



COMMEMORATING THE

85TH

**ANNIVERSARY
OF THE SIEGE**

Tobruk House NEWS

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION



THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION
NEUROSCIENCE FELLOWSHIP FUND



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RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC.

ABN 23 136 193 517

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

Month / Date	Event Description
Sunday February 22	Annual General Meeting 10.30am
Sunday March 15	Open Day 10am – 3pm – Volunteers needed!
Sunday April 12	Tobruk Sunday - Details to be advised.
Saturday April 25	Anzac Day - Tobruk House will be open from 9am to 3pm
Sunday May 24	General Meeting/Open Day from 10.30am
Thursday June 11	RCH Morning Tea 10.30am – registration essential - details TBA

Immediate past Patron: Bill Gibbins AM

Committee of Management:

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: APRIL 2026

DEADLINE: MARCH 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will not be published.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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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.

President's Message – February 2026

Dear Members and Friends,

As always it is a very great privilege and honour to extend my personal New Year best wishes in 2026 to all members and families of The Rats Of Tobruk Association. I join all our hard-working committee members in saying may the New Year bring you happiness, peace and prosperity.



It is with great sadness I recognise the passing of our Patron, Mr William (Bill) Gibbins AM on the 3rd of December 2025. Bill's memorial service was held at Flemington racecourse, attended by many hundreds of people whose life had been enriched in so many ways by his infectious enthusiasm for getting things done. His wife Iolanda and family paid their heartfelt thanks to Bill for his constant love and affection via many eulogies that honoured his robust personality throughout their lives. He was a man of significant character for whom his word was his bond.

I am sure all members will be aware of Bill's special affection for the Rats of Tobruk, and his generosity towards our organisation. He was our patron and he and his wife Iolanda were regular guests at Tobruk House. It was my very great honour to represent you at his memorial service along with fellow committee member Mr Tony Codd. We formally extended our condolences and appreciation on behalf of all members of The Rats Of Tobruk Association to Bill's family.

Sadly, this was the passing of a man who will be greatly missed. RIP Bill.

It was also my very great pleasure to attend and support on behalf of all members the inaugural presentation of The Rats Of Tobruk Award for Excellence at my old state school Murrumbena Primary School in late December 2025. You can read more about this award on pages 8 and 9 of this issue of the Tobruk House News.

This year is the 85th Anniversary of The Siege Of Tobruk. To mark this momentous year, your committee has been hard at work devising various significant events to honour this occasion. The memory of the sacrifices made by our veterans during the longest siege of WW2 needs to be honoured and kept alive. More on these special events will be posted as I am sworn to secrecy at this stage.

In closing, please be assured your committee members are looking forward to 2026 with enthusiasm to bring the memory of all our veterans to the forefront of recognition to the wider public for their selfless service to Australia .

Let your aspirations have wings, so they may take you far in 2026

Kind regards,

Paul Dipnall
Vice President

ps I also encourage you, if possible, to attend the Annual General Meeting, held for the first time on a Sunday, where we will reflect on the year past, share plans for the future, and discuss ways to continue building our association.

NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC.

ABN 23 136 193 517

Reg No: A0054511Y

Date: SUNDAY 22nd February 2026

Time: 10.30am for 11am commencement

Venue: Tobruk House, 44 Victoria Avenue, Albert Park, VIC

At this meeting, members will have the opportunity to:

- Find out about ROTA's operations and finances for 2025
- Learn about our new schools program
- Speak about any areas of concern

At this meeting, members will be asked to vote to:

- Accept the minutes of the last AGM
- Accept the annual report
- Accept the annual financial statements
- Confirm the appointment of the new executive and general committee members.

If you are unable to attend, please consider filling out the separate PROXY form attached.

At this meeting the recipient of the Royal Children's Hospital 2025 Rats Of Tobruk Neuroscience Fellowship will be presented.

REMINDER: ROTA SUBSCRIPTIONS WERE DUE FOR PAYMENT ON 1ST JANUARY 2026



Affiliate members are reminded that this year's subscription was due for payment on 1st January. The subscription remains at \$30 for 2026.

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

Payment can now be made using a credit or debit card. Please call 0432 232 502 to arrange.

If you are paying by EFT, ensure you include a unique reference such as your surname and membership no.* (Account Name: Rats of Tobruk Association BSB: 633 000 Account No: 197610603)

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

*This is important for correct matching of payments, as bank deposits do not have adequate referencing.

Please note that Tobruk veteran's widows are exempt from paying the annual subscription.
Life and honorary members are also exempt.

