

## MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

### **The action at Bita Paka 11 September 1914**

Following a request from the British government, the Australian Naval & Military Expeditionary Force (ANMEF) was formed on 6 August 1914. Its sole purpose was to destroy German wireless stations, operating in the Caroline Islands at Nauru and New Britain, which were communicating with the German East Asian Cruiser squadron operating in Pacific waters. The ANMEF was raised separately from the Australian Imperial Force, and comprised 1,500 militia infantry and 500 naval reservists and ex-sailors. On 11 September 1914 shore parties landed unopposed at Rabaul and nearby Kabakaul, where a patrol of 25 Australian naval reservists pushed inland to the wireless station at Bita Paka. There they were engaged by a composite force of German reservists and Melanesian police. In this action Australia suffered six dead and five wounded, and took possession of the wireless station. It was the first Australian action of the First World War. Those Australians killed at Bita Paka were the first of more than 60,000 killed in the four-year conflict.



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Members of the Australian Navy & Military Expeditionary Force bringing Captain Brian Colden Antill Pockley, the medical officer, on board HMAT *Berrima*. Pockley had gone out to rescue Able Seaman Williams, who had been wounded by enemy fire. Both men died later that day.



[H05465](#)

Able Seaman William Williams, Royal Australian Naval Reserve, killed at Bita Paka on 11 September 1914.

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### [H19316](#)

Captain Brian Pockley, Australian Army Medical Corps, killed at Bita Paka on 11 September 1914. Capt Pockley was shot on Bita Paka Road near Kabakaul, 11 September 1914, removed to HMAS Berrima where he died of his wounds; the first Australian officer to be killed in the First World War. After they encountered German soldiers on Bita Paka Road, Able Seaman William Williams was shot in the stomach and Pockley had given his red cross armband to another naval serviceman, Stoker Kember, to carry Williams to the rear. This was done to protect the transporting of the wounded Williams; Pockley was shot shortly after. Pockley and Williams were taken back to HMAS Berrima, one of the ships that had carried the Australian force to Rabaul and they both died on board that afternoon. Six Australians were killed and four wounded in the battle of Bita Paka. "Pockley's action in giving up his red cross badge, and thus protecting another man's life at the price of his own, was consonant with the best traditions of the Australian army, and afforded a noble foundation for those of Australian Army Medical Corps in the war," wrote author S. S. Mackenzie in the official history, *The Australians at Rabaul*.



### [A02544](#)

German New Guinea local troops at drill, being trained by German Reservists, shortly before the arrival of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN&MEF).

### **Further Reading:**

Michael Kelly, "First to Fight: At the battle of Bita Paka the AN & MEF was the First Australian Combat", *Wartime*, no 67