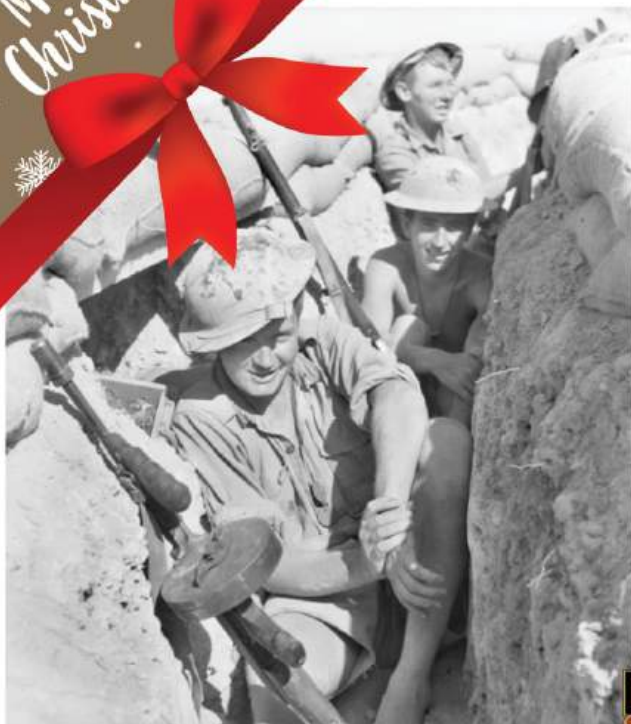


Merry
Christmas



TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION



THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION
NEUROSCIENCE FELLOWSHIP FUND

RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC.

ABN 23 136 193 517

44 VICTORIA AVENUE, ALBERT PARK, VIC 3206

www.ratsoftobrukassociation.org.au

PHONE No 0432 232 502



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

Month / Date	Event Description
Sunday December 1	Christmas luncheon (Booking essential. \$35/head)
Sunday February 23	Annual General Meeting and lunch at Tobruk House
Sunday March 2	Open Day 10am – 3pm
Sunday March 30	Open Day 10am – 3pm
Sunday April 13	Tobruk Sunday – Service and afternoon tea at Tobruk House
Friday April 25	Anzac Day – Tobruk House will be open from 9am to 3pm

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: FEBRUARY 2025

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Articles or letters with no contact details will not be published.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

RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC.

Vice President's Message – December 2024

Dear members and friends,

Yet again, it is my very great honour to present the recent activities of your management committee.



Spring has finally arrived, with warmer weather on the way. The oft-called winter of discontent has passed, bringing with it the promise of new growth and sunshine. Spring is a time for renewal.

Following the sad passing of Tommy Pritchard over winter, our last remaining Australian Rat of Tobruk has been honourably recognised, not only by the membership but also by various national dignitaries, along with condolences from national parliament. The condolence book contains many kind thoughts and memories from members, dignitaries, neighbours and general members of the public, illustrating the broad spread of interest and awareness of the importance of the Rats of Tobruk.

This underlines the importance of our organisation. The obligation to keep alive the knowledge of the incredible feats of these men is more important than ever. Our commitment to their legacy of the Rats of Tobruk Royal Children's Hospital Neuroscience Fellowship is stronger than ever. As we are fast approaching Christmas, please consider gifting a membership. It's a modest investment of \$30.00, yet it will have a significant impact on the association and the work that we can do.

We have been very pleased to see an increase in the numbers attending our general meetings with some excellent guest speakers providing plenty to chat about over lunch.

With this issue we are also looking for expressions of interest from all members who would like to join our committee. Several current committee members are retiring and so there are many roles we need to fill. In particular, we need to fill the position of treasurer. If you, or if you know of any members with accounting experience, we encourage you/them to come forward. For more information on what this or any other committee position entails, please contact the secretary.

It would be my very great pleasure to welcome some new members to the Committee.

As this will be my last epistle for the year, I, along with the committee, extend very best wishes to all members and their families for the season. I look forward to welcoming members and guests to the forthcoming Rats of Tobruk Christmas Party. (Don't forget to book.) And I hope to see many of you at Tobruk House in the new year.

Kind regards,

Paul F Dipnall

FROM THE ARCHIVES

This month the archives article is from ROTA member Ray Rowley, and was sent to us in response to the story in the August issue about the concert at Tobruk.

There were an unknown number of concerts held during the siege. This was for the 2/24th Bn.

PROGRAMME

Compere: "Cedric" Parker.		
Geo. (Dead) Slow	(Baritone)	Because
AIF (Bozo) Boss	(Mouth Organ)	Selection
Newcombe (Duke) Goldsmith		Recitation
Ron (Bing) Winterburn		Crooner
The Tobruk Trio - AIF, Harry And Cooky		Instrumental
Raul (Caruco) James (Tenor)		'Smilin' Thru'
J. (Amadio) Anderson		Flageolet
P. (Tex) Greagen		Yodeller
Beer Coy Vocal Trio (Big, Conny and Mac)		A Run item?
Iwon (Maidrun) French and Joe Moloney (from Czechoslovakia)		Sketch
Sid (Buccancer) Morgan		Baritone
Fred (Fanny) Hollingsworth		Recitation
Harry (Shugg) Fraser		Cornet Solo
Lindsay (Strength thru') Joyce		Tenor
Book and AIF		A Spoonful
Stan (Tommy Gun) Stratton		Crooner
Bill (Adler) Rainsworth		Aussie Harp
George (Perfect) Bliss		Recitation
Joe (The Other) Moloney		Baritone
Tobruk Trio Again		Selections
NATIONAL ANTHEM.		

