Gunner Albert Charles Edgar (Edward) Smith



Albert Charles Edgar Smith was born at Nicholls Rivulet, son of William (Willie) Henry Smith (1858-1934) and Magdalena Christina Dorothea Bonham, most often called Lena (1860-1988). Grandson of the famous last full blood Aboriginal Tasmanian Fanny Cochrane Smith, he was born on the 19 July 1896, one of three brothers, to Amberzine Ward (nee Smith), more often called Ida (Coad n.d.). While nothing much is known of Albert's childhood and early life at Nicholls Rivulet before he enlisted in the war, some idea can be formed of his life during those early years from the memories passed on from the older members of the Smith family. However much can also be gleaned from the similar experiences of his siblings and cousins. Albert was baptised as Albert Charles Edgar Smith on the 6th September 1896 in Irish Town Tasmania, now known as Nicholls Rivulet (Blair, 2016).

Grandson of Fanny Cochrane Smith



The Wybalenna settlement on Flinders Island, Tasmania



Fanny Cochrane Smith

About Fanny Cochrane Smith

Fanny, Albert's grandmother had a very hard life before she came to Nicholls Rivulet. In 1833 George Augustus Robinson (1791-1866) was instrumental in the removal of over 200 Aborigines to the Wybalenna Aboriginal Establishment on Flinders Island. Here, Fanny Cochrane Smith was born in December 1834. The conditions for the Aborigines at the settlement were appalling and many of them died each year. The huts they lived in were old and damp and very crowded. The Aborigines were forced under the European rule to be taught their ways to become like them. A diet of salted meat, flour, tea and sugar caused many health problems and it was a rare occasion when they were allowed to go mutton birding and catch their food. Fanny stayed here on and off until 1847, when the establishment was abandoned. The name of Fanny Cochrane's blood father is unknown because it wasn't written down at her birth, however Nicermenic (anglicized to 'Eugene') had been a father to her all her life and Fanny and all her descendants claim that he was her real father. Fanny's mother was called Tanganuturra later anglicized to 'Sarah'. Fanny had a half-sister, Mary Ann and a half-brother, Adam. At age eight, Fanny Cochrane left Flinders Island and was admitted to the Queens Orphan School in New Town on the 9 December 1842, being one of three aboriginal children who arrived together. Fanny was aged 8, Martha 7 and Jessie 9. Fanny only stayed at the school until the 8 February 1843 when she was discharged to a man named Mr Clark on the order of the government. Martha was sent away as well but Jessie died in hospital on the 2 March. Fanny resided with Robert Clark for eight months after which he felt unable to continue looking after his charge and requested him to return her to the Institution. Despite Clark's claim that he was educating Fanny, bringing her up and feeding her as his own, he treated her very badly; so badly that I do not want to mark these pages with his awful deeds. It was decided by His Excellency, Sir John Franklin, the Governor of Van Diemen's Land- that rather than return Fanny to the Institution, she should be sent back to Flinders Island. Fanny stayed with Mr Clark for a further four years and worked as a servant with a minimal salary. While in Mr. Clark's residence, Fanny acquired her last name Cochrane, the maiden name of Mr. Clark's wife (On Being Aboriginal, 1984).

On the 20 October 1847 Flinders Island was evacuated and all the inhabitants were forced to move to Oyster Cove. There had been a build-up of problems at Wybalenna for several years; the Europeans were quarrelling and the Aborigines were neglected and felt that no one cared for them anymore. The treatment of the aborigines became harsher than ever. Oyster Cove was only 30 kilometres south of Hobart and was an old convict station. It was chosen because it was thought to be too unhealthy for convicts to live there anymore. By this time only 22 females, 15 males and 10 children were alive. Fanny, Sarah and Mary-Ann were among them. Fanny was aged 13 at the time.

