

William was born in Durban, South Africa, in 1881, the son of William Desmond and Alice Desmond, nee McLaughlin. On 11th August 1914 he joined the AN&MEF stating that he was a Bridge Builder, single, and gave his intended wife, Miss M Howell at Dover House, Clarence St, Sydney, as his next of kin. He also stated that he was in the Durban Militia in 1906, the Durban Light Infantry, Canadian Scouts and Baden Powell's Mounted Police in South Africa.

William returned from Rabaul and was discharged, term expired, on 4th March 1915 having completed 206 days service. Later the same year he married Margaret Alice Howell in Sydney.

He joined the AIF twice. The first time was on 11th Aug 1915 when he was allocated the regimental number 2721, but he was discharged at own request on 11th April. He again joined on 29th September this time being discharged on 5th May 1916 at the request of his wife.