VALE WILLIAM (BILL) GIBBINS *(by Glenda Garde)*

On April 19, 2007, some of the remaining Rats of Tobruk must have filed into Tobruk House with heavy hearts; my father being one of them. He had tossed and turned the night before, managing only a few hours' sleep. As a member of the committee at that time, they had reluctantly made the decision that with dwindling numbers their time was up, and that the hall would have to be sold. They had also decided that the proceeds would go to the Royal Children's Hospital for medical research. However, a shock was in store for this gathering on that day.

As the Age from the following day reported, *'For the second time in their history, a siege has been lifted for the Rats of Tobruk. Just when they thought age might finally weary them and the years condemn them to leave their Albert Park headquarters, along came Bill Gibbins with \$1.73 million.'*

Yesterday, after much anguish, the survivors of one of Australia's most illustrious military engagements auctioned the property where their association has held meetings for more than 50 years. But in an act that stunned the old diggers, Mr Gibbins, who made his wealth out of trucking, went well beyond the expected price to outbid a Sydney developer. He then told the veterans they could keep the hall as long as they wanted.'

I can clearly remember how excited dad and his mates were when they realised that their Anzac Day gatherings and meetings would not have to end after all. Bill was their 'white knight' and, in any subsequent events at the hall, he and Iolanda were always made a great fuss of. (He also gave some of them a few racing tips, which were appreciated!)

Dad passed away aged 97 in 2012, but I know that his longevity was not just because of 'good genes', and I am sure that I am not alone in saying that those visits to the hall kept many veterans going. Bill's generosity has certainly gone a long way, and all ROTA members should be extremely grateful to this humble man, so why did he do it?

Recognising the important place that the hall held in the veteran's lives, and as a son of a WW2 veteran himself, Bill said at the time, "I thought I'd buy it and let you keep going, because we owe you a debt that can't possibly be repaid."

He also noted that, "There are sons and daughters of Rats who may carry the place on. This is a good feeling."



Bill and Iolanda Gibbins were presented with Life Memberships of ROTA on Anzac Day 2013. They are pictured here with Rats (L-R) Bob Semple, Tom Pritchard and Eddie Emerson.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

In celebration of our eight decades of operation, we are brought to the swinging 60's, a time of social and cultural change, the Vietnam war and the Beatles!

By the late 1950s, members of The Rats of Tobruk Association began asking how best to ensure that the story of Tobruk would never fade from public memory. A statue or plaque, it was agreed, would stand silent. What was needed was something that could live, move, and be heard.

In 1959, the Association resolved to create a living memorial in the form of a pipe band. Music, particularly the stirring sound of pipes and drums, had long been associated with remembrance, ceremony and military tradition. It would be a memorial that marched, performed, and carried the name of Tobruk wherever it went.

The following year, in 1960, the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Highland Band was formed and held its first official meeting. Many of its founding members came from the Royal Caledonian Society Pipe Band, bringing with them experience, discipline and a strong musical foundation. With an initial donation of £1,500 from ROTA, the band was able to establish itself with purpose and pride.

Great care was taken in choosing a uniform that reflected both military heritage and remembrance. Scarlet doublets, Glengarry headwear and full plaids were adopted, and the MacLeod of Harris tartan was selected for its symbolism. The dark tones spoke of loss and memory, while the yellow and red stripes represented the sands of the desert and the blood spilt during the Siege of Tobruk.

From its earliest days, the band was in demand. It became a central part of Rats of Tobruk Association events, including the annual debutante balls at St Kilda Town Hall, reunions and commemorative occasions. Beyond association duties, the band quickly became a familiar and respected presence at major public events such as the Melbourne Show, Moomba Parade, Melbourne Cup and, most importantly, the ANZAC Day Parade. The band also frequently performed alongside the Rats of Tobruk Marching Girls at street parades, reunions and the annual Rats picnic.

Competition soon followed performance. Beginning as a Grade 3 band, the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Highland Band progressed rapidly, earning promotion to Grade 2 and achieving consistent success across Victoria. Top-three placings became the norm, and the band travelled extensively throughout Australia for competitions and Rats of Tobruk reunions, carrying the story of Tobruk.

By the 1980s, the band's reputation had reached a national level. It took part in the Melbourne Military Tattoo at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, an event instigated by Premier Sir Rupert Hamer – himself a Rat of Tobruk. In 1986, a significant change occurred when the band opened its ranks to women following the demise of the Melbourne Ladies Pipe Band, welcoming female pipers and drummers into what had previously been a male-only ensemble.