Every summer Fanny went on hunting trips with her people and learnt many traditional bush and trapping skills and learned to love the sea. She remained at the settlement for seven years until 1854 when she married a sawyer and former convict William Smith. He first saw her when she was 18 years old and was instantly captivated by her lithe and graceful movements as she ran across the beach gathering shellfish and it reminded him of the young deer he had seen in the forests when he was young. He fell in love with her at first sight (*On Being Aboriginal*, 1984).

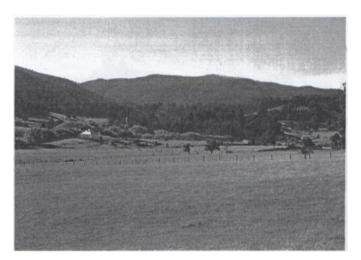
Convict grandfather

William Smith was born in England and was sentenced to seven years transportation, for stealing a donkey, and arrived on May 1844.

William requested from the government to marry Fanny and was granted permission as well as a monthly amount of money equal to the cost to keep her at Oyster Cove. Fanny was initially granted 100 acres (40.5 hectares) of land in 1858 by the government for being Aboriginal. She chose the land at Nicholls Rivulet because it was fertile and well-watered. Her land was in a narrow valley that was surrounded by rugged hills. Tall gum trees covered most of the land and dense bushes grew alongside the banks of the rivulet. There were not very many people at Nicholls Rivulet when Fanny and William moved there (*On Being Aboriginal*, 1984).

Despite their being major discrepancies as to whether Fanny's claim of being 100% aboriginal was correct or not the Government acknowledged her full aboriginality and granted her a further 500 acres (a total of 243 hectares) of land. The amount of money she was paid was also increased to 50 pounds (\$100) each year, over double what it was. The first 100 acres of land Fanny was given; she did not have the right

to sell but by 1889 she had been given the full ownership of the land (*On Being Aboriginal* 1984). The government did this, perhaps to regain favour and compensate for the awful treatment they gave her people. While this was of great benefit to Fanny and her family and her children it is still no excuse for the disgusting and heedless way the Aborigines were treated. Fanny used her land for hunting, celebrations and events, logging and a bit of farming. She also donated a portion of it to have a Methodist church built on it which can still be seen there today. As Fanny's eleven children grew older she divided some of her land up between them and Fanny and her daughters worked tirelessly on the land. Each child had his or her allotment of land which they built their houses on and grew food to sell in their orchards. Albert and his brother would have worked with his father on his portion of land and they were probably still living at home until they enlisted. Ida and Billy, had by that time married and moved away from the family home (Blair, 2016).



Some of Fanny Cochrane Smith's land grant

Fanny was reasonably well educated whilst at Wybalenna on Flinders Island, and the Orphan School in Hobart as a child. William her husband was also well educated although a convict and they would have ensured that their children were also. Albert, along with his brothers, William (Billy) Henry Smith jun. and Archie Wilmore Smith and Ida attended Nicholls Rivulet State School probably from the usual age of around the age of seven or eight until 14 when they would have had to leave to find work or help their father. Albert was most likely at the school from 1904 until 1910. Upon leaving school Albert would have worked for his father or found some local work, His father has been listed on various records as a bushman, labourer, farmer,

sewer, sawmiller but almost all Fanny's children owned orchards so it is highly likely that this was Willie's sole form of profit. On Albert's records he is listed as a labourer/orcharder (Blair, 2016).

Fanny Cochrane Smith lived between two cultures



Despite Fanny's hard start in life and anger she would have felt at the unfair and awful treatment of her family and people she was a very kind and giving person. Her doors were always open and people were welcome to drop by. She somehow managed to fit between both of her cultures, while still maintaining her aboriginal heritage and practices and she was well respected and accepted into the European society. She was described by her neighbour as 'one of the best natured women I have ever known. Her character was of the finest quality' (*On Being Aboriginal*, 1984). She was very charitable and always saw the best in everyone. I find it astounding that she still maintained this trust in people despite having her younger brother die of

tuberculosis due to damp conditions, her people confined and having been through the things she did when she was younger (On Being Aboriginal, 1984).