Production: Major C. G. Weir and Padre Fomar
Decor: Monsieur Georges Gassen
Cover Design: Alan Davenport
Printing etc by the Puffery Flyer Press Inc.

By pure chance, during a recent working bee at Tobruk House, in the December 1968 issue of the Tobruk House News, we found another reference to a Tobruk concert.



CONCERT IN TOBRUK

Most of us have heard that such functions took place but few of us can claim to have been in attendance on such an occasion. Here is the programme for such a concert.

CONCERT TO BE HELD AT THE M.D.S. TOBRUK on the 7th September, 41. from 1830 hrs. to 2030 hrs.

PROGRAMME

Arranged and produced by N.C.O.s and men of 104th Regiment, R.H.A.

- 1.—Piano Accordion Solo: "Bright Music." Soloist, Gnr. Dick Salter
- 2.—Song: "Sorento." Soloist, Gnr. "Ivor" Aaron.
- 3.—Comedian: "Any More For Any More." Gnr. "Enoch" Mendle.
- 4.—Composition: "Still is the Night," "Barce Woodlands." Written and composed by Bdr. Geo. E. Clarke. Soloist, Gnr. Dick Salter.

- 5.—Song: "Where Our Heinkels and Junkers Dive Into the Sea." Solist, Sgm. L. James.
 - 6.—Cornet Solo: Soloist, Gnr. A. Gardiner.
 - 7.—Song: "Dancing in the Moonlight." Written and composed by Gnr. Enoch Mendle. Soloist, Gnr. "Bill" Bent.
 - 8.—Harmonica Solo: "Snake Charmer" and "Caravan." Soloist, Sig. Ken Lander.
 - 9.—Desert Boys Sings (this means you): "That Cause The Motherland."
 - 10.—Banjo Solo: Soloist, Gnr. A. Poulton.
 - 11.—Quartet: "Quaint Little Old Fashioned Town" and "Passing By." (Sigs. Lander, Hawgood, James and Steer.)
 - 12.—Comedian: "Here We Are Again." Gnr. "Enoch" Mendle.
 - 13.—Song Select: Soloist, Gnr. I. L. Muir.
 - 14.—Song: "The End of the Road." Soloist, Bdr. Geo. E. Clarke.
- THE KING**
Compere: Sgt. "Dick" Castle.

2/5TH FIELD AMBULANCE REUNION 2024 (Story by Glenda Garde)

This year's 2/5th Field Ambulance Assoc. reunion luncheon was once again held at the famous Young and Jackson's Hotel in Melbourne. The reunion is traditionally held on the Friday before Caulfield Cup Day, the day in 1940 on which the 2/5th left for the Middle East. Tom Pritchard, who passed away in August, was our last 2/5th veteran and had been a regular attendee at these reunions, and was remembered fondly. Peter Butters, son of Bill Butters VX20925, read from his dad's memoirs, which describe the unit's departure from Melbourne on October 18, 1940.

'Embarkation – makes us into six bob a day' tourists'

'During the evening, Saturday 18th October 1940, we entrained as a unit at Seymour, and after being shunted into every siding to enable priority trains to move in either direction, we finally passed through platforms 6 & 7, Flinders Street, Station at 1.30am, after the last train at 12.05am had departed. The station was deserted and extremely quiet. Shunted into the Jolimont yards and back through platform 10, destination Port Melbourne. Six to a compartment, our gear had been stacked on the floor, enabling an attempt to sleep, one each in the wire luggage overhead racks, two seats and two members on the luggage (kits).

Reg Harry boasted at Seymour, "Tell me when we reach the nearest station to Kensington, as I will go home to mum, because I don't think this war really needs me." We passed South Kensington station at 1.15am, by which time he was sound asleep in one of the racks, which saved him having to prove his 'big man' talk.

I did not sleep but watched every move toward our 'secret destination', which proved to be the 'Mauretania', a Cunard Line luxury vessel commissioned only weeks before the outbreak of the war, which had performed only one passenger Atlantic trip before war became a reality. The vessel had recently sailed to Melbourne for a refit as a troop ship.

The Ships Carpenter's Union fitted an extra two pine bunks (vertical, upper/lower) in each four berth cabin, and similar accommodation was made in holds and chambers between decks. All luxury fittings were then to be removed, i.e. beautiful maple and teak paneling, luxury carpets, chrome fittings, chandeliers, tables, bars etc. However, a demarcation dispute of some weeks standing between the Ships Carpenters and the Ships Painters and Dockers Union had prevented their removal to storage at Downards in Carnegie 'for the duration'. This was settled some weeks later, so we sailed around breakfast time, Monday, 20th October 1940, with the full luxury intact!

Maurie Benson (son of VX17910 Leo Benson) was our MC for the day and once again did a superb job of keeping us in check. Sue Coghill had the honour of proposing a toast to the unit. Sue is the daughter of Bert 'Chook' Fowler (VX20954). 'Chook' had once been an editor of the precursor to this publication. After a delicious lunch, and before the traditional raffle, proceedings included some stories from past interviews with some of the men.

As has been mentioned before, we wonder if these men of the 2/5th had any idea of what lay ahead back in 1940? I once asked veteran Bill Butters if, whilst in Tobruk, they had any idea that they were making history. He laughingly replied, "of course not"! He said they were too busy worrying about how to make it through to the next day! These men and others like them, might be pleasantly surprised to know that reunions such as this one continue to this day, and that, they, and their stories, are not forgotten. An edition of the Tobruk Echo dated November 1963 reported a reunion get-together of 60-70 members. Thirty descendants of these men attended the reunion this year, which is a very good 'roll-up' and, of course, it was decided that the 2/5th family would meet once again in 2025. Why wouldn't we?

