

Corporal Joseph Alfred William Morgan

September 20th, 1885 - March 6th, 1917
27th Infantry Battalion - Australian Imperial Force
SN: 378



**2021 Premier's Anzac Spirit School's Prize
Wirreanda Secondary School
Abby O'Donnell**

“One must be present to appreciate the stunning vehemence of the sound - the gamut of crashes and screams that make the earth quiver and recede in fogs of white and yellow fumes, or green and black and brown. The noise is numbing; air and sky.”

Anonymous in the *Beverley Times*

(Kearney & Cleary, 2017, p.187)

These are the theatrical noises and scenes that Joseph Alfred William Morgan would listen to while recuperating from illness in England, the echoes a constant reminder of the reality he would return to and ultimately die within. This poetic piece romanticises a war that, for many men like Morgan, would take the lives of fathers, brothers, and sons from their loving family. This biography is an ode to Morgan’s selfless sacrifice on the front lines and to the courage his wife and daughters displayed during their time of hardship.

Morgan was born on September 20th, 1885 (however his birth was not registered) in North Carlton, Victoria, and was the first born son to parents Alfred and Angelina. He spent most of his upbringing at Parkside and received his education at the Parkside Public School (The Chronicle, 1917, p42). Before enlisting in the Australian Imperial Force, Morgan worked as a painter and paperhanger and was married to Christina Wilbelmina Morgan. Together they had four children - Myrtle, Gladys, Beatrice, and Harold (see image right) - and resided at Church St, Prospect. It has been noted by the grandchild of Gladys that enlisting for war with four children at home was a risky, selfish decision that burdened Christina dearly (Brian Langley, personal communication, February 10th, 2021). However, this decision represented the selfless attitude of most Australian service people who flocked to enlist, eager to serve their mother country on the ‘Grand Adventure’ that was war. However, for Joseph the war would claim his life and his decision to enlist would prove fatal.



Morgan enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force at Keswick, Adelaide, on February 17th, 1915 at the age of 29 (National Archives of Australia, 2021). He was placed in the 27th Battalion which would be affectionately referred to as ‘Unley’s Own’ as the majority of soldiers originated from the suburb of Unley. The soldiers would form a close-knit bond and were commanded by the former Mayor Colonel Walter ‘Dolly’ Dollman (Kearney & Cleary, 2017).

Morgan embarked on the *HMAT Geelong* in Adelaide on May 31st, 1915 where he sailed to Egypt before journeying to Gallipoli. On September 4th, 1915 Morgan was sent to join the British Expeditionary Force in Gallipoli, where they took over the defensive position at Cheshire Ridge to relieve the exhausted New Zealand Mounted Rifles (Australian Imperial Force, 2021).



Colonel Walter Dollman leads the 27th Battalion during a parade at Mitcham Camp in 1915 (Kearney & Cleary, 2017).

According to Unit Diaries, throughout October considerable effort was spent to garrison the Cheshire Ridge Line with *"No action to report, but the men in the ... line and supports are continually harassed by shrapnel, high explosive, bombs, and musketry fire"* (Australian Imperial Force, 2021, p.1). On October 2nd, 1915, within a month of landing at Gallipoli, he was promoted to Lance Corporal and then again to Corporal on October 16th, 1915, however the reason for this is unknown. Kearney and Cleary note that although the 27th Battalion *"had served at Gallipoli and had taken part in the evacuation of the peninsula, by the time it reached France it had not fought in any major battle."* (2017, p.186)

Throughout the month of October the casualties within the 27th Battalion included *"5 killed, 29 wounded and 131 hospital cases"* (Australian Imperial Force, 2021, p.2). Morgan was one of these hospital cases, being admitted to the 16th Casualty Clearing Station on October 25th, 1915 for enteritis and later transported to Lemnos for further medical attention. Considering the conditions at Gallipoli, it is little wonder so many soldiers succumbed to enteritis, dysentery and other gastrointestinal conditions:

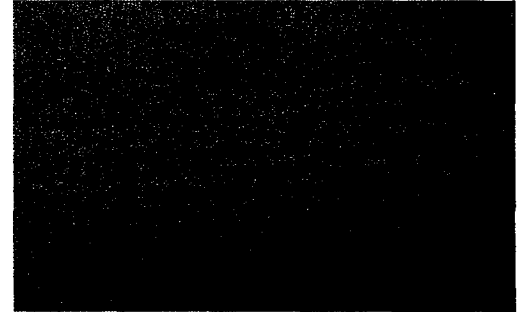
"After a few months in crowded conditions on the peninsula, soldiers began to come down with dysentery and typhoid because of inadequate sanitation, unburied bodies and swarms of flies ... With up to 25,000 men packed into such a cramped space, latrines filled up fast and there was limited space for new ones."