Albert was eight and a half when his grandmother died so he would have known her well and participated in all her picnics and concerts. His father, like almost all Fanny's children had been given a block of her land to live on so Albert would have lived fairly close by to Fanny (Blair, 2016). Her cooking ability and hospitality made her famous in the Cygnet region and some people said her cooking was the best they had ever tasted. Every year, to raise money for the church she held dinners and picnics and concerts at her home. Fanny was a great entertainer and people came from all around to attend her events (*On Being Aboriginal*, 1984). Albert had 34 cousins, 12 of whom were the same age as him and lived close by (Blair, 2016). Picnics were held at Easter and Christmas and the barn was used as an improvised concert hall where Fanny would sing her native songs (*On Being Aboriginal*, 1984).

Aboriginal women were always excellent very strong swimmers and Fanny was no exception (*On Being Aboriginal*, 1984). She often swam in a deep part of the creek on an adjourning property known as Ribbons Hole, despite it not being 'proper' for a woman to do so. She loved to dive to the bottom of the swimming hole and sit on the big rock there, holding her breath for as long as she could. Fanny taught all her children to swim, gently introducing them to the water by carrying them on her back. She would have encouraged her grandchildren to swim and Albert would probably have spent much time swimming with his cousins (Blair, 2016).

Fanny's grand-daughter Gladys, a year older than Albert, has told her family much about Fanny. She was apparently a very jovial person, always playing jokes on the children. Gladys also recalled outings with and her cousin Augustus Eugene Smith called Gus (born in 1891) in a boat on the river, and Fanny telling them that she would save them if the boat capsized. Albert would possibly have had the same or similar experiences with his grandmother and he would have attended all the family social events and church gatherings. His father was a lay preacher in the Cygnet Methodist circuit gatherings so there would have been frequent social gatherings within the church community and in nearby areas, such as Gardners Bay, which was just over the hills in the next valley (Blair, 2016).

Cousin Augustus 'Gus' Eugene Smith enlists





Gus, Albert's cousin was one of the eight

grandchildren of Fanny's who served in the First World War and he also lived with Albert. When Gus was about nine years old Isabella Smith, his mother died. He went to live with his uncle William, Albert's father and would have grown up with Albert and Archie when he was younger. He married Silvia Gladys Johnston in 1913 but was not living with her for some time; perhaps a reason for enlisting. Gus apparently had Rumeratic fever in 1912 and perhaps another reason why he moved away. He was only four years older than Albert and enlisted five months before Albert and Archie in July 1915. In France in 1916, he suffered from shell shock and was admitted to a military hospital in Wiltshire England. His cause of death was recorded as heart failure and he died on the 19 December 1919. Gus is buried in the churchyard of St George Parish church at Fovant in England. He was buried in an oak coffin with brass fittings. Around 40 or 50 members of the AIF or Imperial troops attended his funeral with full military honours. His medals were sent to his uncle (Blair, 2016).

Albert and Archie enlist

Albert, his two brothers and his father belonged to the Nicholls Rivulet Football Team which was mostly comprised of his cousins and relatives, 10 of the team being grandsons of Fanny. In 1913 the football team played 14 matches in the season; they won 11, lost two and had one draw. The big team photograph taken suggests that they may have won the premiership for the season. Albert and his brothers Archie and Billy along with six of his Smith cousins were a part of the photo. His father Willie, and Aunt Mary's husband, Billy Miller were also photographed with the team,



The Nicholls Rivulet football team

possibly acting as coaches or the team manager. At the time Albert was 17 and he may have played another two seasons before he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in November 1915. By then the team may have disbanded with so many of the Cygnet men enlisting, Albert and Archie being two of them (Blair, 2016).