****If your association has had a reunion, or intends having one, please send details to the THN. We would love to hear from you.**

2/5th Field Ambulance Reunion

FORMED in May, 1940, the 2/5th Australian Field Ambulance was disbanded in October, 1945. In between times, however, the unit had popped into such out-of-the-way places as Tobruk, Milne Bay, Goodenough Island, Buna, Sandananda, Ramu Valley and Balikpapan, Borneo.

Let by their original commanding officer, Colonel Arthur Green, members of the 2/5th gathered in force again on Friday night, 20th October, 1941, on the occasion of their annual reunion, held this year at the New Treasury Hotel in Spring Street, Melbourne.

Some 60 to 70 members attended—a splendid indication for a small unit some 18 years after disbandment, yet not surprising when you know what a staunch band they are. They came from far and wide: most of them were Borneo of Tobruk badge, and they enjoyed every minute of it.

Amongst those present were two other original officers of the unit—Dr. Dennis Stone and Colonel Wally McMillan—both still looking in the glory of the War years. A string of names of Goodenough—Dr. James, Nancy Woodcock and Tom Raine. Among a number of bushwhackers who attended was George Freeman, from Woorin; and there were three foreigners from interstate—two from South Australia, one from "Bobby Over" country. Chatterbox Jimmy Wilson sent his regards from Western Australia.

Toasts for "The Queen" and "Fusion Country" were proposed by Dr. Stone and Colonel McMillan. Charlie Jamies, before proposing the toast for "The Unit," related a number of humorous incidents which highlighted the 2/5th throughout its years of service, but, unfortunately, the presence of waitresses necessitated some re-arranging of the seating. The story of Bill Wagner and George May (of which I have heard too often). Up in the Ramu Valley, George May (Jack) had developed an unexpected talent with the microscope and became the unit "pathologist." Never far away from his microscope, he studied blood, strains and what-have-you, and, with the tenacity of a Queensland housewife, ministered and looked his books of anatomy and other things. These were the days, however, when Bill Wagner, in a chivalrous mood, was sometimes the way with army cooks; probably a memory of which he was particularly proud. He gave some to George to try out, and in the course of the evening, he was reported—

"Well, Bill, I've examined it for three days now and I can't find a thing wrong with you!"

There were, of course, any amount of other stories told around the table, and as the night progressed Reg O'Leary and Nancy Woodcock, along with vocal entertainment—Harry, by the way, did not sing "Queensy" this time. Then, true to tradition, Barney Brady performed the time-honoured ritual of carrying the C.O. pin-board around the room—a ritual which, from memory, dates back to the Christmas festival at Aleppo in 1941.

A grand night, certainly, for there's no doubt but that these unit reunions have no significance at all of their own. Each year the boys look just the same—fit, but, alas, yet, strangely enough, the passing of the years seems only to strengthen the bonds of comradeship forged by men who shared a common experience—a peculiar comradeship in which men from all walks of life rally to the assistance of comrades who are less fortunate. And to those members of the unit who couldn't make it to the reunion, I can assure you that you were not forgotten—somebody, sometime or other during the night, your name was sure to have been mentioned.

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TRASH OR TREASURE?

(Story by Glenda Garde)

ROTA was recently contacted by member Nancy Litchfield, daughter of Thomas 'Rex' Tingate (Signals) VX1596, with an interesting story for us.

Nancy had noticed in a neighbourhood hard rubbish clearance that someone was disposing of some old.... in fact very old, 78rpm records. Imagine her surprise when she discovered that amongst these recordings was a 1939 Columbia LP with a song, 'Lord Haw Haw, the Humbug of Hamburg'.



The original 78rpm Bakelite record

A quick google reveals that the song "Lord Haw Haw, the Humbug of Hamburg" was performed by The Western Brothers, a popular English music hall and radio act from the 1930s to the late 1950s. This song was a satirical piece targeting William Joyce, infamously known as Lord Haw Haw, who broadcast Nazi propaganda during World War II. (He was christened 'Haw Haw' by the British press and was executed after the war.) Now, while those familiar with the story of the Rats of Tobruk know of Lord Haw Haw and his exploits, unfortunately many people do not.

Nancy was concerned that some people... 'have no idea of some of our history and don't value what has taken place in the past. To us, it (*finding the record*) was like finding a treasure in the local hard rubbish collection in the street, but to whomever threw this rare item out, it was presumably just trash, that had no value.

The Rats and our other brave war service men and women who risked their lives to protect our way of life and freedoms would be shocked to find out how little respect or gratitude is expressed or appreciated, for the sacrifices they made.'

Well said Nancy!

And in case you would like to listen to the song, here's the link.

[The Western Brothers - Lord Haw Haw, the Humbug of Hamburg / That's A Secret That... \(1939\) - YouTube](#)

Nancy has kindly donated the record to ROTA for the hall memorabilia collection.



The Western Brothers



"Lord Haw Haw" -William Joyce in Berlin

GEORGE BIRKETT'S ABORIGINAL SERVICE MEDAL *(Story by Lachlan Gaylard)*

Victoria Police recently introduced the Aboriginal Service Medal, a prestigious award designed to recognise the dedication and contributions of Aboriginal employees within the force. Among the first recipients of the medal was George Cyril Allan Birkett, a pioneer who holds a special place in the history of Victoria Police. George Birkett made history in 1951 when he became the first Aboriginal police officer to graduate from the Victoria Police Academy, and his legacy continues to inspire generations.

