



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
July 27 (Sunday)	General Meeting 10.30am
August 24	Shrine Service commemorating the Rats of Tobruk 1pm (NEW TIME)
August 29	General Meeting 10.30am
September 3	Royal Children's Hospital afternoon tea – RSVP essential
October 5	ROTA 80 th birthday celebration at Tobruk House (details TBA)
November 21	General Meeting 10.30am
November 30	Christmas Lunch at Tobruk House 12pm

Patron: Bill Gibbins

Committee of Management:

Vice President – Paul Dipnall

Secretary – Lachlan Gaylard

Committee Chair – Stuart Tolliday

Other Committee Members –

Gayle Sherwell, Glenda Garde,
Tony Codd, Karolina Sevcikova

TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS

NEXT ISSUE: OCTOBER 2025

DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 1

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will not be published.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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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 – August 2025

Dear Members and Friends,

As always, it is my great pleasure to bring you up to date with the latest activities of our association.



Sadly, I must begin by paying tribute to two stalwart members, former committee member Tony Smith, and honorary Life Member and past president Graham Gibson, both passed away recently. We extend our deepest condolences to their families.

Although the chill of winter is upon us, your dedicated committee has continued working diligently towards a number of meaningful goals. We had a very productive working bee recently where the committee did a major cleanup at Tobruk House giving us more storage space and better access to the annex area.

Our membership remains the lifeblood of the association. The support you provide through your contributions and your presence at our events ensures that we continue to thrive. We kindly remind those who are yet to pay their annual subscription to please do so.

Looking ahead, we are preparing for a major commemorative event to be held at the Shrine of Remembrance on Sunday 24 August 2025 at 1pm. We have been working closely with the Shrine's executive team to ensure a ceremony that is fitting for such an important occasion. See page 16 in this issue for more details.

Every year the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Foundation invites members and friends of the Rats of Tobruk Association to visit the hospital for an illuminating dive into the work of the dedicated team of doctors, nurses, scientists and ward assistants in the Rats of Tobruk Cockatoo ward, with a focus on the work of the current and past holders of the Rats of Tobruk Neurology Fellowship. It's a very special event.

This year the visit will be held on September 3. Our host, Associate Professor Mark Mackay, and 2025 Rats of Tobruk Neurology Fellow Nadia Truong, will take us on a tour of the ward, and for the first time we'll visit the RCH Historical Room, and Gallery – an inspiring place honouring the RCH's long history as one of the leading paediatric hospitals in the Southern Hemisphere.

This is a unique opportunity to see the legacy of the Rats in action and to meet some of the amazing people who make it happen. Please see page 16 in this issue for details.

This year also marks a significant milestone. On 2 October 2025, our association will turn 80 years old, having been formally established in 1945. To mark the occasion, we will be hosting a special afternoon tea on Sunday 5 October. Please save the date. Further details will follow.

Warm regards,

Paul Dipnall
Vice President

FROM THE ARCHIVES

In this issue of the Tobruk House News our dedicated committee member and writer, Glenda Garde features the Navy in her "In Their Own Words" series. While scouring our archives for an article of interest we found this story from the December 1961 issue of the Tobruk Echo.

DECEMBER, 1963

TOBRUK ECHO

PAGE NINE

The Gallant Lady Of Tobruk

SHE was just a gunboat patrolling the Yangtse River when she was bombed during the Chinese-Japanese war in 1937. But she survived to rise to glory at Tobruk.

H.M.S. "Ladybird" was a fighting ship which continued to fight even after she was sunk in Tobruk Harbour by enemy bombs on 12th May, 1941. To the Australians who held this desert fortress she epitomised all that made the siege famous—there was no surrender.

A gunboat of the Insect Class, with six-inch armament, "Ladybird" had spent many years patrolling the Yangtse River when unrest in China had necessitated protection in British concessions of lives and property and figured in an incident which was indicative of the growing Japanese militarism. On 6th December, 1937, and again on the 13th, during air raids on Nanking and Wuhu, Japanese planes bombed the "Ladybird" while at anchor, and one British seaman was killed and three injured, including the captain and commander.

At the same time, Japanese shore batteries fired on other British gunboats and merchantmen. A brief apology from the Japanese Government, at a time when Britain was pursuing an appeasement policy, ended the incident. A few days later the U.S.S. "Panay," an American gunboat, was bombed and sunk. The American Government, however, adopted stronger measures, and, despite Japanese evasion, received an indemnity of over two million dollars for loss of property and injuries sustained.

H.M.S. "Ladybird" was brought from China in August, 1940, and with

a sister gunboat, the "Aphis," became known as W Force, which was the forerunner of the Inshore Squadron, a force which rendered inestimable service off the coast of Cyrenaica from June, 1940, to January, 1943, and particularly the siege of Tobruk.