Albert and Archie enlisted together in the AIF on the 3rd November 1915 at Ross. He was almost 19½ at the time and was given the position of gunner in the 6th Field Artillery Brigade 3rd Reinforcement. Before he enlisted Albert worked as a labourer and Archie as a sawmill worker ("Smith Albert Charles Edward" 1996). Their father owned an orchard so Albert would have helped him and probably worked there (Blair 2016). Albert's service number was 12407 and after almost three months of training he embarked on HMAT Themesosceles A32 on the 28 January 1916 from Melbourne. Albert was later moved to the 4th Field Artillery Brigade on the 5 October 1916. Albert was 5 feet, 6 inches tall and weighed 140 pounds. He had a chest measurement of 32/34 inches and he was listed as having a fair complexion despite acquiring the nickname "Darky," probably because of his dark brown eyes and black hair ("Smith Albert Charles Edward" 1996). When Albert enlisted he listed his middle name as Edward instead of Edgar, the name he was baptised with. The true reason for this is unknown.

"He was in the 11th Battery and was known as Darky – he was dark, short, very quiet and a gunner and acted as runner," as described by Gunner B. Cookston.

After his death, some of his mates who were witnesses described him:

"He was short, very dark, black hair, about 25.26..." described Sergeant T.S. Lambie.

Private. W.S. Mc Fadzen, talked about him very highly:

"He was of medium build, short and of very dark complexion, about 23 years of age, and single. He came from Tasmania and joined the Battery [4th FAB] at La Boisselle in February, 1917. He was a quiet chap and kept to himself and was popular amongst his mates." ("Red Cross Wounded And Missing: Albert Charles Edward Smith | Australian War Memorial" 2016)

Minority of Aboriginals allowed to enlist

Albert, Archie, Gus and seven of their other cousins were part of the small minority of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders that were allowed to enlist in the First World War. Somewhere between 400 and 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers and also Pacific Islanders did serve in the First World War, however that doesn't mean that they were treated with total equality. Many of these men simply lied about their ethnicity. Many were also not allowed to put the true colour of their skin down on their enlistment forms and were forced to put 'fair' for complexion. I have only come across one so far which has written 'dark.' Around a third of those soldiers served overseas and became casualties and were either killed or wounded. Because the enlistment forms did not record Aboriginality it is impossible to say how many soldiers of Aboriginal descent enlisted and fought in the war (Coulthart, 2012).

In an article written by Dr Chris Clark about Indigenous Service, he reported in 1916 instructions were issued to recruiting centres for the 'Guidance of enlisting officers at approved military depots' stating: 'Aboriginals. Half-casts, or men with Asiatic blood are not to be enlisted – This applies to coloured men'. But by the end of the year the casualties were so appalling from the famous battles of Pozieres and Fromelles that they were in severe need for new recruits. The Australian Government was getting worried about meeting the quotas of extra troops demanded by the British Empire. After the attempts to bring in conscription failed in the 1916 referendum, by late 1917 the government changed its laws to allow the enlistment of 'half-castes'-although certification was required stating that one of the parents was of European origin. The Australian War Memorial reported that once Aborigines were enlisted they enjoyed the same pay as other soldiers and were 'generally accepted without prejudice' (Coulthart, 2012).

Disgracefully, when the Aboriginal soldiers returned home from overseas service they were once again denied the same rights as other soldiers. Only one New South Wales Aboriginal soldier was given land in the soldier settlement scheme despite the fact that much of the best farming land in aboriginal reserves was confiscated for soldier settlement blocks (Coulthart, 2012).

Albert's war service

When Albert enlisted in the war he was admitted to the 6th Field Artillery Brigade, and departed Melbourne as the 3rd Reinforcement with the position of Gunner from the 15 December 1915. The 6th FAB was a subdivision of the 2nd Division Artillery. On the 21 December 1915 the troops of the 6th FAB disembarked at Suez en route to the Western Front.

In April, May and June 1916 troops of the 6th FAB first fought on the front line in an area south of Armentieres known as Bois Grenier. On the 3 July, they handed over to the 4th Division Artillery AIF. In late July the brigade grouped with the 1st Australian Division Artillery in Sausage Valley. The 6th FAB was involved in the attack on Pozieres. On the night of the 29th the 2nd Division was expected to attack however the dust made by the shelling of the Germans prevented the gunners from aiming properly. Fire was eventually stopped in accordance with orders given. Heavy fire and shelling was experienced by the troops while at Sausage Valley ("AWM4 Subclass 13/34 - Headquarters, 6th Australian Field Artillery Brigade" 2016).