Perhaps the band's most defining international chapter began in 1987, when it set its sights on the Edinburgh Military Tattoo as part of Australia's Bicentenary celebrations in 1988. Joined by colonial dancers and Rats veterans, a specially prepared performance was accepted by the Tattoo's producers. What began as a single appearance grew into a lasting relationship, with the band returning as part of the massed pipes and drums in 1994, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2008 and 2012.



Also in 1987 the name The Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums was officially adopted when it became an incorporated organisation.

While the band hasn't been very active of late they do still perform at our important occasions such as Tobruk Sunday, and they did receive significant publicity associated with their involvement with the original AC/DC promotional video for "It's a Long Way to the Top" during the recent AC/DC concert tour, and the establishment of a new world record at Melbourne's Federation Square for the greatest number of pipers assembled to play the bagpipe accompaniment to that famous song.

CHRISTMAS PARTY 2025 - TOBRUK HOUSE STYLE (Story by Glenda Garde)

Well, it just wouldn't feel like Christmas without the traditional ROTA Christmas party, would it! Held just before December last year, there was, as always, plenty of good food, plenty of drink and there was plenty of entertainment combined with good company. So, all in all, a perfect way to spend an afternoon! The hall looked very 'Christmassy', and we even had to add a few extra chairs and tables to accommodate all who showed up on the day.



It is always gratifying to see so many people enjoying themselves, and both new and old friendships ensured that there was a quiet hum of conversation and laughter to be heard throughout the afternoon.

Les Kenfield, one of the now famous pipers from our band, played a medley of bagpipe favourites to accompany polishing off the array of delicious desserts. Of course, no one ever leaves Tobruk House hungry and the empty plates proved that the food was appreciated (and certainly offered great value for money).

After last year, Lachie's 'Tobruk Quiz' is now becoming a bit of a tradition, and the ubiquitous raffle almost finished off the most enjoyable afternoon. (Lachie relishes the idea of putting together a quiz to test us out and naturally there is a prize for the winner.)



As a special surprise to finish the day, we managed to entice Les Kenfield to do a repeat performance of his bagpipe accompaniment to AC/DC's hit 'It's a Long Way To The Top' from 50 years ago, and more recently from Federation Square last November. (Les said he has played it so often in the last couple of months he could probably do it in his sleep!) Tobruk House was really rocking! Heaven knows what the neighbours must have thought was going on.

Thanks to all who generously donated food, to those who gave their time to set up and create the festive Christmassy feel, to the 70 plus who attended (especially those helped with the clean-up) and if you missed this one, there's always next year!

SCHOOLS' PROGRAM 2025

Well, the ROTA schools' program has gotten off to a great start with a number of primary schools accepting our offer of an award for a Grade 6 student who will be transitioning into secondary school.

You may recall that earlier this year members were emailed information about this program, which will broaden our existing Primary Schools Award Program. It aims to recognise Year 6 students who reflect the values exemplified by the Rats of Tobruk: Service, Courage, Respect, Integrity, and Resilience. It is not focused on academic performance, but on character and conduct deserving of acknowledgement. It is our way of inspiring younger generations while keeping the memory of Tobruk alive.

At **Murrumbeena Primary School**, principal Chellee Plumb was most eager to be involved in the program, and a presentation was made at their whole school graduation ceremony which took place in the final week of term 4 last year.

The children were told that their award was named after a Rat of Tobruk, VX41310 George Anderson, who had been a student at Murrumbeena PS in the 1920s and whose family lived just a few blocks from the school. Whilst George survived Tobruk, sadly he was killed later in the war, in 1943 in New Guinea, aged just 24.



Murrumbeena PS Rats of Tobruk Award winner Amelia
with ROTA vice president Paul Dipnall,
School principal Chellee Plumb and
ROTA committee member Glenda Garde

Our vice president, Paul Dipnall, made the presentation and, as it happens, he had also attended Murrumbeena PS in the 1960s.

Chellee had written the following for Paul to read about why Amelia was receiving the award:
'The student selected for this award embodies the same spirit shown by the Rats of Tobruk. When faced with challenges, she meets them with quiet courage and determination. She consistently places the needs of others before her own, stepping forward without hesitation when something needs to be done. She shows initiative, compassion and a strong sense of responsibility, noticing when others need support and offering it without being asked. In doing so, she reflects the values of service, resilience and leadership that this award seeks to honour. The student being awarded today is...Amelia H.'

Amelia's parents were thrilled that she had received this award, explaining to us after the ceremony that, as a toddler, Amelia had undergone cancer treatment.

