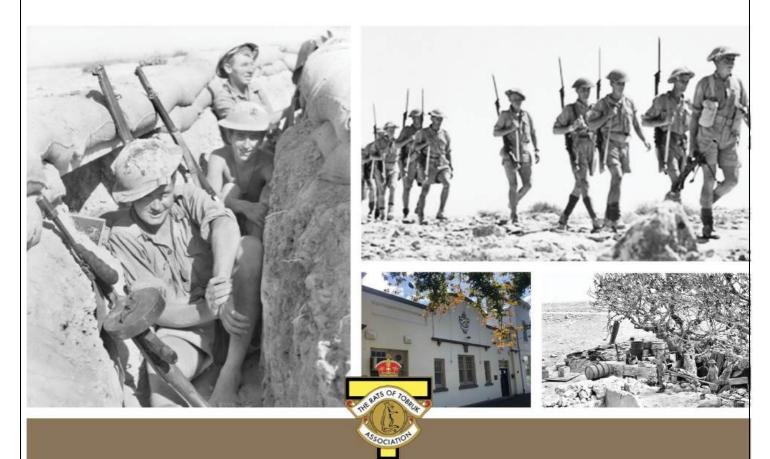
VOLUME 148 OCTOBER 2024



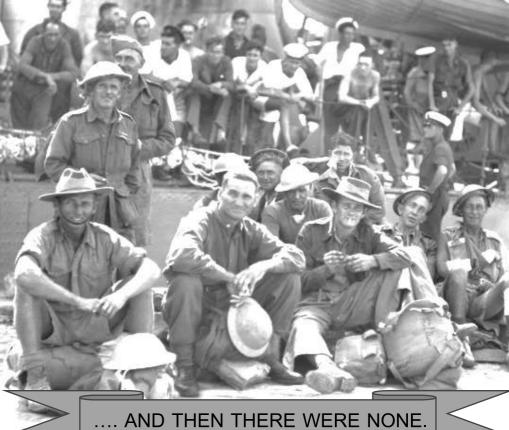
TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION









RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC.

ABN 23 136 193 517

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THE DATES & EVENTS LISTED BELOW ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. CALL FOR MORE UP TO DATE INFORMATION.

Month / Date	Event Description
Sunday October 27	Open Day at Tobruk House 10am-3pm
Sunday November 10	Open Day at Tobruk House 10am.3pm
Friday November 22	General meeting 10.30am (Lunch and guest speaker)
Sunday December 1	Christmas luncheon (Booking essential. Details TBA)
Sunday December 15	Memorial Service for the Rats of Tobruk at The Shrine (Please note: <u>Date to be confirmed.</u>)

Patron: Bill Gibbins
Committee of Management:
Vice President – Paul Dipnall
Secretary – Lachlan Gaylard
Committee Chair – Stuart Tolliday

Other Committee Members –
Bruce Bingham, Marlene Bingham,
Tony Codd, Glenda Garde,
Karolina Sevcikova, Gayle Sherwell

TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS

NEXT ISSUE: DECEMBER 2024

DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 6

We welcome contributions from our community but cannot guarantee publication.

Email is preferred with documents in Word and pictures in jpeg format but not essential.

Articles or letters with no contact details will not be published.

Editor Stuart Tolliday

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CONTACT US: ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com



VALE

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
we will remember them.

LEST WE FORGET

PRITCHARD, Thomas Page (Tom) VX23441 2/5 Fld Amb 24/8/1921 - 3/8/2024

RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC.

Vice President's Message - October 2024

Dear members,

It is my privilege to provide an update on the recent activities of the Rats of Tobruk Association since our last communication.

As many of you know, we recently mourned the passing of Tommy Pritchard, the last Australian Rat of Tobruk. On behalf of the Association, I extend our deepest condolences to Tommy's family. His passing marks a significant chapter in our history, and the Association swiftly responded, ensuring national coverage of this momentous occasion across newspapers, radio, and television. This was made possible through the tireless efforts of our Secretary, Lachlan Gaylard.

In tribute to Tommy, we opened Tobruk House for a commemoration, inviting both members and the general public to sign the official condolences book. The invitation was taken up by many, including those who knew Tommy personally, as well as by members of the public paying their respects. A special highlight was a visit from Sir Peter Cosgrove, who, with kindness and compassion, initiated the visit to sign the condolence book and pay tribute to Tommy. His warm and gracious demeanour was appreciated by all in attendance.

Vale Tommy Pritchard – Rest in Peace. You and all our departed Rats will always hold a special place in our hearts.

In August, I had the honour of addressing the significance of the Polish contribution to the siege of Tobruk at our annual Polish Commemorative Service, held at the Shrine of Remembrance. During the service, wreaths were laid in memory of the Polish fallen, and Colonel Daniel Strack delivered a moving address, sharing both his own story and that of his grandfather, further emphasizing Poland's critical role. The event was well-attended, and we look forward to even greater participation next year. (Ed: See page 18)

The August General Meeting was particularly poignant, as we set aside general business to pay tribute to Tommy. During this meeting, we were also privileged to present long-overdue service medals to the family of Kenneth Gard, a serviceman who had been denied recognition of his wartime service. Through the dedicated efforts of the committee, the medals were finally awarded, acknowledging the physical and psychological toll Kenneth endured as a result of his service. Hearing heartfelt remarks from his family was a powerful reminder of the importance of the work we do to honour and remember those who served. (*Ed: story on page 10*)

This meeting was deeply appreciated by the Gard family, and we hope it brought some comfort and closure in recognising Kenneth's honourable service. I am incredibly proud of our committee for their persistence and dedication in advocating for this recognition, despite numerous setbacks along the way.

It has been a busy and emotional period for the Association, but I am grateful for the way we have risen to the occasion. Our collective efforts in honouring our veterans and their families reflect the core values of the Rats of Tobruk Association. You should all be proud of the role we play in preserving the legacy of our veterans.

As summer approaches, we look forward to a bright future for the Rats of Tobruk Association and remain committed to our mission of remembrance and support.

Thank you for your continued dedication.