These gunboats, in their bombardment of coastal towns, shipping and shore batteries, employed "tip and run" tactics—a short run in, then developing maximum fire followed by retirement out of range. The "Aphis" on one occasion penetrated right into Bardia Harbour and at a range of 600 yards set three ships on fire with six rounds of her six-inch guns.

On another occasion, at Sollum Bay in December, 1940, the "Ladybird," "Aphis" and the monitor "Terror"



bombarded from early morning until midnight, expending their entire stock of ammunition. In the case of the "Terror," this amounted to 220 rounds of 15-inch high explosive (each shell weighing approximately 9/10 of a ton), and each gunboat 300 rounds of 6in. It was not surprising to hear that Italian troops in the area "appeared dazed."

During the Italian advance in Egypt in September, 1940, W Force harassed the enemy near the coast between the frontier and Sidi Barrani, where the advance was halted. Between September and December,

when General Wavell launched the British assault, this force was continually employed against targets ashore.

With the entry of German forces into the North African sphere and Tobruk besieged, the Inshore Squadron assumed the role of maintaining supplies and equipment to the Australian and British defenders. It was while a member of the "Tobruk Run" fleet that H.M.S. "Ladybird" was bombed and sunk.

"Ladybird" was not to be kept out of a good fight, and with enough of her deck clear of the water to be habitable, ack-ack gunners of the 40th Battery, 14th Light A/A Regt., Royal Artillery, continued to hurl defiance and other missiles more lethal at enemy aircraft. Her gallant fight is an epic of the port.

This battered hulk, with her torn ensign still flying, half-submerged, rusty and dirty, manned by stout-hearted men far removed from the spit and polish of barrack room perfection, chained to the harbour bed in one of the hottest spots of Tobruk, was ever-ready to snap at and keep at bay her attackers, and was just another instance of the indomitable spirit that denied the Axis Powers the coveted prize—Tobruk.

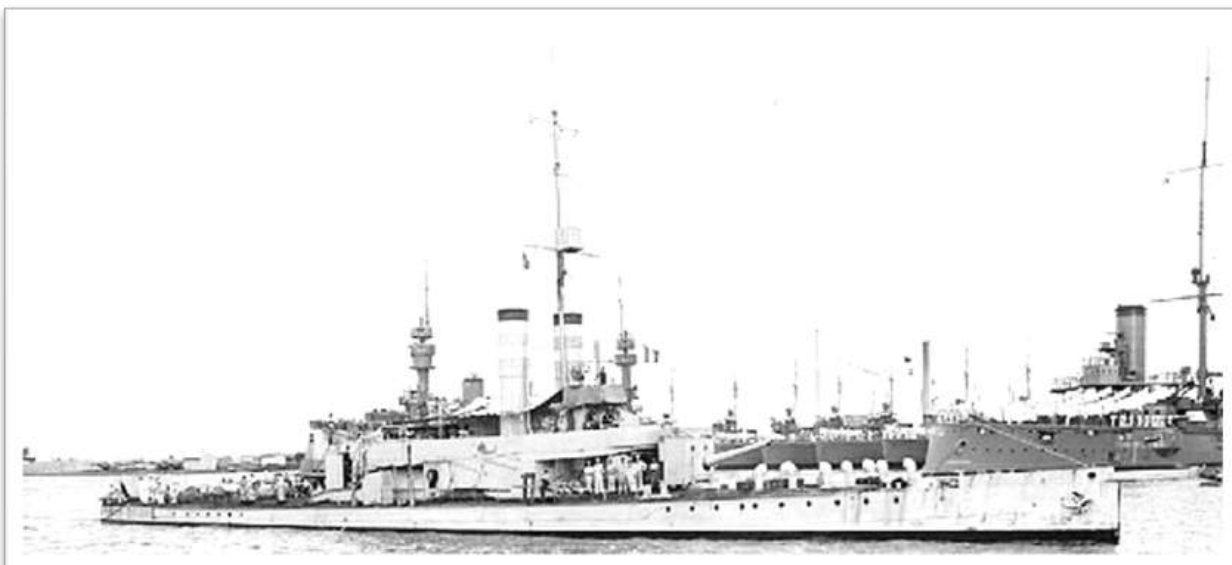
DEMON DRINK

Subject of the padre's discourse had been the evils of strong drink.

Leaning forward, he said earnestly, "Men, intoxicants are not your friends; they are your enemies. If I had my way I'd have all strong drink thrown into the Yarra."

"Let us sing 'Shall We Gather at the River!'" murmured old Alf, a veteran of the last war.

Members—Support Your Advertisers



The Insect class British gunship HMS Ladybird pictured in Port Said, Egypt in 1941

OPEN DAY AT SIMPSON BARRACKS

In the June edition of the THN we reported that a group of 12 army trainees had recently visited Tobruk House to learn about the siege and the story of the Rats.