(New Zealand Government, 2021)

Morgan embarked for England on the *Formosa* on November 14th, 1915, where he was admitted to the University War Hospital in Southampton. Morgan's condition was so severe that his recovery required months of treatment

and was transferred to several different hospitals including 3rd Southern General Hospital in Oxford (Australian Imperial Force, 1915).

In April, 1916 Morgan was located at Montevideo Australian Camp, Weymouth, a recuperation site for those who were wounded as a result of the Gallipoli Campaign. Photographs sent home indicate that Morgan spent his time visiting the local area including attending theatre performances at the Weymouth Pavilion (Weymouth Pavilion, 2021; see Appendix1) Whilst recovering, Morgan would also write to his loved ones and a postcard (see right) sent to his eldest daughter



Gladys Mabel, noted his ever-changing context and preparation for the worst:

"So Daddy may be sent away again soon to France, I want to ask you to do a few things for me ... set an example to your sisters and brother and always live a clean and honest life ... You are lucky children in having such a good mother, who will always guide you in the right way. It is so long since I saw you that I suppose you nearly forget me, but try to think of me sometimes. Your loving father."

(Morgan, 1916)

A letter dated September 24th, 1916, places Morgan at the Folkestone Camp, England, where he writes of sending a book of poems to his daughter in the hope that one day she would recite them to him upon his return to Australia. Morgan writes that he was *"keeping fairly well now and so is Uncle Oscar. I see him nearly every day."*

While waiting for his inevitable return to the front, Morgan would hear the guns and bombing across the English Channel and would constantly remind him of the terror that was not so far away (United Kingdom Government, 2018).

Morgan eventually proceeded to the Western Front in December, 1916, embarking the *SS Victoria* at Folkestone and re-joined his unit in Etaples, France (Australian Imperial Force, 1916). A postcard dated December 20th, 1916 (pictured right) labelled "*Somewhere in France*" highlights Morgan's positive attitude to the war effort: "*I think we will soon have the Germans beaten now.*" . However, we know this was not to be the case and Morgan had only months before he would reach his fate.



The Western Front entered its deadliest year in 1917, which was further worsened by the harsh winter conditions that soldiers endured on the front lines. According to Unit Diaries in February 1917, conditions on the front lines were "*very cold, freezing*" with enemy shelling all positions heavily but no damage done (Australian Imperial Force, 2021, p.2). In the first days of February, Morgan and his battalion "*moved off to take over front line*" where they would spend the next four days before marching back to Villa Camp on February 6th.

Unit Diaries state that Morgan returned to the front line to relieve the 22nd Battalion on February 14th, 1917. Records from the days after are brief, simply stating that "*enemy shelled very heavily cutting our line. Our retaliation very good*" (Australian Imperial Force, 2021, p.2). While travelling with the A and B Companies in 26th Avenue Morgan and his comrades were "*heavily shelled with 5.9's [shells] 20 were killed and 4 wounded*" (Australian Imperial Force, 2021, p.2)

Morgan was killed on March 6th, 1917, however Official Unit Diaries make no mention of significant engagement with the enemy on this date. Kearney & Cleary note that the 27th Battalion lacked "*large-scale operational experience*" at this time which may have contributed to his death (2017, p. 186). Morgan was originally buried in an isolated grave in south east Bapaume; However, in the proceeding years the Australian Imperial Force would relocate his remains to the nearest cemetery - Adanac Military Cemetery, Miraumont - and photograph his grave for the family at home (Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 2021).

(1140 words)

"I think we will soon have the Germans beaten now."

(Morgan, 1917)

This quote, taken from a postcard sent to his beloved daughter, epitomises the perseverance and positive attitude to war that Morgan (and many other soldiers) held. However, whether his time spent away from the front altered his perception of the reality of war is another question.

Resilience in the face of defeat and a reliance on the man next to you were integral characteristics of soldiers serving on the front line. Morgan had shown this spirit when he had fallen ill, however he fought for not just his country but his own family and health at all times. In Morgan's time at war he was ill for a long period of time: during this time in hospitals, still hearing the sounds of war that wasn't so far away, he had tried his best to keep writing to his children and wife, which shows how lonely he would have felt during those months. Being isolated in England recuperating would have been an adventure for many you Australians, however for Morgan, a father of four, this would have been a prolonged period where he would persevere through homesickness and a desire to be reunited with his loved ones. Morgan also sends a letter home to one of his daughter saying *"is so long since I saw you that I suppose you nearly forget me"*, this shows that he was having doubts and felt bad for not seeing his family. This did not stop Morgan, his bravery helped him perceive through, in hope to see his family once again, even though this was not the case. The bravery that Morgan has was in all service people, being on the front line or being in hospital.