Kind regards

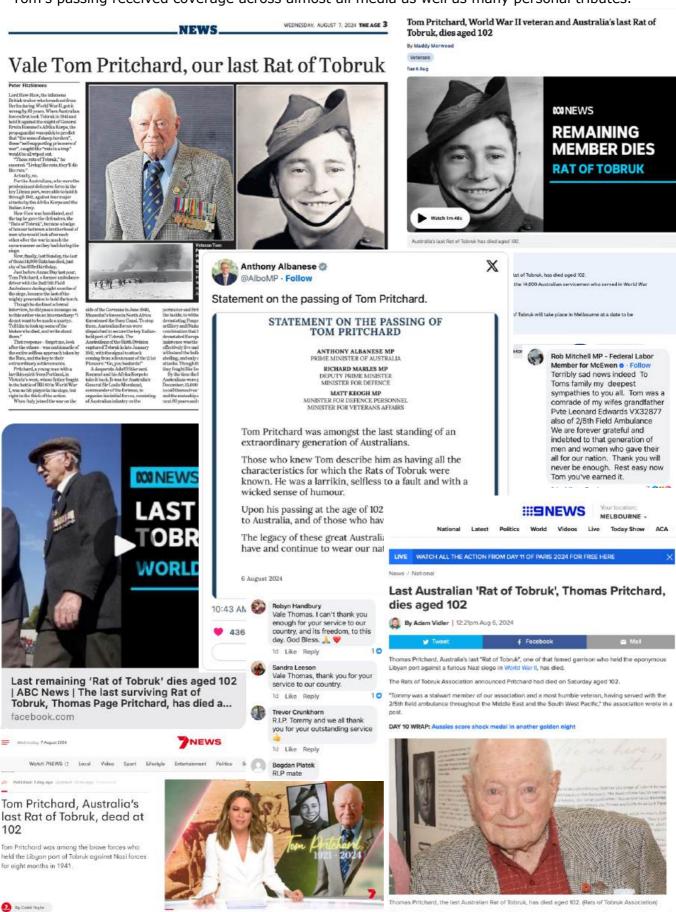
Paul F Dipnall

OUR LAST RAT...

te was the last living link to the Rots of Tabruk, who famously held the Libyan part of Tabruk against the

man Afrika Corps in 1941 for eight months, stopping German and Italian forces from marching into

Tom's passing received coverage across almost all media as well as many personal tributes.



We as an Association are extremely grateful to have had Tommy for so long yet we mourn his loss and

r, a public memorial for all Rats of Tobruk will take place in Melbourne at a date to be advised,

The association said that, per Pritchard's request, he would be farewelled at a private family funeral.

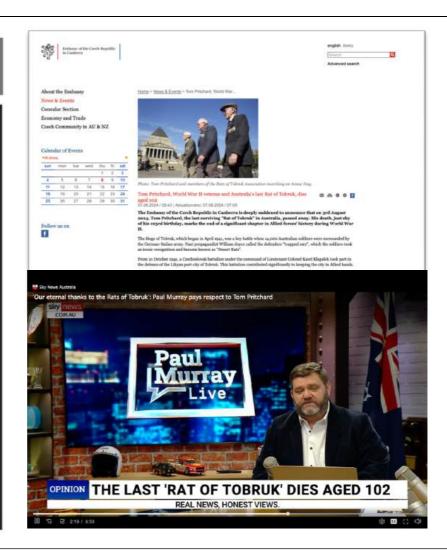
the last direct linkage with some 14,000 Australian se

they said.

Tributes & Condolences

PRITCHARD, Thomas (Tom) 03 Aug 2024

The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation is deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Tom Pritchard. Tom's service to our country was inspirational and he leaves behind an outstanding legacy. He was a valued member of the Rats of Tobruk Association and was a wonderful supporter of the hospital. His generosity and philanthropic vision have ensured children with neurological conditions will be supported for generations to come. We send our heartfelt condolences to his family and friends at this very sad time.



OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE



This photo was given to me by Tom Pritchard shortly after I became involved with the association many years ago. It shows three mates having a few beers and a chat, after a general meeting at Tobruk House. On the left is Keith Chrystal (2nd/23rd Battalion), my father Ern Kiernan (2nd/23rd Battalion) and Tom (2nd/5th Field Ambulance), on the right. They regularly attended the monthly general meetings of the Association, as did

many other veterans. They enjoyed nothing more than getting together after a meeting for a drink and a chance to reminisce. On most occasions these sessions went on for a considerable amount of time. As a result, the Committee decided to give them a set of keys to the hall (Tobruk House), so that they could lock up after they were finished. This allowed the then Secretary / Hall Keeper, Reg Lawrence to head home at a reasonable time.

I suspect the mates are now together again having a drink and a chat at Heaven's bar. They might as well throw away the key to that door. Rest in peace Tom, along with all your mates. It has been an honour to have known you Tom, you will be missed. *Author: Mike Kieman, Proud Son of a Rat*

CONDOLENCES

The condolence book at Tobruk House received many touching tributes from people far and wide. When former Governor General, General Sir Peter Cosgrove heard of the passing of Tom Pritchard, our last Rat of Tobruk, he asked if he could sign the condolence book currently in place at Tobruk House. So ROTA welcomed Sir Peter, along with Rob Webster, Victorian RSL President, Port Phillip Mayor Heather Cunsolo, Nina Taylor, State MP for Albert Park and other RSL sub-

branch representatives.

Sir Peter Cosgrove signs the condolence book watched by ROTA Secretary Lachlan Gaylard and Vice President Paul Dipnall.



Sir Peter Cosgrove chatting with Nina Taylor during his visit to Tobruk House.

Sir Peter has visited Tobruk House on a number of occasions over the years, when many of our veterans were present, but this time he stressed that, whereas Tobruk House was once a place of people, it can now become a place of ideas, commemoration and reflection.

Describing the Rats as having been a thorn in the side of Rommel's army in 1941, he also felt that with the passing of our last

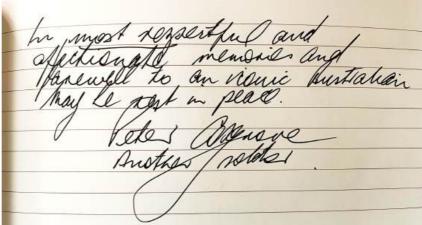
Australian Rat, we have lost an icon. Sir Peter made an impassioned plea to the Federal Government to keep the spirit of the Rats alive by funding Tobruk House as a place for ideals, ideas and memories. You can see Sir Peter's comments, broadcast on the Channel 7 news, via this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8sOsOnNkSE



Hawthorn RSL Vice President Eamon Hale signing the condolence book.