Stuart and Glenda with a Bushmaster, displaying its usually hidden special triangular shaped lower body which helps protect the occupants from IEDs



The very new Hawkei, developed and built in Australia, with its very high tech turret which can be attached to many different vehicles.

Two of our committee members were therefore very pleased to receive a reciprocal invitation from Sergeant Braedan Heverin, Platoon Sergeant, Holding Company, Joint Training Command, who had organised that visit, to attend a special Open Day at Simpson Barracks, Yallambie.

The barracks were established during the Second World War on 55 acres of land and today are predominantly a Forces Command training base supporting Defence Force School of Signals, Defence Force School of Music and Army Education centre. Headquarters 4th Brigade (Victoria's reserve brigade) and Headquarters Australian Army Cadets Victoria also operate from the site.



Braedan and two volunteer trainees kindly gave us a tour around the base and we were able to explore a variety of military displays and interact with soldiers, learning about their roles and their daily lives. Naturally the large vehicles, including an M1A2 Abrahams tank, Bushmasters and the very new Hawkei, were a big attraction, but the sounds of automatic rifle fire (blanks of course) quickly drew the crowd to witness a demonstration of the army in action in a simulated attack by insurgents.

Many small displays gave the visitors a chance to learn about some of the special aspects of the modern army including cyber security, multiple health and support systems and the Military Police. Although it was focussed on the army, a few navy and airforce tents were also spotted!

We look forward to a close association between ROTA and the barracks. Many thanks to Braedan and his two volunteers for organising it, as the visit really provided a great insight into army life. The expo is an annual event, open to the public. (Normal army security measures apply.)

THE HISTORY OF 'LEST WE FORGET'

Perhaps the most famous words associated with any military commemoration are 'Lest we forget'. Our story in the June issue of the Tobruk House News looked into the origins of what we call 'The Ode' which it often accompanies. In this issue we look at 'Lest we forget'.

As with The Ode, 'Lest we forget' started life in a piece of poetry. That poem was called 'Recessional' and was written by the famous author Rudyard Kipling. Kipling, a staunch Englishman, wrote it for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. It was intended as a cautionary poem. Far from celebrating the glory of the British Empire, Kipling wrote it in sombre reflection and warning. Its mood is one of humility and a fear of national hubris.

Except for the most famous three words "I love you", 'Lest we forget' surely carries more emotion than any other. In recent years we saw those three words create such a media driven furore that the young Australian journalist who used them received death threats and was forced to leave her country. It was a somewhat ironic situation given the intention of the original author.

RECESSIONAL by Rudyard Kipling

*God of our fathers, known of old
Lord of our far-flung battle line
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget -- lest we forget!*

*The tumult and the shouting dies
The Captains and the Kings depart
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget -- lest we forget!*

*Far-called our navies melt away
On dune and headland sinks the fire
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget -- lest we forget!*

*If, drunk with sight of power, we loose
Wild tongues that have not Thee in awe
Such boastings as the Gentiles use,
Or lesser breeds without the Law
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget -- lest we forget!*

*For heathen heart that puts her trust
In reeking tube and iron shard
All valiant dust that builds on dust,
And guarding calls not Thee to guard.
For frantic boast and foolish word,
Thy Mercy on Thy People, Lord!
Amen.*



TOBRUK HOUSE WELCOMES SHRINE VOLUNTEERS

The committee of ROTA was recently delighted to receive an offer from the Shrine of Remembrance to bring along some of their volunteers to visit Tobruk House to enable them to discover more about the siege and the association. This was a follow up to a visit by an education team from the Shrine earlier this year.

As part of National Volunteers Week in May, the purpose of the visit was primarily to generate some genuine enthusiasm amongst the volunteers to perpetuate the story of Tobruk when they talk to visitors at the Shrine. It was hoped that this may in turn result in more visitors to Tobruk House on our open days and other such events.

After allowing the volunteers time to peruse the exhibition and the memorabilia on display, committee member Stuart Tolliday gave a brief presentation about the siege, which included some fascinating stories of his own father's experiences. Stuart also spoke of the history of our association and, of course, of Tobruk House. A few Shrine volunteers have now joined as members of ROTA!

Following the formal presentation the Shrine visitors provided a delicious lunch over which there was considerable more discussion. What's On At The Shrine has been a feature of the back page of the Tobruk House News for many years. It provides a brief overview of current exhibitions and we hope it inspires some of our members to visit. There is so much to see there and the guides are very happy to share their knowledge.

After the visit, we received some wonderful feedback, and we are hoping that visits such as these will assist in forging the shared mission and strong links between ROTA and our friends at the Shrine.

With Melbourne's famously inclement weather, a visit to the Shrine on a cold (wet) afternoon night be just the tonic to get you moving.



NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members:

**Georgina Dudzinski Jack Saggars Andrew Saggars Justin Warner
Bruce Knight Margaret MacKenzie Richard Devonshire Ian Murray
Stephen Brazenor Samuel Fowler Myfanwy Coghill David Newcomb
Sam Walker Anita Payne Jennifer Carlisle Rohan Carlisle
David Raymond Jeffery Rosenfeld Grant Reeves Marita Madden
Norma Sutcliffe William Mooney Wayne Baker Darren Waters Hugh Watt**



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

WHAT ABOUT THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY IN TOBRUK Story by Glenda Garde

aka 'The Tobruk Ferry Service'

Whenever the navy was mentioned amongst any gathering of veterans at Tobruk House, the following phrase would often be heard... "There wouldn't have been a Tobruk if it hadn't been for the navy", and, of course, they would know, wouldn't they?



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

040581

Tobruk, Libya. 1941. Anti-aircraft gunners ready for any eventuality during a trip from Alexandria to Tobruk, when extra caution is necessary.

drone and Havock's guns stab the darkness with red flashes. She rolls over in a 90 degree turn and a hundred yards or so ahead of her, a great white water spout tells us that the Stuka has missed it's mark. Out of the darkness ahead, we see two pinpoints of light, the harbour lights of Tobruk, shielded from the air but visible to us. We slacken speed. There is no wash now, and a welcome cloud clokes the moon and other bombers cannot see us. But they are over Tobruk and are going for the harbour. We can hear the muffled crack of the ack-ack guns and see the flashes of bursting shells high in the sky. We slip in between the lights, past the black ghosts of wrecks, under the lee of the white sepulchre of a town.'

Chester Wilmot- Desert Siege

Chester Wilmot- Correspondent August 1941

'Then, above the roar of the engines, wind and sea, from the rear gun-platform, an officer shouts through a megaphone, "Stand by. Action stations." We wait again. Then, "Stand by. Enemy aircraft." Suddenly we're snatching at the nearest rail or bulkhead, as the destroyer heels over in a wild zig zag and seems to leap forward. On the slippery deck, the cargo slides crashing into the scuppers and the spray drenches everything. Above the turmoil, that voice again, "Stand by, Blitz barrage." Behind us, a great white swathe of wash is even more tell-tale than before... I look across at Havock (another destroyer in the convoy) - a great stream of black smoke is pouring from her funnels.

Then we hear the bomber's

Kenneth Pantlin 9th Division Signals NX13594

"Food all had to be brought in by sea. So, it was only what they could carry on the destroyers. There was no cargo ships came in. Couldn't risk them because they wouldn't last long. So, they used the destroyers, which came up from Alexandria and set times to be in Tobruk. They had to be into the port and out of the port in darkness, so that determined the time that they could have to unload stores.

And again, that determined how much they could carry, to get off in the time. Plus, onload any sick people or any people that were surplus and were going out, whatever. There was no outside contact by land at all. It was all done by sea by the Australian navy and the destroyers that did it. The Germans knew the timings of the craft coming up and it was determined by the time they could be in darkness. So, it wasn't very hard for them to calculate what time they were going to leave Alexandria and what time they'd be on the way. So, they used to give them plenty of attention coming up and there was the odd ship lost, but most of it got through all right.

They had to be quick to unload it. They had to have people on the wharfs ready to unload it as smartly as possible. And alternatively load stuff on that was going out; seriously injured people or wounded. It was a very hectic time while they came in. As I said earlier too, there were a number of ships in the port that had been sunk. So navigation wasn't easy either, particularly in the darkness. The navy did a wonderful job. Couldn't have existed without them. We had no aircraft support after the first week or two. ...So it was pretty open go for the German aircraft in their sorties on the garrison as a whole."



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

128086

The RAN destroyer HMAS Waterhen, which sank in the mediterranean sea off Sollum on 1941-06-30 during a tow after damage in a bombing attack by enemy aircraft while on the Tobruk ferry run. She was the first ship of the royal Australian navy to be lost through enemy action.

**Charles Cutler 2/17th
Infantry Btn.
NX14800**

"Tobruk was under siege, as I said, for the 242 days and... seven months or so, and there is no way, no way on this earth that Tobruk could've been held without the navy, both the British Navy and the Australian Navy, and in fact quite a few naval ships were lost.

I was with my platoon having a very rare swim in the harbour when the Stukas came over and sunk, oh dear, HMAS Waterhen I think it was, and we'd scarpered [run] out of the harbour of course naturally, getting out of the road, and we were

sitting on the hillside overlooking the harbour and saw the Stukas bomb Waterhen, yeah, I think it was Waterhen, but I'm not sure. And I can still remember that ship, little ship, still firing as she settled.

