

William Mangan

In early 1966, the names of eight local servicemen, who lost their lives during the Second World War, were assigned as street names within the newly established estate in Altona North. One of these was Mangan Court, that runs in a northerly direction from Harris Street to the edge of the West Gate Freeway and was to acknowledge the ultimate sacrifice given by local resident, Eric Robert Mangan.



Eric Robert (William) Mangan

William Mangan was born Eric Robert Mangan in Coburg on 14 July 1915 to parents Daniel Mangan and Kathleen (Kate) Mangan (nee Mahon). We know little of his formative years, except that the family were living in the suburb of Fitzroy, when Eric was born, and moved to Brunswick around 1927. Their relocation to Brunswick appears to have taken place following the death of Eric's mother in 1926. By 1936, Eric was now living in rented premises in Bent Street, Altona and working locally. On the 21st of March 1940, according to his enlistment records, he enlisted into the army as William Mangan. Why he enlisted under an alternate first name is not known nor can be speculated¹, but our research links the details of the enlistment as William with that of Eric and that around this time, the Werribee Banner listed E Mangan of Altona as enlisting in the Army².

Private William Mangan was assigned to the 2/6 Australian Infantry Battalion and embarked from Australia in November 1940. His new battalion had been deployed to the Middle East where in January 1941, it had taken part in the first action of the war by Australian ground forces, the Battle of Bardia³, which was followed by further actions around Tobruk in Libya. Private Mangan joined the battalion, in the Middle East, shortly after these battles took place. Here he, and the other reinforcements, joined the battalion and trained to be battle ready for their next mission.

In the first week of April 1941, an advance party of the 2/6 Battalion be dispatched to take part in the Battle of Greece, this included transport and carrier platoons as well as an escort platoon of 20 volunteers. Private Mangan embarked for Greece a week later, on 9 April, with the remaining members of the 2/6 Battalion. The journey across the Mediterranean Sea was not without its danger as both convoys, the advance and main, encountered numerous waves of enemy bombers. The defence of Greece was placed largely in the hands of troops from Australia and New Zealand. During the campaign this dominion force, although it included a British brigade, became known as the ANZAC Corps.

Even before the German invasion of Greece, senior British military and political figures doubted the wisdom of attempting to fight the Germans in Greece and some were already discussing evacuation plans. Lacking aircraft and armour, the Allies were poorly prepared to withstand the German onslaught which came in the form of ten infantry, armoured and specialist mountain warfare divisions.

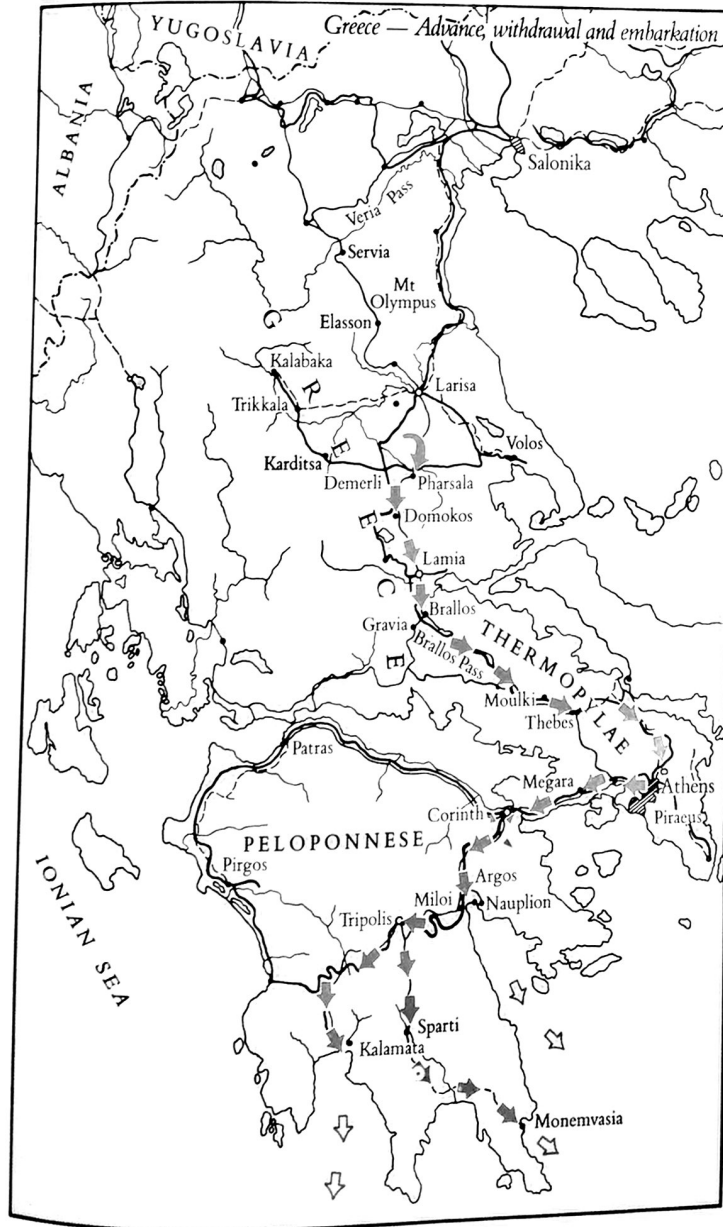
¹ There is hearsay that William/Eric Robert may have been adopted and therefore may have enlisted under his original Christian name.