On Monday July 29 the Federal Parliament paused as a sign of respect following condolence speeches dedicated to Tom's family by the Prime Minister and the Opposition leader. Mr Albanese referred to Tom as being our last living link to one of the most extraordinary episodes in Australian military history, and he emphasised the importance of the siege as the first significant defeat in WW2 of German forces on land.

The condolence book will remain at the hall for a number of open days and meetings. Please check the website for details.



Dick Friend wore his father's original desert jacket from his time in Tobruk when he came to sign the condolence book. Capt. Ken Friend (NX402), fresh out of medical school, was a doctor at the Tobruk hospital. His jacket was made of a cotton/gaberdine material, designed to withstand incursion by the desert sands. incorporating elasticised sleeve cuffs and waist. Dick told us that the jacket was his father's gardening attire for many years and despite the odd stain is still doing good service. Even the brass zipper still runs smoothly!



FROM THE ARCHIVES

This month the archives article is from the Tobruk House News of April 1971. It's a two-page story about the Australian slouch hat. (Please note that this is not an official history.)



AUSTRALIA'S "DIGGER HAT"

ITS COLOURFUL SIGNIFICANCE by Kerwin Maegraith

Of all the illustrious 'traditions' in Australia's colourful military history, there is none to equal that of the Digger hat.

Yet, a comparatively New Australian, who has made a great success of his becoming "one of us" in the last few years asked me, in his genuine and remarkable ignorance of the "significance" of our glorious headgear, "what it means".

As the words of the World War II song go—"Just an old slouch hat, with the side turned up, but it means the world to me".

It was the valour and gallantry of the men who wore it, and also of those who wore a similar felt hat, dented into four, with the point at the peak, those grand cobbers from over the Tasman, not forgetting their Maori Digger pals, that inspired the Scottish poet Will Ogilvie.

When he returned to Scotland after cattle-droving and a spell of horse-breaking in the Australian outback country, he wrote a verse tribute in London "Punch" after the siege of Gallipoli, which rings through history.

Of the Anzacs, Ogilvie movingly said of them . . . "The bravest thing God ever made.

AUSTRALIA, A NATION

If the Australian Diggers who made Australia a Nation on the shores of the Dardanelles were just that, their humour and cheerfulness in battle and on leave was as decidedly their own too.

When asked why the Australian Diggers wore their hats "with the side turned up" one wounded Digger retorted to the questioner, his nurse, at Wandsworth Military Hospital, "That's so it is easier for us to salute, Lady".

He must have been, like me, left-handed! The hat is turned up on the left hand side, you salute with the right! Easier to salute! Did any soldier ever hate to salute more than the Diggers?

And if you think they altered their idea of "kow-towing" to the officers, what about when General Mark Clark, in the Italian Invasion, complained to that magnificent New Zealander, General ::Tiny" Freyberg, V.C. "General, I passed two of your Noo Zealanders yesterday and THEY DID NOT SALUTE ME."

Freyberg, loved by his men and always 100 per cent "with them", gave the Yank General apretty typical reply. "TRY WAVING AT THEM". Freyberg of Gallipoli! What a soldier!

BADEN-POWELL'S SCOUTS

One of the memorable experiences I had in the 30's in Britain was to be asked to illustrate the story of Lieut.-General Lord Baden-Powell's first experiment in forming the Boy Scout Movement.

He had held the first camp for scouts down at Brownsea, Poole, in Dorset in 1907 and the Movement was then founded the following year.

He was a little man, with freckles all over his dial, the remaining marks of an attack of an ailment on his face and had an angular nose and scantsandy hair, including atea-dyed moustache.

He told me how he had "tried out" the Scout idea at first with 20 tough, mischievous boys at the Poole fishing village, on the south end of the island. We had one thing in common, he loved to draw.

One of the first things I asked Baden-Powell was how he had got the Scout idea. He told me of his defence of Mafeking and of the British Army in the South African War and the initiative of his Army "Scouts" then wearing felt hats, 'Just like you Australians, and how they "had their sides turned up".

"What was your reason you turned the sides up?" I asked the great British cavalry leader. He told me that it facilitated the 'slope arms' movement and that was also a distinction which he thought 'Regimental' on parade.

BIRDWOOD'S VIEW

Not long after my visit to Poole with Lord Baden-Powell. I was drawing cartoons for "The Bystander" at the House of Lords and I chanced to chat to Field-Marshal Lord Birdwood.

"Did you wear a Digger hat on Gallipoli?" I asked Birdie. "No, I always wore my corkpith helmet even when I was G.O.C. of my Australian Troops", replied Birdie.

A funny incident took place later, in 1934, at Australia House. Welcoming the Australians and Bill Woodful, their Test Cricket Skipper, a little man with an eyeglass burst in, calling, "Bertie, Bertie, where are you, Bertie?"

At last he bowled up to Bert Oldfield, our immortal 'keeper and last of the A.I.F. Team to go to England and represent Australia at cricket. "Bertie, Bertie, the last of my boys," exclaimed the chap with the eyeglass. Always a wag, the late Arthur Mailey drolly said, "Who's THAT?, is it your father, Bert?"

"Oh, no", replied the famous wicketkeeper, that is Lord Birdwood, I'm the last of his A.I.F. boys in Test Cricket". And so he was, the famous Bert!

AUSSIE RULES HAT

When recently the Australian Rules footballers made a 'gimmick' of the Digger hat, and

Page 19

wore a white adaptation of it, with "Pom Poms" attached, to "sport", on their tour of Ireland, some Diggers arose in anger.

The President of the R.S.L. in Victoria, Brigadier, Sir William Hall, C.B.E., D.S.O., known to us all as "Henry"—and who has since received a Knighthood from the Queen, said when commenting on his fellow Victorian footballers "exhibiting" the hat, "We have no copyright on our hat, but do appeal to the 'good tatse' of the footballers."

The slough hat was worn by the Anzac Mounted Division under Allenby at the Beersheba Victory and in 1917 when they captured Jerusalem. It was worn by the A.I.F. in France and in Belgium and is now proudly aloft again among the defenders of the West in Vietnam.

The Digger hat can be worn by a soldier properly. There are many ways of denting and wearing it but you only have to watch on the TV screen a ludicrous American "actor" with the "imitation" of a Digger hat on, supposedly that of an "Austratian Digger", as shown in that awful "Tobruk" film recently to know that this decoration belongs to fighting men and looks appropriate and correct only upon a fighting soldier!