But the navy was, well, it was an essential part of Tobruk. It was, there's no way, there was a fellow by the name of Palmer, he was a British Navy Officer who ran, I think I'm right in saying British, but I'm not sure about that, he could've been an Australian, but he commanded a ship that ran in and out of Tobruk with supplies for the whole siege, and without them we couldn't have survived. But they brought supplies in, ammunition and food and took our wounded out, so they, you know, the navy was all part of it."

**Colin Uren 2/4th AGH VX22541
Letter dated 7th March 1941**

'This week I have a long tale to tell so, as my time is limited, I will not waste words. Last Friday, we abandoned our camp just outside Alexandria, Egypt, where we had remained for a month. We were transported to the wharves where, after some time we boarded a small passenger vessel of 1400 tons

We were directed along the cramped decks to the hatchway which we descended by a vertical iron ladder way into the hold. To our astonishment, we learned that this was to provide our quarters for sleeping and eating for the duration of the voyage (which should have been a 48 hour run to Tobruk).

The hold occupied an area no more than 60 feet by 30 feet, and into this area were crowded more than 120 men, with their personal gear and equipment. Every surface was covered by human bodies and kits, and the congestion was indescribable. To add to the confusion there was no light, save the light afforded by the hatchway which, as soon as we sailed, was covered. We left the port as evening advanced and ate "iron ration" (= bully beef and rock-hard dog biscuits)



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P00090.041

Men on HMAS Vendetta watching the destroyer HMS Defender going down off

The tiny vessel headed into moderate seas and was soon tossing. It was not long before several of the men were sick. Then commenced the night of hell, like which I have never experienced. Every minute, the seas grew fiercer. The waves began to wash the entire ship. The hatch was now left open to allow fresh air, but as the great waves covered the hatchway, water fell into the

hold, where we were sleeping, with a terrifying clap. Some lying beneath the hatch were now drenched. The blankets were all saturated, the kits swished about the hold, and the boxes at the end crashed with every terrifying lurch.

It was a terrifying experience, sounding as though 50 torpedoes had ripped our dreaded confinement. The outlet for the water was small compared to the constant inward flow and at times, when the boat lurched acutely, the water rushed to and fro, reaching a height of four feet at the sides, sweeping all before it. On all sides men were sick. The foulness of the atmosphere was nauseating. I looked at my watch a thousand times. Every minute seemed an hour, and it seemed the morning would not arrive. But we had no relief, and as the night drowsily lagged our position became worse.

By 10 am I had all I could bear, so I made my way cautiously to the hatchway, to the top, and peered for the first time at the terrifying spectacle and, as I scampered out the hatchway, a great wave swept the deck and I was drenched before I could take cover. The waves were indescribable. There were great mountains sixty feet high into the valleys of which the vessel was tossed at the mercy of the sea. Our progress was retarded, and for 36 hours we made no more head way than 2 and ½ knots per hour. The storm continued all day and the next night, ripping the gangways, tearing the boards from the bridge, and smashing the furnishings. That night, I slept in the officers' lounges which was opened because of the appalling conditions in the hold. I shared one blanket with another lad, but the ship rolled so violently that neither of us were afforded any sleep. As the ship rolled acutely, our bedding, furniture and everything else sped across the floors causing minor injuries.

The next day, the storm abated to some extent, and a few of us who were fit tidied the ship which was naturally in a foul condition. On the third night, in the early hours of the morning, we were startled by a sever series of jolts and it dawned upon us that the vessel was grounding. We slipped on our boots and lifejackets. It felt that the vessel would break. We peered into the darkness and were drenched by a huge wave which swept the deck.

Fortunately, the disaster occurred within the site of the shore. The dismemberment of the troops began by means of the lifeboat. A shipwreck seemed a fitting climax to our ill-fated journey. A rope was fired to the shore and the lifeboat made a succession of journeys to the beach. To enter the lifeboat, one scrambled over the side of the vessel and dropped. The journey in the lifeboat was not long but was thrilling as the fragile vessel rode the heavy surf. About 20 yards from the water's edge, one jumped out of the boat and made to the beach. Once there we tugged the rope that pulled the lifeboat to shore. Upon one journey, the lifeboat capsized with the occupants struggling helplessly beneath the craft. But all were rescued.'

A DISPLAY OF DETERMINATION & COURAGE

From *Heroes of Tobruk AWM Wartime Magazine Issue 49* by Peter Burness (01 January 2010)



SX7808 Sergeant (Tex) Jack Weston, MM,
2/48th Battalion.



AUST ALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P19024.001
QX3000 Sergeant Ronald Arthur Patrick, MM,
2/15th Battalion.



NX14892 Sergeant Jacob Geoffrey Hunt, DCM,
2/13th Battalion.

In January 1941 the Italian harbour fortress of Tobruk on the Libyan coast was captured in one of the Australians' earliest actions of the Second World War. It was taken in brief fighting and with not much fuss as the 6th Division continued its successful 500-kilometre advance eastward. Even then it was obvious that the town's harbour could be an important asset for future operations in the region. In the following weeks the division was ordered to Greece to take part in an ill-fated campaign there, so the 9th Australian Division under Major General Leslie Morshead took over.

