines to surface ships caused them to review their previous and outdated policy concerning underwater

warfare. Rear-Admiral Christian was reprimanded and Captain Drummond criticised for failing to follow the Admiralty's anti-submarine precautions but praised him for his conduct during the attack.

Kapitänleutnant Otto Weddigen was born in Herford, a province of Prussian Westphalia on the 18<sup>th</sup> September, 1882. He entered the Imperial German Navy on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1901 as a Seekadett. Promoted on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1902 to Fähnrich sur See, Leutnant zue See on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 1904, Oberleutnant zur See on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1906 and Kapitänleutnant on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1912. He commanded U-9 from the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1911 to the 11<sup>th</sup> January 1915 and the U-29 from the 16<sup>th</sup> February 1915 to the 18<sup>th</sup> March 1915. On the 16<sup>th</sup> July 1914 his crew performed for the first time in history the difficult job of reloading torpedoes while submerged a valuable achievement which would be repeated during the war with devastating effects. During his submarine career he sank four warships (43,350-tons), four merchant ships (12,934-tons) and damaged two others. For distinguished and outstanding submarine action he received the Pour le Mérite on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1914. He also received on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 1914 the first Bavarian Military Order of Max Josef Order of the First World War that was given to non-Bavarians, the Military Order of St Henry (Saxony) on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1914 and the Military Merit Order (Württemberg) on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1914. Pre-war he had received a Lifesaving Medal and the Order of the Red Eagle. Kapitänleutnant Otto Weddigen died on the 18<sup>th</sup> March 1915 whilst commanding U-29 which was rammed and sunk by HMS Dreadnought in the Pentland Firth. There were no survivors.

Southern Times ~ Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1914.

### The Torpedoing Of British Cruisers

#### Uncertain Fate of A Weymouth Man On H.M.S. Cressy

There are very few ships in the British navy probably, on which a Weymouth man is not serving, and some of the comparatively light naval disasters before the sinking of three twin-screw armoured cruisers, Aboukir, Cressy and Hogue, this week have a tragic interest for more than one Weymouth family.

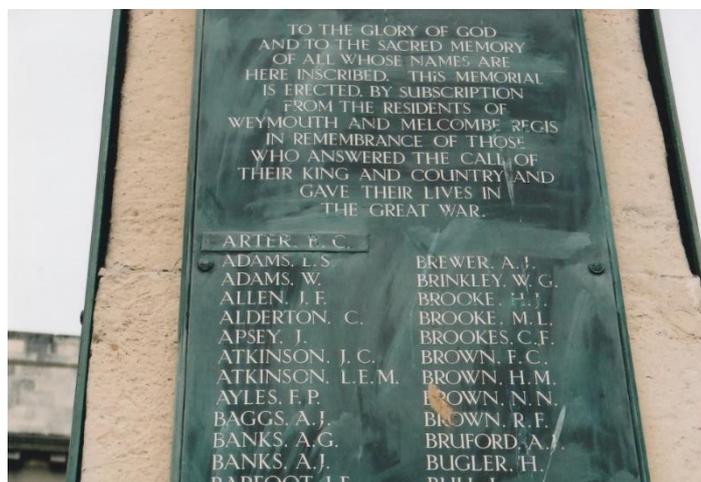
Mention is made elsewhere of the Weymouth lad Frampton who was killed on the Pegasus. A Weymouth nurse had a brother killed on the Pathfinder, and in the Carmania, which in a glorious stand-up fight, sank an armed German liner, a man named Honeybun was serving and is reported safe. No tidings have yet reached Weymouth as the fate of Able Seaman Alderton, Royal Fleet Reserve, who was on board the Cressy, and whose wife lives at 2 Johns Street. As recently as Sunday, Mrs Alderton received a postcard from him conveying the brief message

that he was all right. Alderton has been ten years in the Reserve, and when called up he joined the Cressy at Chatham.

Southern Times ~ Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1914.

### Naval Casualties ~ Weymouth Men Lost

When the lists were published on Saturday of the men who were reported safe in connection with the loss of the three British cruisers, Aboukir, Hogue and Cressy, they were anxiously searched by one Weymouth family at least. Serving on board Cressy (as we stated last week) was Able Seaman Aldington\* Royal Fleet Reserve, who has a wife and a family of five living at 2 John's Street, Weymouth. No such name appeared among the list of those saved; but when seen by a representative of the Southern Times Mrs Aldington was hopeful of receiving tidings of her husband's safety. Instances have occurred where men have been picked up by trawlers but whose names did not appear in the official list of those saved and this has fortified Mrs Aldington in the hope that her husband might still be safe. But now we learn with regret, in response to a telegram, which was despatched to the Admiralty, the Secretary regretting that Aldington was not among the men rescued. The deepest sympathy will be felt for Mrs Aldington and her young family.



AB Charles Alderton RN – Weymouth War Memorial

Among the sailors lost on the Cressy in the recent naval disaster was a man named Brantingham, who had relatives living in Weymouth up to a short time ago, and who was known at Westham.

\*This article names the missing seaman as Aldington (printer's error maybe), the article of the 26<sup>th</sup> September, has the correct surname Alderton.

Charles Alderton's name is commemorated on the Chatham Naval Memorial. After the First World War, an appropriate way had to be found of commemorating those members of the Royal Navy who had no known grave, the majority of the deaths having occurred at sea where no permanent memorial could be provided. An Admiralty committee recommended that the three manning ports in Great Britain – Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth – should each have an identical memorial of unmistakable naval form, an obelisk, which would serve as a leading mark

for shipping. The memorials were designed by Sir Robert Lorimer, (1864-1929) who had already carried out a considerable amount of work for the Commission, with sculpture by Henry Poole (1873-1928). After the Second World War it was decided that the naval memorials should be extended to provide space for commemorating the naval dead without graves of that war, but since the three sites were dissimilar, a different architectural treatment was required for each. The architect for the Second World War extension at Chatham was Sir Edward Maufe (1882-1974) and the additional sculpture was by Charles Wheeler (1892-1974) and William McMillan (1887-1977). Chatham Naval Memorial commemorates more than 8,500 sailors of the First World War and over 10,000 from the Second World War.

Charles Alderton is also commemorated on the Weymouth War Memorial. His wife Nellie applied for a 'Naval Pension to Widows Of Men Whose Death Is Attributable To Warlike Operations'. Her five children were granted allowances of 1s 6d per week from 26<sup>th</sup> December 1914 until they reached to age of 16. Nellie received 19/6d per week totalling 27/- per week paid to her and the children from 25<sup>th</sup> March 1915. She also received her husband's 1914-15 Star, British War Medal 1914-1920, Allied Victory Medal 1914-1919, Bronze Memorial Plaque and Commemorative Scroll. Nellie died on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1943 aged 64 years.

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Sources:

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Web-Site ~ [www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org)

National Archives ~ Service Record Charles Alderton – ADM 188/290/176323

Ancestry Web-Site ~ [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) – UK Naval Medal and Award Rolls 1793-1972

Extract From ~ The Royal Fleet Reserve & How To Join It

Wikipedia Web-Site ~ [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) – HMS Cressy; Otto Weddigen; Action of 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1914;

Ancestry Web-Site ~ [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)

UK FWW Pension Ledger & Index Cards 1914-1923 ~ Western Front Association

Royal Fleet Reserve ~ [www.sites.rootsweb.com](http://www.sites.rootsweb.com)

Southern Times ~ Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1914

Southern Times ~ Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1914

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