GURKHAS' PRIDE

We do know that the hat does look well on the Gurkhas. The Gurkhas, more magnificent fighters, none have been seen ever, wear our Digger hat, but do not have it turned up at the side, as they go into battle. We wear a steel helmet in action, but their religion will not permit that and they wear felt hats.

I asked Subedar-Major Lalbahadur Thapa, of the 7th Gurkha Rifles (who covered themselves in glory in the Western Desert, sending Rommel's North Africa Korps screaming in defeat), what it felt like to wear his felt hat under murderous fire.

"We are proud to look like the Diggers and it will do us," smiled Thapa, one of the out-



L.A. KNERSCH, 2/24th Bn.

William James SHEEHAN 2/23rd Bn. 10th October, 1970

standing soldiers in the Second World conflict and a hero of the Western Desert. On his chest was the crimson ribbon and the miniature insignia of the Victoria Cross.

The Digger hat must be "balanced." An assorted platoon of dilatory no-hopers can mar their otherwise good appearance by not attending to the denting and balance of their hats.

"The Guards can show how to wear their bearskin caps (not busbies, Sir), and it is a fact that King George the Sixth used to 'balance his bearskin' on his head, otherwise attired in his ordinary suit, in his study at Buckingham Palace for days before taking the salute at Trooping the Colour on the Horse Guards Parade.

ARGUMENTS SETTLED

Arguments will arise from time to time about who really owns what we know as our "Digger Hat," but Australia has well and truly won its claim to it.

A version of it, "turned up at the side and all," is worn by police forces in many parts of the world. The Pennsylvania Patrolmen, Rhodesian Infantry. West Africa troops, Queensland Police, South States Police, all wear it, just like us. So do the King's School boys of Sydney, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and even "Monty" put a "Digger dook" on, before El Alamein.

The men of the Ninth Australian Division wore it, but not in action. So did the other troops at Tobruk. Lieut.-General "Al Baba" Morshead has unfortunately died but other stillliving "Nines" will be there to greet 'Monty" when he comes here later this year for the reunion. But they will not forget 'Ali Baba" in their festivities.

Add to the list the American "Doughboys" who, late in the piece arrived to help the hardworn Allies in France in 1918.

'Cripes", murmured a wornout Digger, coming back from the mud of the trenches he had been in for 10 months, "What a

lot of bloody reinforcements the Kiwis are moving up to the line." He was mistaken, the Yanks had turned up, in "similar hats", to those worn by the "Enzedders".

When I sketched Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey, GOC of the mob, in the last conflict, I had visions of drawing him in his ornamental Field Marshal's cap.

"Not in this please draw me in my Digger hat, I feel more at home, like an Australian in that", he roared. I reckon he did too. For after all "Old Tom" was a fair dinkum "Anzac".

And you could not pay a man a better compliment than refer to him as THAT, could you?

TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS - APRIL, 1971

DINING IN AT PUCKAPUNYAL

The annual Dining-In event at the Rats of Tobruk Sergeant's Mess was held in July, and members of the ROTA committee and the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums were honoured quests.



Candlelight and a formal dress code add to the drama of the annual (very) formal dinner at the Tobruk Barracks at Puckapunyal



Members of the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums entertained before the meal and during the breaks with a collection of bagpipe favourites.



Marlene Bingham, Bruce Bingham, Stuart Tolliday, Glenda Garde, Paul Dipnall and Lachlan Gaylard represented the Rats of Tobruk Association

This candle-lit dinner has been a long-standing tradition. Many descendants will recall the annual bus trip to the barracks for a special luncheon in years gone by. The dinner replaced those lunches and enabled the involvement of more current service personnel. The focus remains, to honour the memory of the Rats of Tobruk, and their success in repelling Rommel for the first time in WW2.

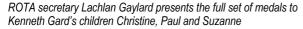
The dinner was a wonderful opportunity for the committee to share the story of our association and the important work it undertakes. A particularly touching moment came when Lieutenant Colonel Jeremy Mar Fan spoke about the profound impact a friend's grandfather, a Rat of Tobruk, had on him as a child. It was later revealed that this Rat was none other than Sydney Kinsman, the Northern Territory's last surviving Rat and a tireless advocate for the commemoration of the Siege of Tobruk.

Attendees were also treated to a performance by members of the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums, adding to the evening's atmosphere. After dinner, guests enjoyed the chance to socialize with current-day history makers, creating a sense of connection between past and present. We are grateful for their service and look forward to attending next year's event.

AUGUST SPECIAL MEETING AT TOBRUK HOUSE

Those who attended Friday's general meeting at Tobruk House were treated to a moving tribute to our last Australian Rat of Tobruk, Tom Pritchard. Tom's condolence book remains available for people to sign whenever Tobruk House is open. The meeting began with a presentation of long overdue medals made to the family of TX1546 Kenneth Gard, a Rat of Tobruk with an incredible story, which needed to be told.







Melbourne Legacy president Kerry Jenke gave an emotional speech regarding the role and importance of her organisation

Also present was Melbourne Legacy President Kerry Jenke who spoke of the trauma experienced by some veterans and their families, and stressed the importance of the work of Legacy.



RSL Victoria State Vice President Terry Makings AM, spoke on the importance of veteran organisations and associations such as ours.

Kathryn Sell represented the Royal Children's Hospital and described how important the Rats of Tobruk Neurology Fellowship has become. Tom was deeply involved in the decision to establish this legacy.

It was an emotional and heartfelt meeting with several other speakers who spoke of more personal memories of Tom. There was also a pictorial tribute to the Rats of Tobruk Association.

FAREWELL TO THE ORIGINAL RATS



Kathryn Sell told us that in the minutes of the meeting to establish the Fellowship, Tom proposed the motion.



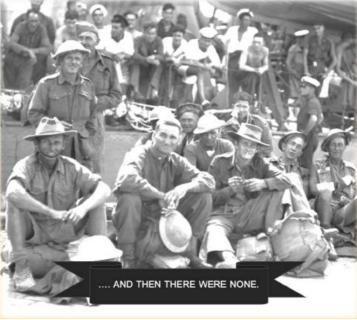












WHAT ABOUT THE ARTILLERY? "This looks like it, boys... "(Story by Glenda Garde)

In this issue we examine the role of the artillery during the siege, and, once again, it is through the words of the men who were there.