The fresh unblooded division soon met a tough new adversary when German troops of the *Afrika Korps* under Lieutenant General Erwin Rommel also entered this desert war theatre. As British Commonwealth forces retreated before Rommel over the recently captured territory, the Australians fell back to Tobruk, joining others already there.

The plan was to hold onto the town as the Germans began to surround it. It was the start of a siege that would last from 11 April until 7 December 1941 and become one of the epic stories of the war.

At Tobruk, stretching in an arc of about 15 kilometres' radius from the port township, the Italians had built a 50-kilometre-long defensive perimeter of ditches and barbed wire, studded with well-sited strong points.

The Australians based their defence on this existing perimeter ("red line") while adding more weapon pits and trenches and developing a further inner line ("blue line"). The hot, dusty, featureless ground within these boundaries became the British territory that was to be held despite constant stress, discomfort, enemy attacks, artillery fire and aerial bombardment.

On the night of 13–14 April a German attack breached the wire perimeter and defences on Tobruk's southern side. After heavy fighting, a counter-attack drove them back. In this action Corporal Jack Edmondson of the 2/17th Battalion won the first Victoria Cross awarded to an Australian unit since the closing stages of the First World War. At one point he fought with his bayonet to save his officer's life, despite having been gravely wounded. He died soon afterwards from his injuries. More, even stronger German attacks soon followed.

On 30 April *Afrika Korps* tanks and infantry broke through Tobruk's south-western perimeter. Although they were contained in further heavy fighting, they took important ground, cutting a wedge, called "the Salient", into the Allies' territory. Even strong counter-attacks failed to shift them and only ever succeeded in making small gains. Unless Allied forces advancing from Egypt could relieve Tobruk, the garrison would have to hold out, hoping that they could continue to be supplied by sea. For months the navy became the garrison's lifeline. In the meantime, while they stayed, the Australian, Indian, Polish and British defenders would be a thorn in Rommel's side. More importantly, he was denied the best port facilities for his further operations.

Proud comparisons with the defence of Anzac on Gallipoli, during a similar stage of the previous war, 26 years earlier, were inevitable. Tobruk quickly became a household name in Australia. With the enemy surrounding Tobruk, patrolling was vital. The Australians had no intention of being trapped behind their perimeter wire. Whether it was reconnaissance or aggressive action, patrols kept the enemy off balance. Morshead could well remember the success the Australians had in France in 1918 with their fighting patrols and raids. Then their so-called "peaceful penetration" not only upset the enemy's morale: on some occasions considerable ground was taken.

Now, talking about Tobruk, the general said, "From the first day I determined that no-man's-land would be our land." It was important to put the Germans on the defensive and to hold them at least beyond their mortar and machine-gun range. Only around the Salient, where the enemy was a constant and dangerous threat, could they remain close.

Active aggressive patrolling held the enemy at a distance. Patrols went out by day and by night. As daylight patrols were reduced, the Australians began to dominate the night-time. In various sectors there would be dozens of men out and some nights there were hundreds. Often fighting patrols mounted heavy hard-hitting raids. Certain types were conducted in machine-gun-mounted tracked carriers.

Some patrols went out in the darkness and would stay out next day observing the enemy. More generally a foot patrol might have ten to 20 men, but it could be more. They were armed with Bren guns, Thompson sub-machine guns, rifles, and bayonets and grenades. The Germans and Italians came to dread sudden contacts. Other patrols laid mines or conducted ambushes. The enemy had its patrols too, but the Australians were more active.

Patrolling required boldness, clear thinking and a good sense of direction, particularly at night. Going out along or beyond the wire and anti-tank ditch and crossing no man's land, or being sent deep into enemy territory, often meant that one man in the group had a compass and another counted paces. But some men had a natural instinct for the work. The Australians proved to be good at patrolling and some among them excelled at it. The stories of three outstanding soldiers throw light on this side of the battle for Tobruk.

Sergeants Jack Weston, Ron Patrick and Geoff Hunt became renowned for their effectiveness. They had all enlisted in 1940 and quickly became proficient soldiers and natural leaders.

In many ways Weston and Hunt were similar. Both were 28-year-old rural workers when they joined up. Hunt was working on the family property near Inverell, New South Wales, while Weston, who was married, had been a tractor driver at Appila, South Australia. Physically, they were very different. Weston was tall, loose-limbed and well-built, while Geoff Hunt was short and wiry.

Hunt had been serving in the Militia before the war and was a keen soldier. He had tried to enlist in the AIF but was rejected as too small. He persisted and was finally accepted. A colleague once said that the height he gave on enlistment, 5' 5" (1.65 metres), must have been an exaggeration.