Born in Richmond in 1923, George's story is one of resilience, determination, and service. Raised in a family with deep roots in Aboriginal heritage, George's mother, Annie Florence McDonald, was from the Lake Condah Mission on Gunditjmara Country, near Warrnambool. In 1940, at the age of 17, George enlisted in the Australian Army, ostensibly by falsifying his age on his application. He served as part of the 2/23rd Infantry Battalion in the Middle East and New Guinea, becoming one of the celebrated "Rats of Tobruk." He was discharged in 1945 after serving with distinction.

Upon returning to civilian life, George's dedication to public service led him to Victoria Police. He was one of the first Aboriginal individuals to join the force, graduating from the police academy on 14 May 1951. George's police career spanned 32 years, during which he served in various roles, including at Russell Street, Victoria Docks, and Wharf Patrol. He also worked in the Special Patrol and Crime Investigation Branches. In 1971, George was promoted to Senior Constable, a recognition of his hard work, commitment, and professionalism.

Throughout his career, George received numerous awards, including commendations for his outstanding dedication to duty. Notably, he was recognised in 1954 for displaying exceptional zeal, patience, and ability in his work, and in 1976, he received the Chief Commissioner's Certificate. Despite not having a driver's licence, George's commitment to his work remained unshaken. He travelled daily from his family home in Heathmont to the city by train, showing his unwavering dedication to his role.

George's legacy also includes inspiring those close to him to follow his path. He encouraged his cousin, Robert Molyneaux, to join Victoria Police, and they served together in the Special Patrol starting in 1968.

Retiring in 1983, after more than three decades of service, George's influence within Victoria Police was profound. His life's work exemplifies the qualities of resilience, leadership, and dedication to public service, making him a fitting honouree of the newly established Aboriginal Service Medal.

At the special ceremony on 16 October 2023, George's son, George Birkett Jr., accepted the medal on behalf of his late father, continuing the family's legacy of service to the community. The Aboriginal Service Medal, introduced by Sen-Sgt Christian Wake and endorsed by the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, is a fitting tribute to the contributions of Aboriginal employees in Victoria Police, and George Birkett's pioneering role in that history will never be forgotten.



George Birkett in 1951



*Chief Commissioner Shane Patton and George Birkett Jr
with George's Aboriginal Service Medal*

GAME, SET, MATCH... U.S.A. 'TOBRUK' STYLE (Story by Glenda Garde)

ROTA has occasionally had overseas orders for our merchandise, but usually from the UK, which is understandable. We were therefore somewhat surprised a few months ago when we were contacted by Don, a representative of a Californian tennis club wanting to order some of our polo shirts.

When quizzed as to why he chose us, Don explained that he picked Tobruk for the name of his tennis team because "it is snappy and original" and he knew of the city.

He further wrote, 'I later researched and found it was a famous World War II battle. Very cool! We do battle on the courts. I read about your history and the ROTA organization. We easily consider ourselves scrappy rats. Then I saw that you had these fabulous polo shirts - far superior to a printed cotton T-shirt. Better than anything else in the United States Tennis Association leagues.

'I use links to your website in team communications to make our players aware of the glorious history. To us Yankees, you are very similar to our heroes of the Alamo.'

He also mentioned that when opponents ask about the name, they are happy to tell the story and, 'I've sent some video links to the new team members so they can study the lore and come up to speed quickly.'

The shirts were sent off and Don has sent us some photos from the season... With Christmas coming up, don't forget to check out our merchandise page. There are some great stocking fillers.



2024 MEN'S 3.0 Team
"TOBRUK 3"

End of Season Gala and Awards Ceremony
October 27, 2024



THE McDONALD – BINGHAM CONNECTION *By Major Bruce Bingham (Retd.)*

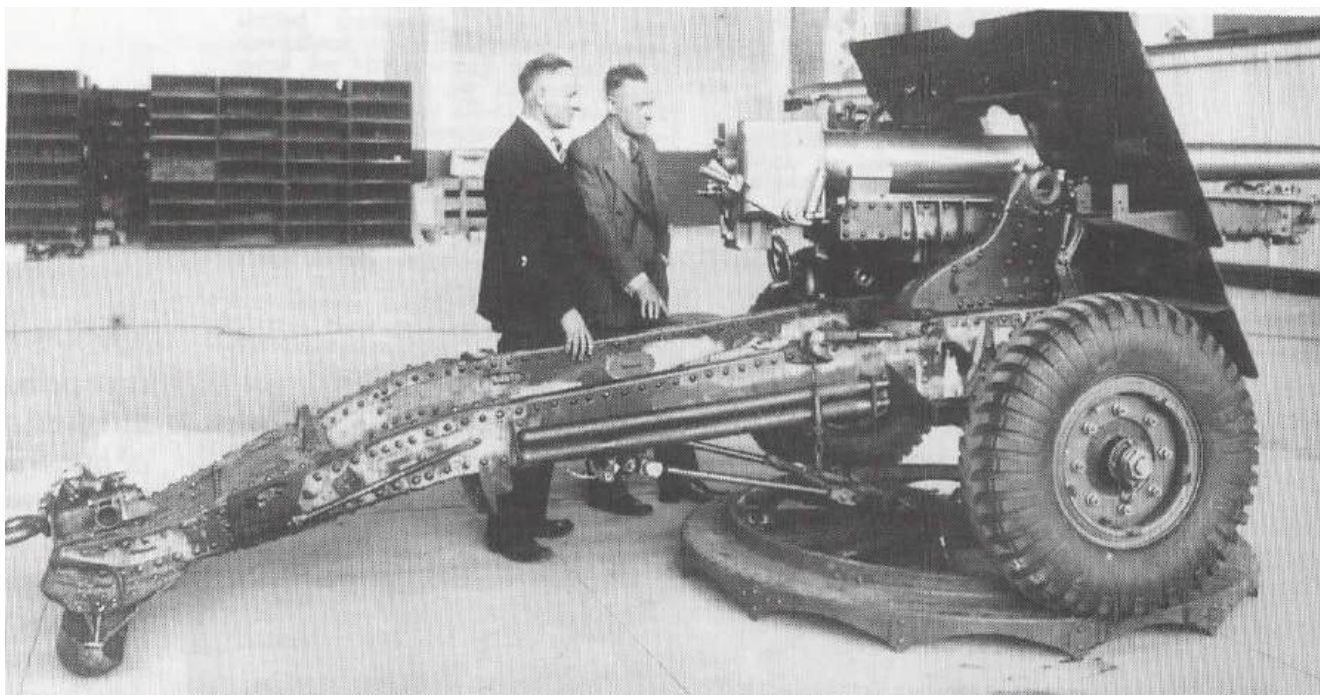
A.H. McDonald was a pioneering manufacturing company located in Bridge Road, Richmond. The company was founded by Alfred Henry McDonald commonly known as "A.H." in 1906. During the first 15 years they manufactured tractors and stationary engines. From 1918 to the outbreak of WW2, they became the major supplier of road rollers to councils throughout Australia. They also designed and manufactured diesel stationary engines, water pumps, tractors and milking machines. They employed over 100 staff.