In his book, 'Tobruk 1941', Chester Wilmot tells us that the artillery in the Tobruk garrison consisted of $2/12^{th}$ Field Regiment, 3^{rd} Anti-tank Regiment, the 16th, 20^{th} , 24^{th} and 26^{th} Anti-tank Companies and the 8^{th} Light A.A. Battery



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Who best to explain the role of the artillery than ROTA's last veteran president Bob Semple of the 2/12th Field Regiment. It was Bob's belief that the Australians at Tobruk were commanded by good officers and that the instructors who trained them in the use of weapons were excellent. He said that the 'product knowledge' learned saved lives. He also recalled having to use captured enemy equipment because of the shortage in their own.

Bob Semple VX25240 2/12th Field Regiment

"There were no trees in the joint at all, and [when we arrived] we thought, God! There were a few picks there, and we were told, you'd better get to work and see if you can dig a hole for yourselves because you'll get some guns in the morning.

When the morning came, there was this great heap of old Italian guns ... but the biggest problem was they were all in the metric system, and we'd been trained in the imperial system, so you had to convert it all.

So therein was the fun and games. We had had to present ourselves for our officers to do conversions. And we remained like that for a large part of the occupation and the siege. They were the tools of the trade, and you just had to go with it, and you had to depend on your mates."

Eric Watts VX15694 2/12th Field Regiment

"The 2/12th Field Regiment was the only Australian field regiment in Tobruk during the siege, I was lucky to be appointed a sergeant in charge of a 60 pounder of World War One vintage. The Italian guns were dangerous, in that often shells burst at the muzzle, or the barrel recoiled violently causing death or injury to many gun crew members.

The Germans had a large, long range heavier gun, known as 'Bardia Bill'. It was well concealed. In an effort to pinpoint this gun, infantry patrols were sent out flash spotting and technical calculations were used, and we had a fair idea re Bardia Bill's exact location. It created a serious nuisance firing on the harbour, especially when a ship had arrived offloading stores and ammunition and reinforcements. The task of the 60 pounder troop was to engage him, and we usually managed to stop the firing, so we must have been close to his position.

The thing that we were lacking was air observation, and that's what the Germans had; we had no planes of our own whatsoever, no fighter planes to shoot down the Stukas. The Stukas were shot down by the anti-aircraft that was there, the anti-aircraft guns, they were brave fellows too, they kept firing while the bombers were coming down and everything. They had a wall around them too, they were protected, or a gun pit. But we had no air support at all. Had we had an air photographs, we might have been able to locate Bardia Bill exactly, but we didn't.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL 009822

Other missions allocated to us involved one gun being used away from the main troop positions in a roving role. This gun fired rounds at varying times to harass the enemy positions at night. When our gun was pinpointed, we would 'up sticks' and get out guickly. Due to a lack of sleep, we felt harassed ourselves!

We would also fire in support of the infantry, because at the other end of the telephone line was the OP (Observation Post) Officer, and he was there to direct the fire of our artillery, and if he wanted 60- pounders of support for infantry, he would call upon us and we would fire. He would then direct the fire on a concentration, if it was infantry or trucks or whatever it might be....

The British had three regiments there, they were on 25-pounders which was a very, very good gun in the Second World War. And the British, the English 104 RHA it was called, Royal Horse Artillery, they were there, they had been there when we got there, and they had been responsible for knocking out the tanks.... They were great. I thought the Brits were the greatest of all. I don't know why, but it was part of their makeup, whether it was the fact they were trained so well, but they were brave.

And their artillerymen were very, very good. And the 25-pounder had the ability to knock out tanks, it was an anti-tank role, and that gun... the 25-pounder was the second-best gun in the desert, the German 88, that's 88 millimetres, was the best. Because they mounted those on trucks, oh, on tanks, they used them in a field role..., you know, firing at the enemy troops and enemy concentrations. Anti-aircraft, anti-tank and field, they were a very good gun. Ours did not have the anti-aircraft role, they, we were able to fire at concentrations and tanks with the 25pounder.

One ironical fact concerning the Italian shells was notable because, in the Czechoslovakian factories, many anti-Hitler workers sabotaged the ammunition in the manufacturing stage so that on impact they failed to explode. We felt that, although we fired many defective shells at the enemy, we were comforted to find many fired at us were quite useless, hitting the sand with a thud!"



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

Ray Widdows VX8252 2/12th Field Regiment

"In Tobruk we just wore a shirt out, and didn't even wear a shirt a lot of the times, just a pair of shorts, they were called Bombay Bloomers, boots with no socks, sometimes a steel helmet, no head things. We were told, when the young sergeants would fire, you'd open your mouth and the sound was supposed to come through your ears out your mouth or through the mouth and out your ears. No earmuffs or ear protection. That's why most of the artillery have a pension for deafness, that's why I'm a bit hard of hearing.

We were doing 'cattle factory' fire there, which means that you are firing at the opposing enemy artillery and also firing at the German strong points and also a point where the German troops were advancing on the Australian infantry....But that was mainly harassing fire which was on targets, or just keeping the enemy awake. ...

All the line of sight and measurement equipment were all in Italian, whereas all the English equipment was in degrees in and seconds. Same as the range, they were all in metric, whereas Australian measurements were all in imperial yards, so consequently it all had to be transformed back into Italian measurement, back into English or imperial measurement. And our CO who was a fairly good mathematician, together with some other officers who were also amongst the leading observation act people, they were able to come up with a converted race table and convert a table to adjust all back from the English metrics and back from the Italian metric system back to the Australian imperial system, which made the gun laying and everything a little bit easier.

In the crew, number one is the gun sergeant, on a sixty pounder number two works the bridge, number three lays the gun, number four rams the shell home, number five puts the cartridge in. Number two then slams the bridge and then the ammunition number brings the shell up on the carrying platform ready for the next one. Well you fired the gun in the pit, but when you had to lay down, or 'stand easy' they called it, generally you went back to, once you'd cleaned all the cartridges you made the gun pit ready for action next time, you just cleaned up around the pit and had a bit of a rest."

Perhaps Bob Semple should have the last word about the artillery

"the Stukas would fly in and roll over us... We'd say, 'Well, this looks like it boys, and so three of us would be sitting and each one of us would put our hands up and we'd hold each other's hands "If this is it, we all go together", such was the spirit within the gun crew."

- *Australians at War Film Archive
- *Stonnington Leader November 2017

A CONCERT IN A CAVE AT TOBRUK by Chester Wilmot, ABC Field Unit, 1941

.....Well, who would have thought!