Hunt went to the 2/13th Battalion's pioneer platoon. At Tobruk he often worked by himself or with a small party, going out in front of the manned posts to lay or repair barbed-wire entanglements or to find and remove mines. Working in the dark of night, he became familiar with the ground and all the approaches. Widely known for his lone efforts, he was described as the battalion's scout.

Jack "Tex" Weston also excelled at patrolling. He was in the 2/48th Battalion. It was said that he had an extraordinary ability to navigate by the stars and would travel long distances outside the Australians' lines to observe the enemy. In fighting actions he was calm, brave and aggressive.

There was a touch of the larrikin in both men. Weston was described as "a real bushman" who enjoyed a drink and a joke. Both were popular leaders, admired by their men and fearless of officers. They were liked and much respected among the latter, from their commanding officers down. One member of Hunt's platoon said that he had a "wonderful control over men and we would happily do anything for him. He was energetic like a game fox terrier."

Queenslander Ron Patrick of the 2/15th Battalion was a bit different, and those meeting him were immediately struck by his youth. Chester Wilmot, the Australian war correspondent, saw him in Tobruk and described him as "a slip of a lad, who barely looked his 21 years and who before the war had been a clerk in a country store".



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

007481

Members of C Company, 2/13th Battalion, going out through the wire on the outer defences of the Tobruk area, on a day time patrol.

During May, Hunt's battalion attacked across the ground the enemy had recently taken. Hunt went out under machine-gun fire to wire new positions. On other nights he led parties carrying stores to the forward posts. He was "outstanding for his energy and courage and resourcefulness". When the battalion prepared to make further attacks in June, he took out squads on two nights to clear booby traps and mines.

It was perilous work; mortar fire killed or wounded several men. Displaying "exceptional coolness and ability", he extricated the wounded, then returned to continue his task. For this, and other work, he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Weston also received the same decoration, and his work on 23 patrols up to 31 July was specially cited. Much of his effort was done in that most dangerous of areas, the salient, studded with mines and booby-traps, and always under the enemy's nose.

A few weeks later, towards the southernmost edge of the perimeter, a kilometre or two from where Edmondson had won his VC, young Patrick made his mark in an attack against an Italian post. He received the Military Medal.

Over a series of nights, patrols had gone out probing the enemy's positions and examining an Italian post that was strongly manned and armed with three machine-guns. It was protected by mines, trip-wires and barbed wire.

Patrick led two patrols and from his reports a plan for an attack was prepared. Then, just after midnight on the morning of 31 August, he accompanied a fighting patrol of 11 men under Captain Frederick Bode in an assault on the post



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

007505

Members of the 2/13th Battalion on patrol along the anti-tank ditch at the El Adem Road to the south of Tobruk. A close watch is kept over this ditch night and day to counter enemy attempts to pierce the town's defences.

In the darkness the men moved into a forming-up position in a line behind the enemy; for last few hundred yards they had to crawl. Suddenly they were spotted and a flare went up. Bode yelled, "Come on boys, up and at 'em," and they charged. Patrick later described an Italian hand grenade bouncing off his helmet before it exploded, knocking him to the ground and momentarily stunning him. In the midst of the wild mêlée he tried to gather his thoughts.

"I rolled over and pitched two grenades into the nearest trench and made a dash for the end machine-gun. I jumped into the pit on top of three Italians, and bayoneted two before my bayonet snapped. I got the third with my revolver as he made for a dug-out where there were at least two other men. I let them have most of my magazine."

Patrick eventually made a scrambling dash back to safety, only narrowly making it. Bode, who received a wound in the hip, got back too, helped by another soldier. There were six casualties from the squad

In August the Australians fought their last major battles and in that time one of the brigades was withdrawn by sea. In September and October the rest of the 9th Division was got away, handing over to other Commonwealth troops. Only the 2/13th Battalion was left behind, unable to get out because of heavy enemy aerial bombing. The battalion was thrown into a heavy action towards the south-east at Ed Duda on 30 November. During the movement into position, at dawn, the Germans brought down heavy artillery fire on the exposed Australians causing many casualties. Sergeant Geoff Hunt was hit by shrapnel and died the following day. He was buried, like Edmondson, in the Tobruk War Cemetery. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Eventually Rommel abandoned efforts to take the fortress. This allowed the last Australian battalion finally to be relieved, by road, on 16 December 1941.

Both Patrick and Weston got safely out of Tobruk. They were destined to take part in more heavy fighting next year around El Alamein. Patrick was commissioned, but tragically was killed in the battalion's attack near Tel el Eisa, Operation Bulimba, on 1 September 1942. He is buried in the El Alamein War Cemetery.

Weston went on to further distinguish himself at Tel el Eisa on 10 July and win the Military Medal. On that occasion, leading a platoon he attacked a battery of German guns; then seeing more, he attacked them single-handed. He fought on all day, even when his position was attacked by tanks. Weston was in further fighting in October 1942 when he was badly wounded but still managed to carry another wounded man over a kilometre to a dressing station.