In 1918, my grandfather, Joe Bingham purchased a McDonald "Imperial" tractor for the dairy farm at Lardner near Warragal. The tractor was used in the district to cut chaff for the horses and cattle. In early 1920, my father Ben Bingham (later QX 2116 of the 2/13 Fd. Coy, R.A.E.) was employed on the farm, and as he was mechanically minded and had a dislike of dairy cows, he became an apprenticed engineer at McDonalds. Over the years, dad became one of McDonald's top engineers, designing diesel engines and water pumps. Prior to the outbreak of WW2, we were living in Ayr, Nth Qld, where dad was supervising the installation of McDonald diesel engines and water pumps in the Burdekin River valley, to irrigate the sugar cane fields.

On the 4th of November 1939, dad enlisted in the AIF and was posted to 2/13 Fd. Coy., R.A.E. He was promoted to the rank of Corporal during his basic training and departed Sydney in April 1940. Arriving in Scotland, he attended a Royal Engineer's course at Cambridge University and finished up de-lousing unexploded bombs in London during the Blitz and Battle of Britain.

In November, 1940, the 9th Division was formed from Australian units in England and they were sent to Palestine, arriving in December, 1940. In January they were sent to North Africa, ill-equipped and untrained to relieve the 6th Division. Dad had been promoted to Sergeant prior to embarking for North Africa. He served in Tobruk as one of the Engineer "Rats" until the 9th Australian Division was withdrawn to Palestine and Syria.

In June, 1941, the 9th Division was deployed with the 8th Army at El Alemein and saw the eventual defeat of Romell's German and Italian armies. The 9th Division returned to Palestine and ultimately returned to Far North Queensland where they were trained for action against the Japanese at Lae and the Huon Peninsula. Dad had been promoted to Warrant Officer and I understand that he was the Regimental Sergeant Major under Colonel Risson, the Commander of the 9th Division Engineers. After their success in New Guinea, the 9th Division returned to Australia. During Dad's service in New Guinea, he contracted a severe bout of malaria, necessitating his medical discharge from the Army on 7th October, 1944.



The 1000th gun being inspected by Sir L Harcett and the Minister of Munitions, Hon. N.J. Makin, M.P.

During the war years, McDonalds was put on a war footing and manufactured the majority of the parts for the 25 pound artillery gun used by the Australian and allied forces during the war. Over 1000 guns were manufactured by McDonalds and Charles Ruwolt Pty Ltd. during the war. In addition, McDonalds manufactured 100's of small 1 HP air- cooled engines for the services for driving pumps, generators, compressors and other small auxiliary equipment. McDonalds had difficulty fulfilling these requests as many of the highly qualified tradesmen had enlisted in the Services.

Dad did not return to McDonalds after the war as my mother had bought an orchard at Harcourt with her parents. He did keep in close contact with the McDonald family during the ensuing years. As horses were used exclusively in the orchards there was a need for chaff. Dad bought the McDonald tractor and chaff cutter from the family at Lardner and for a couple of years provided chaff in the Harcourt District. The use of horses ended when the grey Ferguson tractor and other small tractors were introduced. The McDonald tractor lay idle under a tree for some years before dad donated the tractor to the Swan Hill Folk Museum (his sister was on the Committee).



The tractor donated by Joe Bingham, at the Swan Hill Folk Museum.