ABC war correspondent Chester Wilmot (1911-1954) pioneered the use of recording equipment in the field. He spent several months in Tobruk in 1941 during the siege by German and Italian troops when the Australian soldiers became known as the Rats of Tobruk. He recorded his dispatches on lacquer discs, sometimes with the sounds of gunfire or bombing raids in the background.

In October 1941, the ABC Field Unit recorded a concert put on by 400 Australian soldiers in an ammunition cave. Wilmot's introduction places you right in the cave alongside the men and the musical performances (including the short song *Bless Them All* and a wistful saxophone and piano accordion instrumental) reveal the acoustics to be surprisingly good. The highlight is one soldier's stirring rendition of *The Legion of the Lost*, with the massed voices of the makeshift military choir bringing the song to a rousing finale.

Concert in a Cave at Tobruk by Chester Wilmot, ABC Field Unit, 1941 | National Film and Sound Archive of Australia can be heard via the link below:

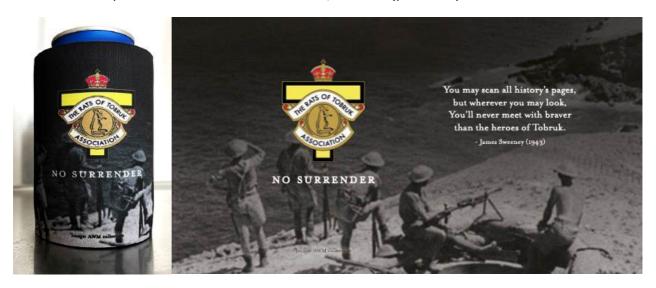
https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/asset/82432-concert-cave-tobruk-chester-wilmot-abc-field-unit-1941

(This story is thanks to our intrepid researcher and secretary, Lachlan Gaylard.)

NEW MERCHANDISE

We are pleased to introduce three new items to our merchandise range featuring a new design – 'Heroes of Tobruk'.

First is a new stubby holder. On one side is our logo and NO SURRENDER and on the other side is an excerpt from James Sweeney's famous 1943 poem "The Heroes of Tobruk" (See the artwork below right). The background is an image from the collection of the Australian War Memorial. The new stubby holders are available now for \$10 each (plus P+P)



We also have a ballpoint pen (\$5) and a mug (\$15) as shown in the images of early samples pictured below. The pens are available now. We expect the mugs to be available early 2025.



The Heroes of Tobruk by James Sweeney

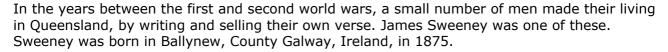
Who comprise those gallant heroes, and where did they come from Renowned in song and story, Aussies some thousands strong?

They are composed of Macs and O's, with Smiths and Jones combined With Camerons and Campbells to fortify the line.

Now famed the wide world over for the blows they gave and took
On the sandy plains of Africa, in and round Tobruk.

Now, what inspired such valour, many thousand miles from home? It was not lust of conquest – they had plenty of their own. It was for faith and freedom, and Australia's honour, too, And to stem the tide of evil and tyranny subdue.

Urged on by noble sentiments, the Aussies cannot fail. For God and King and Country, their arms will prevail. You may scan all history's pages, but wherever you may look, You'll never meet with braver than the heroes of Tobruk.



Little is known of his life until he migrated to Queensland in 1930, at the age of 54. He seems to have lived in the South Burnett region until around 1935, when his first volume of poetry 'Original Verse' was published. It was subsequently reissued twice with additional material added. Sweeney returned to Ireland in July 1945, after the victory in Europe, but before peace with Japan. Nothing more is known of him. (from https://www.oldqldpoetry.com/james-sweeney



HISTORIC CHURCH WITH WARTIME LEGACY OF A RAT OF TOBRUK

Story taken from About Regional 7/8/24 by Edwina Mason

The Catholic Church in Bribbaree – west of Young – is now inviting buyers who, in return, would become proud owners of a building with remarkable links to a Rat of Tobruk.

Officially opened in 1962, the church was the second Catholic Church in Bribbaree, the first having been relocated from its bush setting at nearby Milong, by wagons, in 1926 to the more progressive settlement of Bribbaree, much to the ire of those residents who vigorously took up pens to fight its removal.

St Columba's, the second, was built under the watchful gaze of Reverend Father Owen Thomas Cosgriff who had served with distinction as a chaplain with the 2/4th Australian General Hospital in the Second World War, notably part of a defiant garrison at Tobruk who, over eight months, held off German and Italian forces in 1941.

During the siege, Father Cosgriff conducted three masses each Sunday at St Anthony's in Tobruk despite the constant air raids by the German Stukas, only moving the services after the engineers deemed the church unsafe. He would later recount how the Germans found out the time of mass on a Sunday and accordingly sent over planes to bomb the church.

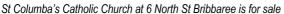
"Not a soldier moved from the church and there was not a single casualty. The following Sunday, the time of mass was changed and the Stukas came and razed the church 30 minutes before the arrival of the priest and troops."

Father Cosgriff was evacuated from Tobruk on a stretcher on 12 October.

The Australian War Memorial houses a collection consisting of Cosgriff's original handwritten diary for 1941, while serving in Tobruk. Also included is a set of letters which Cosgriff sent to his parents during 1941-1942 containing detailed descriptions of events at the front.

Following his return from World War II in which he gave service in the Middle East, Father Cosgriff assisted in Goulburn and Wagga Wagga dioceses and arrived in Bribbaree from Ardlethan in 1961 where he immediately set about building a larger, very distinctive church of rounded concrete featuring, "exterior steel supports with a flying buttress effect".







St. Anthony's Church, Tobruk, 1941

Designed by architect Norman Lipman of Young under the direction of Father Cosgriff, in the absence of historic records, there has been some suggestion the post-war St Columba's was indicative of the Nissen or Quonset-style of building, used during both world wars as churches, bomb and machinery stores, and in post-war migrant camps and accommodation in Australia. But there was another clue. According to historical archaeologist Ray Hampton Christison, "It remains a striking example of an architectural style known as Post-War Ecclesiastical, which strongly reflects the clean and dramatic lines of modern architecture but, in keeping with the desires of clergy and congregation, retains the sense and feel of a traditional church".

St Columba's, it could be argued, also bears some resemblance to St Anthony's in Tobruk.

