

Basic Detail Report



00055239

Title

Service Medals and Sweetheart Broach Belonging to AE1 Crewman Able Seaman James Thomas

Date

after 1914

Medium

Metal (bronze, cupro-nickel and copper(lacquered in bronze)) Ribbon

Dimensions

Overall: 10 × 100 × 118 mm, 112 g

Name

Service Medals and Brooch

History

James Thomas served as an Able Seaman aboard AE1 when it disappeared, and--like many of the submarine's crew--was seconded to the Royal Australian Navy from the British Royal Navy. He was born at St. Helen's, Worcester, England, in May 1883 and commenced service in the RAN on 16 May 1913. Within a year, he was training aboard submarines, and was assigned to HMAS PENGUIN (the depot ship for AE1 and its sister-submarine AE2) in May of 1914. Thomas was accompanied to Australia by his wife, Emma, and their two sons. They were living on Petersham Road in Marrickville (Sydney) at the time of AE1's loss. Tragically, the day the family disembarked at Sydney they were met on the wharf by Thomas' Marrickville neighbour with a telegram advising that he was missing. The Thomas family remained in Australia and eventually received compensation. More family followed from the United Kingdom in later years. In December 2017, a search for Australia's first submarine, HMAS AE1, was undertaken by a collaborative team comprising researchers and specialists from the Silentworld Foundation, ANMM, Find AE1 Ltd., the Royal Australian Navy and Fugro, N.V. The search was successful and identified AE1's final resting place off the Duke of York Islands in Papua New Guinea. In April 2018, further research was carried out at the site by the ANMM, Find AE1 Ltd. and Curtin University's HIVE (Hub for Immersive Visualisation and eResearch) aboard R/V PETREL, a vessel owned by Microsoft co-founder Paul G. Allen and operated by Vulcan, Inc. Also on board was a Remotely-Operated Vehicle (ROV) and images relayed back to researchers aboard PETREL revealed vital clues to a sequence of events that led to AE1's loss. For example, the submarine's bow and stern torpedo tube caps were found to be either partially or fully open, and that this appears to have been an intentional act carried out on the surface. Why the caps were open, and whether they contributed in some manner to the loss will likely never be known. Similarly, the reason that a ventilation valve was partially open will probably never be known, but it is fair to say that it was one of the root causes of the

submarine's demise once it began to submerge on what would be its last dive. Despite efforts by the crew to recover—as evidenced by the positions of the submarine's hydroplanes—AE1 was overwhelmed by the inflow of water through the ventilation valve and began to sink by the stern. At an unknown depth, the forward pressure hull partially imploded, killing the crew instantly. The submarine continued its fatal dive until it struck the seabed stern first at a shallow angle, breaking off the skeg and rudder. The hull then pitched forward, breaking AE1's back and possibly snapping off all four hydroplane guards. This violent movement also affected the fin, which—likely already weakened structurally during the implosion—began to topple forward into the remnants of the control room. Going forward, the imagery and 3D model generated as a result of the 2018 investigations will prove critical in AE1's ongoing interpretation, exhibition and management.