In 1988, Neil McDonald, grandson of "A.H.", wrote the history of McDonalds and my father was a major contributor to the content with his long association with the firm and its owners. In 2005, The Ballarat

Engine and Machinery Preservation Society took the McDonald tractor to Ballarat where it was completely refurbished. It was later displayed at the Lardner Field Days and the Lake Goldsmith Steam Rally. The tractor was then returned to Swan Hill where it is now on display. I am sure the Australian Field artillery regiments appreciated the magnificent and precision 25 pdrs. produced by McDonalds used during the Siege and later conflicts. In conclusion, McDonalds have played a major role in the Bingham family for over 80 years.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members:

Colin Adams John Cumpston Dorothy Hernandez Sandra Gralin
Kerry Jenke David Green Kylie Sewell Isabel Dallas
Alby Curtis Alice Curtis Sydney Eaton Susan Visentin
Simon Hinneberg Peter Buckley Robyn Browne



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

ARTISTIC FLAIR AT LITTLE PARK (Story from Cairns Local News Oct 3)



Toilet block in ANZAC Park, Babinda, Cairns. (Images from cairnscouncil Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/p/C-b-DuShxWF/>)

Murals have revitalised toilet blocks at ANZAC Park at Babinda. The design by artist Matthew Thompson (Ling) features five portraits representing WWI, WWII, and women's auxiliaries. Painted in greyscale and sepia tones with splashes of blue and red, the mural references the Australian flag that Aussie servicemen fought under.

A female figure represents wartime volunteer support, depicting spotters for early warning air defence. Look closely to find a nod to the Rats of Tobruk with a small rat on a soldier's shoulder.

Mr Thompson consulted the Babinda RSL Sub Branch on the design, which is a tribute to the community's involvement in the first and second world wars and subsequent wars in the place that is Babinda's focus of remembrance –ANZAC Park.

Editor's Note: Beginning in 2024, the Neighbourhood Murals Project is an annual program [of the Cairns Regional Council] delivering 4 murals per year, rotating through Council divisions. Councillors nominate suggested sites which are then assessed and selected by a panel of Council staff. Artists are commissioned through the Open Competition Acquisition Model outlined in Council's Strategy for Public Art and Placemaking. Artists are supported to engage with community stakeholders to fulfill the curatorial brief ensuring that murals are themed to reflect local neighbourhood features; environmental, social or historical. (from CRC website)

WHAT ABOUT THE AIRFORCE? *(Story by Glenda Garde)*

In our continuing series of stories about the different roles played by the siege participants, in this issue we examine the role of the Airforce during the Siege.

Airforce presence in Tobruk??? Wooden planes and Murphy's Law!

Let's find out from some men who were there....in their own words.

John Culbert – 451 Squadron

"We volunteered for the air force, volunteered to go away and when we were at Bankstown they said we were going to go away under this RAF Infiltration Scheme. We didn't know what it was. They explained the thing, it was rates of pay, overseas service. ... We went in different ships, the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth. Luckily, we stayed as a squadron, we had no pilots, was only ground crew, the normal thing you had ..cooks, drivers, 2 As [Aircraft Fitters], 2 Es [Engineers], parachuters, everything to make up a squadron, everything, but no pilots. When we got over there they said, "We're going to put you in different parts of this place and you'll learn your trades, what you're going to do on the aircraft we have." At the time, it was unloading Hurricanes and packing cases.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

020684

Then it was, "Right, you're going up the desert, you're going to relieve 6th Squadron," which was RAF. Well, we got into Tobruk and there were 3 aerodromes inside and we got on to one of them, just a plain drome. Jerry comes through every night. You could set your watch by him on that tic. And he knew the drome and that was my closest call I ever coming to departing from here. He come through and I said to my mates, "Get ready", and one come straight at us and he dropped 2 and 2, which was 20-foot one side and 20-foot the other side, and it just lifted the top of the dugout each time, it just lifted it clean up!

....Well, Tobruk itself was a lot rockier than in the desert part of it, a lot rockier and flatter. The town itself it had been hammered to bits. There were walls standing, but not much else. The post office I used to go and pick up the mail and one of the blokes said, "You up here to pick up your mail mate?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "There's the post office just over there, a few hundred yards over." So, I rode the bike over and went down and walked in and nobody was in sight. Walked around and found the bag that had 451 on it so I just picked the bag up and come out and hopped on the bike and was riding past and he said, "Did ya get your mail?" I said, "Yeah thanks mate." "There's no buggie up there?" "Why, what's going on?" He said, "A 4000 pounder dropped in there yesterday and it hasn't gone off yet. Delayed reaction." "Thanks very much." Anyway, they pulled it out and defused it, so she didn't go off. That was Aussie humour, they didn't tell you anything!

Well, one aerodrome had a couple of hangars on it, the other ones were just flat. But we, ..got 2 planes into there, some of the ground crew, the fitters, they took them in, in an old Bombay. And we used to get 2 pilots at a time to go in there and 2 would come out, then another 2 would go in. To stop our blokes firing at our planes, they had on them what they called an IFF [Identification Friend or Foe] signal, a radio signal, identification friend or foe, IFF and you had to have that on and, to drop messages, in they flew in from the sea and wheel flaps down and they had the IFF on then when they got in so far, they dropped the message, wheel flaps up and got the hell out of it.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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What they did in the meantime to try and hide these planes, they got the army engineers to dig a big hole in the ground and they put a camouflage net over the top of it and that was a hangar and that used to hide the 2 planes. What they tried to do at one time, they built a dummy Hurricane and stuck it a hundred yards away, just a wooden canvas thing, and stuck it out there and Jerry come over one day, and he dropped a wooden bomb on it. He knew what was going on, but he just couldn't find the dugout where the real planes were hidden. Their humour was just as good as ours. So much for the wooden plane with the wooden bomb!"

"When we first arrived in Tobruk we were told, "well around teatime, just keep your head down." That was it.

Used to think this is nothing you know, seen this before, heard this before, but they knew exactly where to come in and what was there. We used to get a rum ration every night while we were there, everyone. Navy rum. You needed it. You used to get half a cup full. That was to keep you senseless for a while, you know, try and calm you down. It was rough.You learned, you just lived in a hole underground. As long as they didn't land one on it you were safe. So, all the time we were there, none of our blokes ever got hit while we were in Tobruk. Close ones. but nobody got hit."