Father Cosgriff would go on to become parish priest at St Bede's in Red Hill during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

* Written with thanks to Margaret Nowlan-Jones

COMMEMORATION OF RELIEF IN TOBRUK AT THE SHRINE

This annual service at the Shrine was held on Sunday August 25 at 2pm. It honours the sacrifices of the Australian 9th Division and the Polish Carpathian Brigade during the siege of Tobruk.

In April 1941, after fighting the German counter-offensive along the north coast of Africa, the 9th Division withdrew to Tobruk. There the enemy surrounded the town in a siege that would last 240 days. Seven hundred and forty-nine men of the 9th Division were killed in the siege.

From August 1941, the 9th Division began to be relieved. The Polish Independent Carpathian Brigade took over their duties at Tobruk and remain there until the siege was lifted in December 1941. Composed of soldiers exiled after the invasion of Poland in 1939, they lost one hundred and twenty-seven men while serving in Tobruk.

The guest speaker this year was Colonel Daniel Strack, Assistant Commander, 4th Brigade, 2nd Australian Division. Daniel is the grandson of Rat of Tobruk Bert Veitch VX23447 2/5th Field Ambulance. Bert was a mate of Tom Pritchard. Daniel spoke of three things that epitomised the actions of the Rats, and the importance and relevance of the siege even today.



Resilience - a word often spoken in military circles, yet few events in our history embody it like the Siege of Tobruk. Their endurance, their ability to adapt and overcome, exemplify the essence of resilience. Tobruk teaches us that resilience is not merely the ability to endure but the courage to persist, to find strength within ourselves and our comrades, even when the odds are against us.

Their **quiet heroism** speaks to the power of duty performed without expectation of recognition. These men did not seek glory; they simply answered the call to serve, driven by a profound sense of responsibility to their country and to each other.

Comradeship was the lifeblood of the Rats of Tobruk. The bonds they formed in the heat of battle in North Africa were forged in steel, a testament to the strength that comes from standing together in the face of danger.



Please post this form and payment to the Secretary or pay by credit card or EFT Payment must be made no later than Friday 22nd November, 2024 **Payment Details:** Payment of \$35 per person Payment by electronic funds transfer (EFT) is our preferred method of payment. Payment can also be made by credit EFT Payment: If you are paying by EFT, it is important that you include a unique reference so that the payment can be matched to your application. A suggested reference is the words 'XMAS' followed by your surname. Bank account details: Account Name: Rats of Tobruk Association BSB: 633 000 Account No: 197610603 Credit Card Payment. Please provide the following details: Name on Card: Amount \$ CVC: | | | | | (3-digit number on the back of Visa/MC, 4 digits on front of AMEX) Expiry Date _ _ : _ _ If you pay by EFT or credit card you can scan this form and email it to: ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com Attendee's name:(please print) No. of tickets......(please print) Contact phone number: Email address: All enquiries to email address; ratsoftobrukassociation41@gmail.com Phone: 0432 232 502 Or please forward to: The Secretary, ROTA INC. 44 Victoria Avenue, ALBERT PARK, VIC 3206

HALL FOR HIRE



Tobruk House is available for hire. In recent times it has played host to several 70th birthday parties, numerous meetings of military groups, a police meeting and even a funeral! With a large screen projection system, a clear PA system and tables and chairs to seat up to 80 people, it can offer many possibilities. If you are looking for a unique Melbourne venue for your special event, please contact the secretary on 0432 232 502 for more information.

HFI P PI FASFI

What an amazing outpouring of collective grief we have seen since the people of Australia became aware that there are no longer any veterans of the Siege of Tobruk in our midst. The association has been overwhelmed by the interest shown and by the kindness of the people of Australia, demonstrated through the many messages of support we have received.

You may have noticed that both our June and July open days at Tobruk House this year were cancelled. This was simply because we did not have enough volunteers to open our doors. To continue the legacy of these men, our fathers, grandfathers and uncles etc, it is vital that the story of Tobruk siege is not allowed to simply fade away.

Of course, we know how busy life can be at times, but if you think you can spare a few hours to come along on one of our scheduled Sunday open days (or any other events), please contact: Secretary Lachlan Gaylard 0432 232 502 or email the association (ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com) Any assistance will be greatly appreciated.

****Please don't be put off if you think you are not knowledgeable enough about the siege. We are not necessarily experts either! Most people who visit the hall are just passers-by, interested in the basics of our story. Some have never even heard of us or the siege. The exhibition on display has proved to be a wonderful resource and we are hoping to add to it in the coming years.

RATS OF TOBRUK NEUROSCIENCE FELLOWSHIP FUND

The 'Rats of Tobruk Association Neuroscience Fellowship Fund' has become a 'virtual' monument to the mighty Rats of Tobruk.

Since the fellowship fund was established by the surviving veterans, an annual Fellowship has been awarded to a young doctor so that he or she can undertake studies associated with paediatric neuroscience. The Fellowship has had an inspirational track record of success and achievement. It is an internationally sought after.



prestigious fellowship. The growing number of recipients is contributing to an international network of paediatric neuroscience specialist.

Adding a gift in your Will is another way to help ensure the continuation of the Fellowship.

To learn more about how you can contribute to this most worthy cause by adding a gift in your will, or most importantly, to let the Foundation know of your intention, please contact

> **Kathryn Sell, Planned Giving, RCH Foundation** (03 9345 6389 or email: Kathryn.Sell@rch.org.au)

NOTICE: ROTA SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE FOR PAYMENT ON 1ST JANUARY 2025

Affiliate members are reminded that this year's subscription is due for payment on 1st January. The subscription remains at \$30 for 2025.

Please note that individual payment requests are not normally sent to members. The cooperation of members by responding to this notice and paying their subscription as soon as possible would be greatly appreciated.

For payment information please refer to the 2025 Annual Subscription Payment Form on page 18.

If you are paying by EFT, ensure you include a unique reference such as your surname and membership no.

If you pay by over-the-counter bank deposit, please ensure you send details to ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com or post to The Secretary, ROTA, 44 Victoria Ave, Albert Park, 3206.

This is important for correct matching of payments, as bank deposits do not have adequate referencing. Payment can also be made using a credit or debit card. Please note that Tobruk Veterans and their wives or widows, are exempt from paying the annual subscription. Life and Honorary members are also exempt.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members:

Tevita Topui Michael Kelly Susan Ling **Nigel Hollier**

Geoffrey Pedler Rob Barrie Christopher Stock

Your membership helps to protect the legacy of the Rats of Tobruk



ROTA MERCHANDISE



See Order Form on page 19 for postage costs and other details.