The 6th FAB fought in Mash Valley from 18 August to 6 September, and in Ypres from 10 September until Albert was transferred in October 1916. On 2 October 1916 Albert was detached from the 2nd Divisional Ammunition Column (D.A.C.) for duty with the Trench Mortar School. On the 15 October 1916, he re-joined the 2nd D.A.C. and fought with his division in the battle at Fler until 23 November 1916 ("Smith Albert Charles Edward" 1996).

Frank Crozier, a war artist who fought for some time in the war made this famous statement: "Sausage Valley was the scene of desperate fighting in the opening stages of the Somme battle in 1916..." ("Sausage Valley" 2016)

He was transferred to the 4th Field Artillery Brigade on the 12 March 1917 when the 6th FAB disbanded in January 1917 as part of an AIF-wide reorganization of artillery and units. The 4th FAB consisted of three artillery batteries, the 10th, 11th and 12th. Albert was moved to the 11th. Albert joined his Battery after the capture of La Boisselle, a village 22 miles north-east of Amiens as part of the battle of the Somme. In March when the Germans retreated to the Hindenburg Line his new

brigade moved to Bullecourt. In June they moved to Flanders where they were occupied supporting allied attacks on Messines, Menin Road, Polygon Wood, Broodseinde and Passchendaele, constantly in action until November that year. In the latter location, his Brigade suffered their heaviest casualties of the war. In October 151 men were ill, wounded, or killed and a further 145 in November. When the Germans captured Villers Bretonneux in April the following year the 4th FAB consequently moved to the Somme. When the Australian Offensive began in August they supported the infantry as they moved through Peronne, Mont St Quentin, Bellicourt and the Hindenburg Line. Eventually on 18 October, exactly one month after Albert died, his brigade was relieved, exhausted from combat and disease (Australian War Memorial 2016).

On the 18 September 1918 just over two months before the Armistice was signed, and a month before his brigade was retired, Albert died after being hit by a shell. Red Cross records contain statements from witnesses who saw him die. About 5:00a.m. Albert was working with the guns in front of Gibraltar on the Hindenburg Line. Private. W.S. Mc Fadzen, from New South Wales (NSW) reports,

"During the battle of Hindenburg Outpost Line on September 18th, 1918, we were covering 1st Division Infantry, between Templeux and Rosiel about 4.45 a.m. Smith was hit instantly. I was on the same gun and saw him immediately after."

Bombardier. T.F. Brownhead, reported that Albert

"...was killed whilst on duty at his gun...Death was instantaneous."

"His body showed no evidence of the wounds and it would seem that he was shot right through the heart..." stated Gunner B. Cookston, from Bendigo, Victoria.

There were witnesses only about three metres off and they saw the whole thing. Perhaps the most vivid account of all of these was given by S.H. Armstrong (Driver):

"I saw Smith immediately after he was hit. He fell right across the gun. He was hit in the back of the neck and the back ..." Of the party of eight only Smith was killed.

Gunner B. Cookston saw Albert's body being "taken down to the wagon lines where it was buried the same day."

Sergeant T.S. Lambie, saw his body the same morning just behind the gun and helped to prepare it for burial.

Albert was buried that afternoon in the French Civilian Cemetery at Rosiel, Sergeant Lambie sending the fatigue party to carry out the work. Corporal R. Bretnall helped to put him in the blanket for burial.

Private.Mc Fadzen, reported, "He was later on buried at the Military Cemetery at Roisel and cross was erected."

Gunner. L.J. Wittall said "I did not see Smith killed but I made his cross with his name on it and Quarter Master Palin of our Battery erected the cross, on the grave in the French cemetery at Roisel." He was buried in Rosiel Cemetery beside Gunner Watt and Bombadier Lowe of the 2nd D.A.C.