Edward Hannon-Smith (Ted) 451 Squadron

"Well, with the Australian air force, their pay and conditions were much higher than what the RAF were, so we had to volunteer to go over and serve there under the same pay and conditions as the RAF. The other pay just accumulated in our own pay books back here, but whilst we were over there, we weren't allowed to draw any more than what an RAF man draws. When we got over, we had to retain our own uniforms and our own identity, being Royal Australian Air Force.

It was when we got over there to the Middle East, they took our Australian pay books off us and gave us English pay books and that created a bit of a hassle with the fellows you know. Air Marshal Williams came to visit us, and he was known as the Father of

the RAAF and when he found out about the pay books, he created merry hell and had our own pay books given back to us. He said they were the conditions; everything was to remain the same, except we served under RAF conditions, as regards to the amount of pay and everything, so we had to get our pay books and everything back."



RAAF in the Middle East



A plane spotter in Tobruk

Robert Gibbes (Bobby) - Served with 23, 3 and 79 Squadrons

3 Squadron was doing patrols over the wire, we couldn't get as far as Tobruk because we didn't have the range to do that. If we copped a fight, we wouldn't be able to get back, so we couldn't, we weren't of much help to the Tobruk boys for quite a long time, until the army advanced and then we were able to help them a bit, but basically, by escorting bombers, bombing around the perimeter of Tobruk and so on, stopping enemy forces. When we could get over Tobruk, it looked like a huge rabbit warren with all the burrowing that's gone on around it. I think that the Tobruk boys were always pleased when they saw our aeroplanes instead of the enemy aeroplanes..... We felt quite

desperate for them, we were very proud of the effort, the way they were holding off the enemy. There was no way they were going to let Tobruk be taken."

Leonard Hayman 451 Squadron

"Halfway across the Indian Ocean in the Queen Mary (on the way to the Middle East), the captain of the Queen Mary put over the public address system, "I think you should all listen to this. ...

"This is Lord Haw Haw speaking. We want to send our sympathies in the grief of all the mothers, sweethearts and wives of the personnel on the Queen Mary, which was sunk this morning with all hands," and we were on it listening to this conversation as we choofed along.

Now the next time he bobbed up was at Tobruk. Used to listen to the radio there, army radio, and we listened to him every night at about four-thirty of an afternoon, and we swear he was helping us. Swear to this day, because he'd say, "Well, the usual raid's on today. You'd better have an early dinner, or you'll get shot to pieces as you line up to get your whatever." So, we brought our meal hour forward from five to four. We had our meal, got back into our hole and, sure enough, over they came with the strafing raid. That happened not on one occasion, but on a few occasions.....We reckoned he deserved a medal. They hung him instead.

Well, we were sent to Tobruk because, in Tobruk, unbeknown to ninety-nine per cent of the world, there was an underground hangar in which there were two Hurricanes, which were air worthy and I, in my trade, a mate of mine in his trade and another person were brought to fill in. I think five in all were selected for some unknown reason.

What had happened is, Tobruk had been surrounded for five months, or more, and.. the advancing 9th Divvy, had broken through the German line around Tobruk and opened up a corridor about a mile wide. Well, they zipped us through that corridor on the back of a truck with all our gear and the next day the Germans closed the corridor by sheer force. Well, we were stuck there for a while, quite a while. In that time, we checked the 2 planes and so forth. The planes only flew a few times. The pilots, they used to sneak them in either by an old transport plane or on a British destroyer.

Tobruk harbour was full of sunken ships. Had been a beautiful little harbour and we were there to ensure that, firstly, if Tobruk fell, which it did eventually, the planes wouldn't be hijacked, and, if needed in an emergency, they could be sent out to assist the ground forces or to do a bit of reconnoitring and so we worked underground in the hangar. We didn't stay in there. It was a bit too risky. ...We just looked at the plane, made sure it was still there and that was it. Well, as I said, they only flew three, two or three times. ...My role was just to make sure they were ready for flight on call, which was easy. Start the engines. I mean, as a crew, start the engines and make sure they were right and refuel, plenty of oxygen, plenty of air....



A digger examining wreckage of a burning Stuka

In Tobruk it was pretty hairy I'll admit. Tobruk was a beautiful harbour, at the bottom of like a deep depression. It was pretty big, the area, the whole of the area, they were only interested in the harbour as far as air raids were concerned and the area, we were maybe a mile from the air from the harbour. So, we were relatively safe, except when somebody got an idea that he might, you know, stir us up a bit.

The perimeter was heavily guarded. Really heavily guarded. The air raids were always at night. Or dusk. They never come over in the day. Goodness me, they'd be cut to pieces. Well, we chummed up with a bunch a Kiwis [New Zealander],

bunch, might be six or eight, who'd been there for some months and had a dug this enormous dug out. Reinforced as much as possible on the roof with zig zag stairs down for a reasonable amount of safety and I've always kept this thought with me.

We had our little bivouac canvas, and we were laying in there, you know with our tin hats. Nuts we were. We were safe with a tin hat on, and we saw these Kiwis up there suckin' away on a fag you know. Not a care in the world. So, we went over and had a chat to them. One of them said, "Well look here Snowy," he said, "If the bullet's got my number on it, I'm gone, I don't matter where I am. Under, over or what. So I'm gonna watch the fireworks," and I've accepted that since. If it's gonna happen, it's gonna happen. A lot were like that. Murphy's law."