LADIES SUMMER POPPY SCARF Light Blue, Dark Blue, White, Grey, Black \$15





ROTA RUGBY TOP Sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL XXXL, XXXXL, XXXXXL **\$60**



ROTA POLO SHIRT Sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL XXXL, XXXXL, XXXXXL **\$45**



ROTA 'BASEBALL' CAP One size fits all \$28



'HEROES OF TOBRUK' STUBBIE HOLDER



'HEROES OF TOBRUK' BALLPOINT PEN **\$5**



ROTA BADGE CAR WINDOW STICKER 7cm x 8.5cm approx Sticks to inside of window \$10



RATS OF TOBRUK 1941 LAPEL BADGE \$15



'RATS OF TOBRUK' CD INCLUDES 'NO SURRENDER' Written and sung by John Turner \$15



80TH ANNIVERSARY SIEGE MEDAL **\$50**



RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC APPLICATION FOR AFFILIATE MEMBERSHIP



Please forward this application <u>together with payment of **\$30**</u> to: The Secretary of ROTA, Tobruk House, 44 Victoria Ave, Albert Park, Vic, 3206.

Contact Phone No: 0432 232 502

Contact Email: ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com

Name:				
Title Given Nar		Surname		
Address:				
		Suburb / State	Post Code	
Email:@		Contact Phone No:		
Please Print Clearly				
Are you over 18 years of age: <u>YES</u> or <u>NO</u>	To be eligible for me	mbership the applicant must l	be over 18 years of age	
Are you a descendant / relative of a Rat o	of Tobruk: YES or NO	If yes please print his deta	ails below:	
Given Name (s)	Surname	Service ID	Unit	
My relationship to the veteran is:				
Payment Details: Payment of \$30 Annual Subscription must a Payment by electronic funds transfer (EFT) i EFT Payment: If you are paying by EFT, it i	is our preferred method	of payment. Payment can also	•	
matched to the application. A suggested ref	-			
Bank Account Details: Account Name: Ra	ts of Tobruk Associatio	n BSB: 633 000 Account No:	197610603	
Credit Card Payment. Please provide the fo	llowing details:			
Name on Card:		Amount \$		
Card No.		_ _ _	_ _	
CVC: [] (3 digit number on t	the back of Visa/MC, 4 digit or	n front of AMEX) Expiry Date	_:	
If you pay by EFT or credit card you can sca	n this form and email it	to: ratsoftobruk41@gmail.co	m	
Privacy Clause: Information requested in this application membership, maintain the members registe It will not be provided to third parties for members' register.	er and to keep you info	med about the association, its	s activities and products.	
Promotional Photos: At the Association's functions, photo's may By attending any of these functions you give	•			
Annual Subscription: By joining the Association, you agree to paramount of the Annual Subscription is set by	=			
Association Rules: By joining the Association, you agree to a Management from time to time. These are				
Applicant's Signature:		Date:		
Membership Approval: Delegate of the Commi			January 2024	



RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC MERCHANDISE ORDER FORM

Item	Cost per Item	Quantity	Size (Refer page 20)	Postage Yes/No	Postage (Ordinary Mail)	Total	Comments
Rats of Tobruk, 1941, Lapel Badge – butterfly /clutch fitting	\$15				Inc postage		
Rats of Tobruk, 1941, Lapel Badge – stick pin fitting	\$15				Inc postage		
80th Anniversary Medal	\$50				\$11		Postage for up to 2 medals to same address.
ROTA Rugby Top	\$60				\$15		
ROTA Polo Shirt (New look navy blue with yellow stripes)	\$45				\$11		
ROTA "baseball" style cap	\$28				\$11		
ROTA Bar Mat	\$40				\$15		
Heroes of Tobruk stubbie holder	\$10				\$11		Postage for up to 2 units to the same address
Badge Car Window Sticker (Sticks to inside of window)	\$10				Inc postage		20% discount for more than one sticker.
'The Rats Of Tobruk' CD	\$15				\$11		
Heroes of Tobruk pen	\$5				\$11		Postage for up to 5 pens to the same address
			Colour				
Ladies Poppy Scarf (light weight)	\$15				\$11		Postage for up to 4 scarves to same address
\$15 postage for orders of to the same add	•	tems	Total am	ount to be p	oaid:	\$	

Payment is required before the items are sent. Delivery time can vary depending on stock availability and could be up to 6 weeks. Payment by electronic funds transfer (EFT) is our preferred method of payment. Payment can also be made by card, cheque, or money order.

EFT Payment: If you are paying by EFT, it is important that you include a unique reference so that the payment can be matched to the members register. A suggested reference is the abbreviation 'MERCH' followed by your surname.

Bank Account Name: Rats of Tobruk Association BSB: 633 000 Account No: 197610603

Payment can also be made by Credit or Debit Card.

To arrange this please call: 0432 232 502

Purchaser's Name:	(Please Print)		Contact Phone No:	
Email Address:	(110000111111)			
Delivery Address:				
Suburb:		State:	Postcode:	

Please forward completed form to:

'Merchandise Officer, ROTA, 44 Victoria Av, Albert Park, Vic, 3206.'

If you pay by EFT or card, you can scan this form and email to: ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com

All enquiries to the Merchandise Officer

email: ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com Phone: 0432 232 502

What's on at The Shrine



LAST POST - Every Sunday at 4.45PM



The Last Post Service is another reason to make a family visit to the Shrine on Sunday afternoons. This new moving ceremony features a piper, bugler and Shrine Guard in historic uniform.

TRENCHES TO RUNWAY



This exhibition delves into the profound impact of military clothing design and wartime conditions on popular fashion, tracing these influences from the 1870s to the present day. Discover how wartime led to innovative design solutions and how the fashion industry reinterpreted these styles, giving them new meaning and expression in civilian life.

INK IN THE LINES



This Australian War Memorial touring exhibition focuses on the stories of Australia's military veterans, through stunning photography of their tattoos. Many members and veterans of the Australian Defence Forces have tattoos, and while their reasons for getting tattooed are as varied as the people themselves, self-expression and belonging play a part. They also share a common purpose in getting inked: to remember.

TOYS, TALES & TENACITY



This first-of-its-kind exhibition at the Shrine explores the experiences of children during war through toys and games. Come for an immersive and thought-provoking journey as we explore the intertwined stories of war, childhood, and the enduring spirit of youth in the face of adversity.