

TEACHERS NOTES: BIOGRAPHIES OF SERVICE PEOPLE

SERVICE RECORD 1 – DOUGLAS GRANT

Douglas Grant enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force in February 1916 at the age of 30. He was an Aboriginal man who had been adopted by a Scottish family from Sydney after the massacre of his community by Native Police. He managed to enlist despite laws preventing First Nations people from doing so at the time.

Douglas Grant passed a sergeant examination as part of the 34th Battalion. However, he was unable to travel to the front when a regulation preventing Aboriginal people from leaving the country was enforced. The media reported on his situation, and he lost his rank as sergeant due to the time he had to wait to enlist again.

Douglas Grant did eventually join as a private as part of the 13th Battalion. He was wounded in France and spent time in a German prisoner of war camp before being repatriated to England.

Douglas Grant experienced racial prejudice and discrimination upon his return to Australia. He worked as a draughtsman and lobbied for Aboriginal rights for a while after his return. He also struggled with his mental health and spent time at Callan Park Mental Hospital. Grant died at a war veteran's home in La Perouse (a suburb of Sydney) in 1951.

SERVICE RECORD 2 – CALEB JAMES SHANG

Caleb James Shang enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force in June 1916 at the age of 31. The son of a Chinese-born father and Queensland-born mother, he grew up in Brisbane and in Cairns.

Shang enlisted despite the discriminatory passages in the Defence Act (1910) that prevented people of non-European background from serving in the defence forces. The law was intended to be enforced by medical officers, but this wasn't always done.

Shang served in several battalions during his time at the front in Belgium and France. He was recognised for his bravery when volunteering as a runner under enemy fire and gathering useful information while acting in this capacity. He was wounded by shellfire in 1918 and returned to Australia in 1919. He was greeted as a hero upon his return to Cairns.

Shang married and had two children. He lived for a while in Victoria before returning to Cairns with his family. He was a member of the Volunteer Defence Corps during the Second World War. Later in his life, he struggled with his health as a result of his injuries during the war and an underlying condition with his kidney. Caleb James Shang was hit by a motorbike and died following an illness in 1953.

SERVICE RECORD 3 – GEORGE HENRY SMITH

George Henry Smith was born in England and enlisted in Liverpool, New South Wales in 1915. He joined the Australian Imperial Force and served in the 7th Australian Light Horse Regiment as a trooper. During his time in Egypt he was regularly absent without leave, and he received fines for drunkenness and for breaking and entering. During an attempt to escape from his superiors, he was shot and superficially wounded.

Smith returned to Australia in 1919, where his family wished to greet him. There are records from his parents requesting to be at an event to welcome Smith and his fellow soldiers back to Australia. George Henry Smith was not married, so he elected for his father to receive three fifths of his salary, a portion that was more usually put aside for wives with children.

SERVICE RECORD 4 – NORMAN REID FLEMING

Norman Reid Fleming enlisted in September 1914, joining the 14th Battalion. He was wounded in the jaw at Gallipoli and had a surgical procedure to help correct the damage. Fleming returned to Australia to recover in 1915. However, he re-enlisted once he was recovered and joined the 23rd Battalion. Fleming's battalion made their way to France, where he was killed in action on the 3rd of May 1917. He is commemorated on the Roll of Honour at the Australian War Memorial and at Villers-Bretonneux Memorial in France.

Fleming's mother is listed as his next of kin and received the correspondence regarding his death, as well as his medals. His older brother, Andrew Cumming Fleming, was also killed in action.

SERVICE RECORD 5 – LEILA BOWIE GODFREY

Leila Bowie Godfrey enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force as a nurse in 1917 at the age of 25. She was a registered nurse from New South Wales, who trained at the Royal Prince Albert Hospital and passed her examination in 1916.

At a Christmas dinner in 1918 her face was burnt slightly. Her testimony states that she was burnt by a 'blazing spirit'. The injury itself was deemed 'trivial' by the medical officer and it did not impact her duties as a nurse.

Godfrey survived the war and returned to Australia in 1919. She went on to pass her obstetric (childbirth) examinations in 1922 so that she could practice as a midwife. At some point she married and changed her name to Leila Bowie Edginton. She remained a staff nurse and died in 1970 at the age of 78.