TAFFY'S TALES

TOBRUK TO BENGHAZI

We didn't stay long in Tobruk on our first visit. On arrival, trucks were waiting to take us up to near Benghazi. On our way there in March 1941 we called in at Derna and stayed with the 2/48th Battalion (another South Australian unit).

There were Italian prisoners everywhere, because as you will recall, Marshal Graciani's army had surrendered in their thousands in the first push up the desert. There were so many prisoners, and no POW camps to hold them, and they far outnumbered our troops.

(Ed There are many stories about the Italian surrender in Libya. This story is quite typical.)

Anyway, the 2/48 guys were supposed to be guarding them and when we dropped in at 8:30 pm that night, being fellow South Australians, they were more than pleased to see us and put on a party at their quarters – the erstwhile Italian army barracks.

The strangest sight to us was to see the way our fellows organised the Italian prisoners. Australian soldiers, clapping their hands and calling out "Luigi! Benito!" produced running Italians happy to carry out their orders. In no time cocoa and toast appeared, all prepared and served by the prisoners, and for the rest of the night we were looked after like lords.



Ralph "Taffy" Keith Linthorne
Cresdee Whittel Sgt 2/8 Fince –
SX9054



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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The Italian prisoners far outnumbered the troops, but they had no interest in continuing to fight – they were glad to be out of the war.

In the morning a friend of mine from the 2/48 said "Just call Luigi, and he'll fix breakfast for you". I did that, and in he came, bringing a friend who was anxious to clean my boots and polish the brass buckles on my webbing. As I was only a private – this was too much – two batmen – unbelievable! But we all made the best of it while we could.

This luxury was repeated in Barce (now called El Marj by the Libyans). This little Italian settlement in which Italian civilians still lived seemed overrun with Italian prisoners.

Field Marshal Wavell's desert push had gone so fast that there had been no time to evacuate the civilians, and no POW cages big enough to hold the prisoners. Anyway, they seemed quite happy to be out of the war and were only too anxious to be of service to us. We were inundated by offers by the prisoners to do our washing and serve us tea - all gratefully accepted.

In fact, it was here that my friends and I played our first international tennis match. We borrowed rackets and balls from army amenities and the Salvation Army, and aided by three or four Italian prisoners, we rigged up a net on the court adjacent to the Italian hospital and enjoyed a good afternoon's tennis with some of the prisoners joining in (and incidentally no shortage of ballboys).

This international flavour was repeated in Aleppo, where a friend and I played tennis regularly with two French-speaking local girls, Francine and Jacqueline, and arranged a tennis match against two local Aleppo boys, friends of our unit interpreter John Shaini. John lived in Aleppo and was employed by our unit, which ran a hospital in what was previously an Italian girls' school. He was only about 22, but spoke fluent English, having been educated at the American high school in Aleppo. Apart from his native Arabic, he was also proficient in French, Turkish, Armenian, Italian and some German.

John and I became great friends and visited quite a few local people and business places. He introduced some of us to his Armenian friends, and we went regularly to the Armenian Protestant church Sunday services and meetings, where in deference to us, many of the hymns and most of the addresses were in English.

The younger people, particularly, were happy to extend their English, which most of them took as a second language at school. To one family which had made us so warmly welcome, all of us were able to buy and donate a small church organ. As John himself was a Catholic we quite often visited the local catholic Youth Centre. This was a large building complex near our hospital, which apart from the church itself, contained a well-equipped assembly hall with all stage fixtures, and at the rear, a games room and kitchen facilities. It was in the games room that we played our international table tennis matches against the local Syrians.

REMINDER - BOOK TODAY!

You are invited to the 2024
TOBRUK BASE CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

Sunday December 1

\$35 Per Person

BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL

PHONE 0468 971 450 TO RSVP



RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC

Registration No: A0054511Y

NOMINATION FORM

Committee Members for 2025

In accordance with the Association Rules (2017), at the 2025 Annual General Meeting (AGM), all positions on the Committee of Management will be declared vacant and elections held for these positions. Nominations are sought to fill these positions. All nominations must be on this Nomination Form.

The following rules apply:

- Only a member entitled to vote at general meetings (must be financial), is eligible for nomination.
- An eligible member can nominate himself or herself; or with the member's consent, be nominated by another member.
- Completed nomination forms must reach the Secretary by 31 January 2025. (Completed forms can be sent by mail to Tobruk House, 44 Victoria Avenue, Albert Park, Victoria, 3206 or electronically to ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com)
- The Committee has the discretion to reject a nomination, where the form is not correctly completed.
- A member can be nominated for more than one position.

I hereby nominate: _____
(eligible member's name)

for the position of (please tick the applicable box(s)):

☐ President

☐ Vice-President

☐ Secretary

☐ Treasurer

☐ Ordinary Committee Member

Nominator's Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

Nominated Person's Consent (only required where nominated by another member):

I, _____ accept this nomination.
(member's name)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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.

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)



ROTA MERCHANDISE

See Order Form on page XX for postage costs and other details



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



SIEGE OF TOBRUK BAR MAT
\$40



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



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



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



'HEROES OF TOBRUK'
STUBBIE HOLDER
\$10



'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



'HEROES OF TOBRUK' MUG
\$15



80TH ANNIVERSARY SIEGE
MEDAL
\$50



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		
80 th 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.
‘Heroes Of Tobruk’ Mug	\$15				\$11		
Heroes of Tobruk pen	\$5				\$3		Postage for up to 3 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 multiple items to the same address			Total amount to be paid:			\$	

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: _____ **Contact Phone No:** _____
(Please Print)

Email Address: _____ @ _____

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.