² Werribee Banner, Honor Roll, 15 August 1940, p 4

³ The Battle of Bardia, Libya, was fought between 3 and 5 January 1941, as part of Operation Compass, the first British military operation of the Western Desert campaign of the Second World War. It was the first battle of the war in which an Australian Army formation took part, the first to be commanded by an Australian general, and the first to be planned by an Australian staff.

Outnumbered on the ground and in the air the ANZAC Corps were unable to deploy sufficient troops in any one area to halt the German advance. Instead, they constantly found themselves conducting a series of withdrawals, slowing the Germans down and offering brave and sometimes successful local resistance.

Battle of Greece, map from David Hay, *Nothing Over Us*, page 137



The campaign was dogged by poor liaison between the ANZACs and their Greek allies - problems which were exacerbated by language difficulties and a lack of equipment. While the ANZAC force never lost its cohesion, they were never in a position to reverse German successes. By 20 April, when it was clear that they could do no more than disrupt and slow the German advance, then on the 20 April, the Greek Government agreed that the force should be evacuated.

For day upon day, Allied troops played an important part in containing the German advance on the Thermopylae position, allowing ships to be prepared so they could evacuate the units defending Greece. The final withdrawal to the evacuation beaches on the Peloponnese was skilfully conducted

and the evacuation began on 24 April. Over the next five nights more than 50,000 troops left Greece. They left behind 320 dead Australians - a further 2,065 became prisoners of war. More than 290 New Zealanders were killed and over 1,600 captured. Hundreds of others were cut off during the fighting, many of these men made their way back to Allied lines in Crete or North Africa via Turkey or the Greek islands.

The German Army reached the Greek capital, Athens, on 27 April and Greece's southern shore on 30 April, capturing 7,000 British, Australian and New Zealand personnel and ending the battle with a decisive victory. Some members of the 2/6 Battalion subsequently fought on Crete with a composite 17th Brigade battalion, and the Battalion had to be re-formed in Palestine before being sent to Syria in 1941/42 for subsequent campaigns.

The speed at which the German invasion took place, in Greece, forcing the withdrawal and evacuation of the ANZAC Corps, it must have been a confusing time for units to keep records of the unit and accounting for its personnel. It was not until early June, some six weeks after the retreat from Greece that Private William Mangan was officially reported missing. The command must have waited for advice of prisoners before they sought confirmation of soldiers that had been killed in the action during the withdrawal because it was nearly a further month before Private Mangan was officially declared 'killed in action' on 26 April 1941.

William's father was notified of his death by telegram on 4 June 1941. By this time his father, Daniel Mangan, was living in the suburb of Windsor with his siblings. The service and sacrifice of Private William (Eric Robert) Mangan is commemorated at the Commonwealth War graves, Athens. He was 25 years old, unmarried, and had been serving with the Second AIF for just over one year.

April, 1941. Age 25. Son of G. W. Maltby and of Alice Maltby, of Boston, Lincolnshire. Face 2.

MANGAN, Pte. WILLIAM, VX.16654. A.I.F. 2/6 Bn. Australian Infantry. 26th April, 1941. Age 25. Son of Mr. and Mrs. D. Mangan, of Windsor, Victoria, Australia. Face 11.



Phaleron War Cemetery and Athens Memorial

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