Padre Tinge read the eulogy and the last post was sounded by Trumpeter Lacy.

Sergeant Lambie watched the burial. "The grave was dug by Bombardier Brownhead (Victoria) and Gunner Hackell (New South Wales) who were both still with the unit when we left; after the stunt guns moved forward." (Red Cross Wounded And Missing: Albert Charles Edward Smith | Australian War Memorial 2016)

Both Albert's Father and Mother were distressed at the news of his death. They wanted to know more about his death and desperately wanted to see a photo of his grave but to no avail. In November 1918 William wrote to the base records office: (Coad n.d.)

"It is very hard indeed he has been on service 2 years and 9 months and had been a faithful son and soldier and I wish I knew his whereabouts where he was killed. [...] his mother and myself are very anxious to know [...] it is hard to lose such a great son." (Smith Albert Charles Edward 1996)

They did not receive any news until Christmas as a rather formal letter written by George Bush "His comrades, N.O.C.s, and officers, and all who knew him thought very highly of your late son, and he held the respect and admiration of every member of his battery [...] Though the battery was being heavily shelled at the time,

he unflinchingly stood at his post and carried on until fatally struck by a shell splinter, which brought him about death instantaneously."

Lena Smith wrote several letters requesting information about his death and burial and including a request for a photo of his grave. These items included letters, notebook and newspaper cuttings (Smith Albert Charles Edward 1996). Lena and Billy tried so hard to find the simplest things about their son but much of the time to no avail. Lena spent the last years of her life in an asylum, and I often wonder whether the distress of losing Albert during the war, Archie soon after and Gus who, although a nephew was like a son to them for many years. It is apparent that the distress contributed to her declining health and fragile emotional state (Blair, 2016). I feel incredibly lucky to have so much information at my fingertips and to be able to see and know what they dreamt about. Albert like others who served had his personal belongings sent home. I am looking forward to going to Peronne and seeing where he fought till his last breath.

- Georgia-Alice Bunge, Ogilvie High School



Roisel Community Cemetery Extension where Albert is now buried in Peronne, France

A voice from the family – written by June Sculthorpe

	Pronunciation	
Ya Albert		Hello Albert
Takarilya nanya tunapri nina	ta-ka-ril-i-a na-nyatu- na-pri ni-na	Your family remembers you
Waranta mapali tunapri nina	war-an-ta ma-pa-li tu-na- pri ni-na	Many of us remembers you
Waranta nayri nina-tu	war-an-ta nay-ri (rhymes with diary) nina- tu	We thank you
Malukana, krakani milaythina tu manta manta	ma-lu-ka-na kra-ka-ni mil-ay (rhymes with pie) ti-na tu, man-ta man-ta	You sleep, you rest on land far away
Nina rrala, nina ripana, putiya kuthi nina?		You were strong, you were young, were you not afraid?
Krakani krakani		Rest rest
Waranta tunapri tunapri nina		We think of you often
Georgia-Alice Iumi, ningina muylatina		Georgia-Alice is here, bringing our embrace