He was remarkable in being awarded both the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Military Medal for his service in the Middle East. He later fought in New Guinea and after the war was chosen to join the Australian contingent for the Victory March through London. He returned to rural work and for a while managed hotels. He died in 1963.

Within a few pages it is possible to give only the smallest glimpse of the work that went on day after day and every night during the siege of Tobruk. The stories of Geoff Hunt, Jack Weston and Ron Patrick show how coolness, courage and endurance were vital throughout. They and those who fought alongside them defied a brave and clever enemy and added great honour to the reputation of the AIF. A look at the activities of the three men shows how aggressive patrolling became one of the most important factors in the successful defence of this strategically vital ground.

(The author, Peter Burness was a Senior Historian in the Military History Section of the Australian War Memorial.)

VALE: GRAHAM GIBSON (Past President) 21 July 1949 to 29 May 2025



It is with sadness that we acknowledge the recent passing of our esteemed life member Graham Gibson. Graham recently lost his long battle with cancer. He was 75.

Graham, the son of William (Hoot) Herbert Gibson (VX34385, 7 Div Supply Column), joined the association in 2012. He quickly realised that help was needed with the running of the association, so he threw his hat into the ring. Shortly thereafter, he became a member of the committee. He held several executive positions including Secretary, Vice-President and Editor of the Tobruk House News. In 2020, he became President of ROTA, after the passing of Bob Semple. He was the first descendant of a siege veteran to hold this position.

The importance of Graham's contribution to the association over many years cannot be overstated. He steered the association through the difficult COVID years. He was the editor of the Tobruk House News from April 2013 to October 2018. He was also main architect of proceedings for the Tobruk Sunday commemoration ceremony.

The committee extends condolences to his wife Rosemary and family.



Graham (President of ROTA) escorting Governor General David Hurley and Mrs Linda Hurley, on Tobruk Sunday, 11 April 2021

SPECIAL SERVICE TO RECOGNISE THE RATS OF TOBRUK – AUGUST 24 AT 1PM



With the passing of our last Australian Rat of Tobruk last year, this service which is usually dedicated to the arrival of the Polish Carpathian Brigade and the subsequent relief of some Australian troops will instead be dedicated to all the troops who served in the Siege of Tobruk.

This year the service will be held on the forecourt of the Shrine of Remembrance, commencing at 1pm.

It will feature the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes & Drums as well as the banners of

many of the battalions which participated in the siege. We hope that many members and friends will be able to attend this very special service. Seating will be provided and there will be a marquee to protect from any inclement weather.

AFTERNOON TEA AT THE ROYAL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL ON SEPTEMBER 3

Every year the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) Foundation invites members and friends of the Rats of Tobruk Association to visit the hospital for an illuminating dive into the work of the dedicated team of doctors, nurses, scientists and ward assistants in the Rats of Tobruk Cockatoo ward, with a focus on the work of the current and past holders of the Rats of Tobruk Neurology Fellowship.

Members and friends are cordially invited to visit the RCH on September 3. Our host, Associate Professor Mark Mackay, and 2025 Rats of Tobruk Neurology Fellow Nadia Truong, will take us on a tour of the ward, and for the first time we'll visit the RCH Historical Room, and Gallery – an inspiring place honouring the RCH's long history as one of the leading paediatric hospitals in the Southern Hemisphere.



This is a unique opportunity to see the legacy of the Rats in action, to meet some of the amazing people who make it happen. **Please RSVP directly to the RCH on 9345 5539.**

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 5539 or email: kathryn.sell@rch.org.au)



ROTA MERCHANDISE

See Order Form on page 18 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 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
\$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

(PRICES VALID JUNE 2025 – DEC 2025)

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 (navy blue with red 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.

EUCALYPTS OF HODOGAYA



Marking the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, *Eucalypts of Hodogaya* reflects on a remarkable story of post-war reconciliation and remembrance. This exhibition explores how Australian and Japanese architects, gardeners, and builders overcame cultural divides after the Second World War to collaborate on a site that blends Eastern and Western traditions in a garden of peace.

TASTE OF COMBAT



This exhibition honours the vital work of the Catering Corps and unveils the fascinating science and innovation behind military meals. Explore what and how troops have eaten – from the Boer War to Afghanistan. There are personal stories from cooks on submarines to soldiers with field rations, showcasing the skills and adaptability of Defence chefs, whether cooking in combat zones or delivering fine dining for diplomats.

CAMOUFLAGE



See how nature has inspired military disguise—from animal patterns to clever tricks of deception. Explore real camouflage uniforms. Follow the evolution of camouflage from the First World War to today. Uncover the science and artistry behind concealment and deception, and explore its role in Australian military history. 20