During this time when writing to his daughter, he mentions Uncle Oscar. Private Oscar Jager is Morgan's brother in law, who was in the 50th Infantry Battalion. This could be seen as a positive, due to Private Jager being family they were their for each other no matter what, they both understood missing their supportive and loving family. Morgan showed mateship especially with Oscar who was fortunate enough to come home and tell both of their stories. Morgan wrote in one of many letters that were sent home to his daughter *"keeping fairly well and so is Uncle Oscar"*, this shows that Morgan and Oscar stayed in contact when they could, even though they were in different Battalions.

Morgan and Oscar didn't just unite with his comrades through mateship, they showed the mateship of what it is to be a family. They were lucky to have a familiar face that wasn't just a comrade in arms, but was blood relative that would watch your back, and you'd watch his in return. I can imagine that the death of Morgan would have hit Oscar hard, and he too would have shown perseverance to continue fighting despite his grief. The two were very

close, and upon Oscar's return home he didn't just retell his experience but also that of Morgan's. The ANZAC spirit isn't just fighting in the war but also reflecting on how they had shared it together and ensuring their memory lives on in their children.

(528 words)

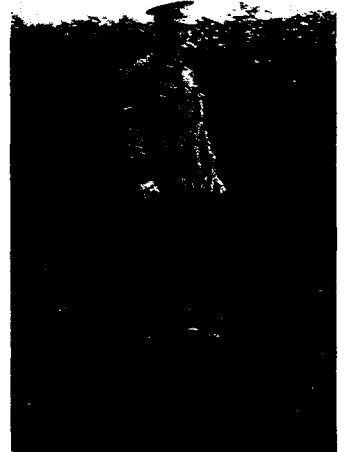
Joseph Alfred William Morgan is my great great great Grandfather on my mother's side.

The journey of retelling Joseph's journey began in history class when I was made aware of the Premier's Anzac Spirit School's Prize and decided to pursue it further. Based on previous family conversations, I was aware that I had multiple family members who had served in World War I, therefore I went to visit my Pa to find out more information. Pa provided me the names of three family members who had served, however Joseph was the only one to fall in the line of duty.

With these three names, I used the support of my teacher to research them on the Virtual War Memorial Australia and NAA Discovering Anzacs websites. We were able to find the most information on Joseph and downloaded his Attestation and Casualty Forms as the starting point.

I sifted through the dates, locations, and notes on these documents to form a basic timeline of his wartime journey. In order to understand what was happening during his time on the front line, I learnt how to access the Official Unit Diaries of the 27th Battalion, particularly the months that he fell ill and was killed in action. These diaries also gave me an idea of what the living conditions and climate was like for Joseph on the front lines.

However, I still had some significant periods of time missing so I once again contacted Pa to gain further information. Since our first conversation, he had completed his own research on Joseph's family and employment which helped me to build a picture of his life before war and compose my introduction. I also contacted Joseph's granddaughter who was able to provide his birth date and a photograph of him in his uniform (pictured right).