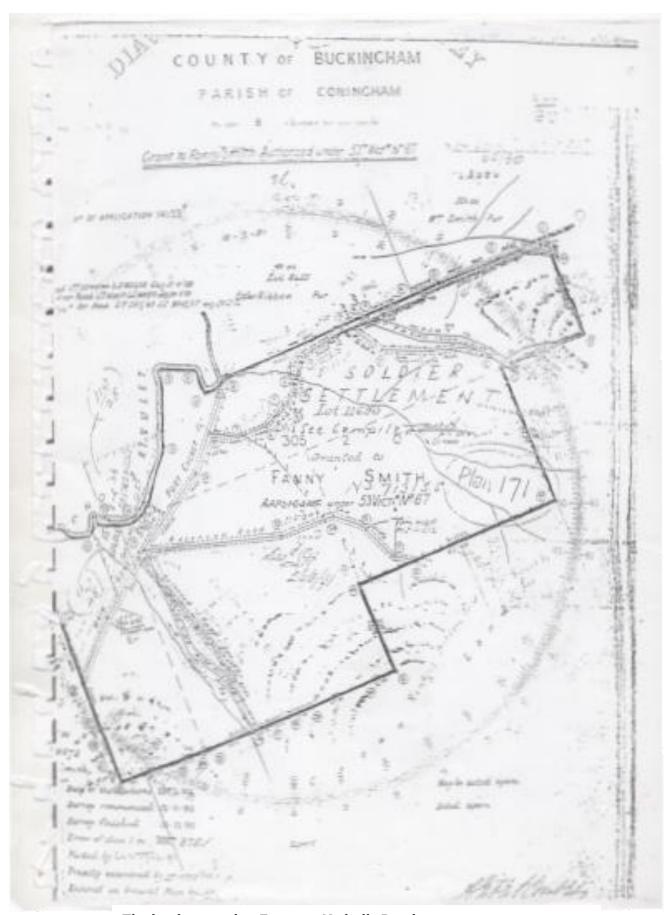
4 th F. A. Bd. (Ino)
Box. 14

CLAREMONT NOV 16 1915



D COLET PALIAN	MILITARY FORCES.		
52357 FRALIAN	WILITART FORCES.		
AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE.			
Attestation Paper of Persons Enlisted for Service Abroad.			
No. 12400 Name SMITH. albert Charle & dward			
Joined on 3 11 15.			
Questions to be put to the Person Enlisting before Attestation.			
1. What is your Name?	2. In the Parish of in or		
2. In or near what Parish or Town were you book 1	near the Town of Nistral Rivulet.		
	in the County of		
3. Are you a natural born British Subject of a Naturalised British Subject? (N.B.—If the latter papers to be shown.)	3. Yes.		
4. What is your age?	1. Jary		
5. What is your trade or calling?	5. A abores		
6. Are you, or have you been, an Apprentice! If so, where, to whom, and for what period!	6. // 6		
7. Are you married t	Father Wan Henry Smith		
8. Who is your next of kin? (Address to be stated)	Nishol Wivulet.		
and the state of t	Das-		
9. Have you ever been convicted by the Civil Power?	9.		
10. Have you ever been discharged from any part of His Majesty's Forces, with Ignominy, or as Incorrigible and Worthless, or on account of Conviction of Felony, or of a Sentence of Penal Servitude, or have you been dismissed with Disgrace from the Navy?	10. N o.		
11. Do you now belong to, or have you ever served in, His Majesty's Army, the Marines, the Militia, the Militia	quoto with 93 c. at Danday Bay bands.		
Reserve, the Territorial Force, Royal Navy, or Colonial Forces? If so, state which, and if not now serving, state cause of discharge	11. gara hayaring		
12. Have you stated the whole, if any, of your previous service? 13. Have you ever been rejected as unfit for His Majesty's?	12. 11. to the soul		
Service? If so, on what grounds?	13. 1005 600 1000		
are the sole support of vidoued mother)— Do you understand that no separation allowance will be issued in respect of your service beyond an amount which together with pay would reach eight shillings per day?	14.		
15. Are you prepared to undergo inoculation against small pox and enteric fever?	15. J. Mes		
by me to the above questions are true, and I am willing and Commonwealth of Australia within or beyond the limits of the	do solemnly declare that the above answers made hereby voluntarily agree to serve in the Military Forces of the Commonwealth.		
And I further agree to allot not less than two-fifths three-fifths	of the pay payable to me from time to time during my service		
for the support of my wife and children.			
Date 3/ 11/15	* a. b. E. Smith Signature of person enlisted.		
This clause should be struck out in the case of susmann	ied men or widowers without children under 18 years of age.		

† Two-fifths must be allotted to the wife, and if there are children three-fifths must be allotted.



The land granted to Fanny at Nicholls Rivulet

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