



AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION PORT MORESBY

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MEDIA RELEASE

100 years since World War I actions in New Britain

Australia and Papua New Guinea will lead commemorations in September to remember and honour the men who fell in World War I battles and actions in New Britain 100 years ago.

Services in Kokopo and Rabaul this week will mark the Battle of Bita Paka on September 11 and the loss of the Royal Australian Navy submarine, the HMAS AE1, on September 14.

At the outbreak of the First World War, Germany administered several territories in the south and central Pacific and operated a small naval fleet. In order to prevent harbours in these territories being used by the fleet, Australia and New Zealand were requested by Britain to dispatch forces to occupy them.

On 11 September 1914, troops from the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force landed in Rabaul to search for and destroy German radio stations. A patrol of 25 Australians encountered a composite force of German reservists and New Guinean police at Bita Paka. Six Australians, one German and 30 New Guinean police died in this action. The Australians who fell at Bita Paka were the first of more than 60,000 Australians killed in the Great War.

The Royal Australian Navy's first submarine, the AE1, disappeared on 14 September after last being seen off Duke of York Island in St George's Channel. No trace of the AE1 or her crew of 35 have been found. It has been presumed that AE1 struck a coral reef and sunk.

Australian High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea, Ms Deborah Stokes, said the services would honour the sacrifice and bravery of all the men who died in devotion to their duty.

"The First World War was a global conflict that drew in over 100 countries. It is essential to commemorate, remember, and learn from those who sacrificed their lives during those four years, 1914 – 1918," Ms Stokes said.

The remembrance services are open to the public. The service to commemorate the Battle of Bita Paka will be held at the Bita Paka War Cemetery, Kokopo, at 10am on 11 September. The service to commemorate the loss of the AE1 will be held at the Montevideo-Maru Memorial Site, Rabaul, at 10am on 14 September 2014.

Photos:

Bit a Paka 1 –New Guinea troops at drill, being trained by German Reservists, shortly before the arrival of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force. Photo: Australian War Memorial

Bit a Paka 2 – Captain Brian Pockley, Australian Army Medical Corps, killed at Bit a Paka on 11 September 1914. Photo: Australian War Memorial