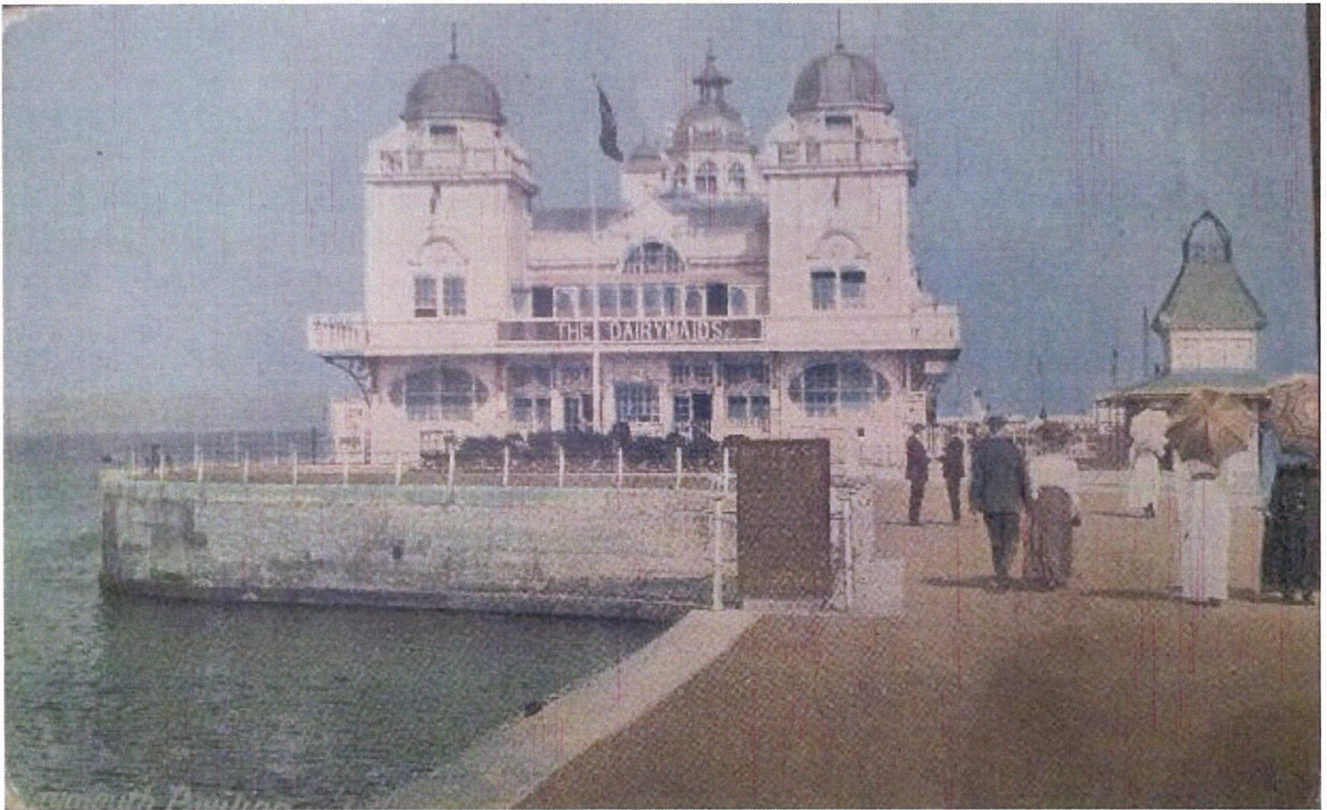
Pa and I also contacted my Aunty, who had collected his postcards, books and photographs sent home, but she was hesitant in giving these to us. However, after explaining the nature of my task she scanned copies and sent these to us. These were the missing links that we needed to finally piece together his journey.

With the assistance of my teacher, we interpreted Joseph's hand-written postcards and selected the aspects we wanted to give Joseph a voice in this biography. We also researched into the Weymouth Pavilion, which was identified on a postcard sent, which gave us an understanding of how he, and many other soldiers, spent his time recuperating.

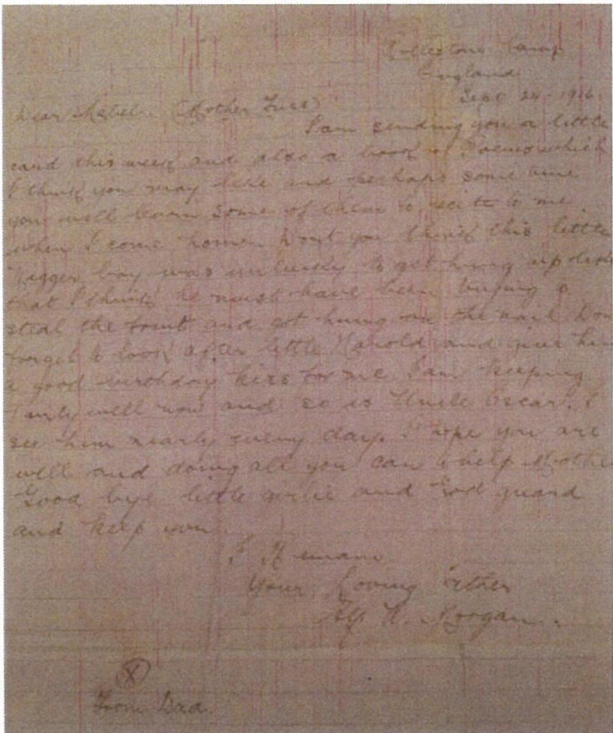
During my research of Joseph Alfred William Morgan I have grown close with my grandfather, Brian Langley, and has given me the opportunity to contact my distant and close family members for sources of information. Without this inquiry task, our family would not have had the opportunity to share knowledge and converse about our family history and vital artefacts would remain unshared. My hope is that by uploading these artefacts and stories onto the Virtual War Memorial Australia, that future family members can access this history and appreciate the role of our family in war.

No longer will Joseph Alfred William Morgan's story be hidden from family memory.

(518 words)



Appendix 1: A postcard sent while Morgan was recuperating depicts the Weymouth Pavilion.



Appendix 2: A letter dated September 24, 1916, placed Morgan at Folkestone Camp.

Appendix 3: One of many embroidered postcards sent to Morgan's beloved daughter.



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