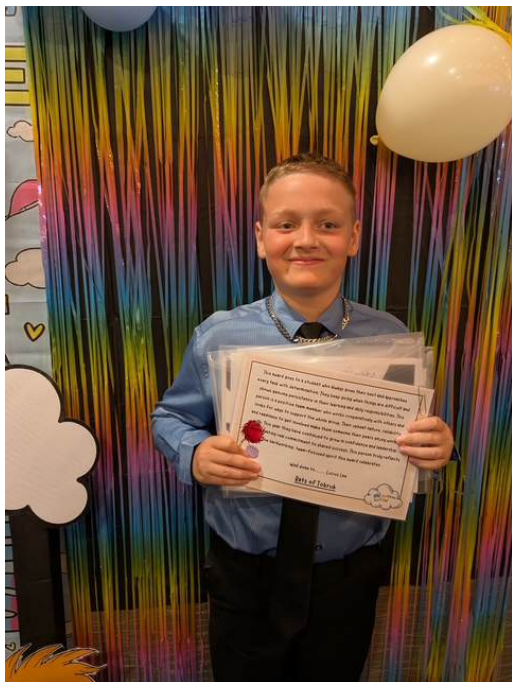
Warrandyte PS is a school with a long involvement with the Rats of Tobruk. In fact their Multi Purpose hall is named Tobruk Hall! The Year 6 students visit Tobruk House every year, to learn first hand about the significance of the Siege and their connection with the Rats.

This year the ROTA award went to Arthur W. He was described by his teacher James Schultz as a student who always tries his best. A polite and kind natured boy, Arthur treats his peers, staff and community with respect, showing diligence in his role as house captain. He was also described as a talented rugby player with a good sense of humour, popular with his classmates.

Warrandyte PS Rats of Tobruk Award winner
Arthur with school principal Nieta Manser



Morwell Central Primary School has long been associated with ROTA's end-of-year awards and this year we were sent the following address regarding the two 2015 award winners:



This award goes to a student who always gives their best and approaches every task with determination. They keep going when things are difficult and shows genuine persistence in their learning and daily responsibilities.

This person is a positive team member who works cooperatively with others and looks for ways to support the whole group. Their upbeat nature, reliability, and readiness to get involved make them someone their peers enjoy working with.

This year they have continued to grow in confidence and leadership, demonstrating real commitment to shared success. This person truly reflects the hardworking, team-focused spirit this award celebrates. Well done to..... Lucius L

And also:

This award goes to a student who always strives to be the best they can be. They are a true friend to their peers, always working with and supporting those around them.

They are a wonderful listener and help in any way they can. Even if that means just being there. They have a huge heart, and the world is a much better place with them in it.

This person always tries 100% while learning, they always use their ASPIRE values in class and around the yard, and they aim to get as much out of each day of learning as they can. I am pleased to announce, the Rats of Tobruk award goes to... Hazel A.

We are thrilled with the interest shown by so many members and schools in participating in this worthy program, and congratulations must go to all recipients of both the old and new awards.



Thanks also to our secretary, Lachlan, for initiating and coordinating this new program which will continue into the foreseeable future.

We are seeking more interested members to nominate a primary school, ideally one that may have a connection to a Rat of Tobruk. The association will then engage with the school to establish the award, tailoring the selection criteria to suit their student community.

After five years, we will jointly review the program to determine whether it should continue.

This is a small but powerful way to connect generations, promote the story of Tobruk, and instil enduring values in young Australians. We hope you will consider becoming a donor or nominating a school in your community.

If you are interested in contributing and becoming a part of this in 2026, please let us know and we will be happy to contact the schools concerned. This is a wonderful way in which to carry forward the name of the Rats of Tobruk.

THE BIRTH OF A LEGACY – THE BEGINNING OF THE RCH FELLOWSHIP

In October last year Stuart Tolliday, ROTA Chairman, and Kathryn Sell, Head of Planned Giving at the RCH Foundation, sat down with Associate Professor and Senior Neurologist Andrew Kornberg, to find out more about the history of the Rats of Tobruk Royal Children's Hospital Neurology Fellowship.

Andrew's passion for the groundbreaking work at the RCH has been evidenced by his tireless promotion for neurology research and his many efforts to raise the money necessary to gain and maintain the position of the RCH as one of the top paediatric hospitals in the world.

His most recent exploit was Fly For the Kids. In July 2025, he took off on his [Fly for the Kids](#), a fundraising adventure in the skies, as he navigated Australia by plane – solo, with the goal of raising \$4.5m!

(This was the second time he had embarked on such an adventure. Andrew initially completed this epic challenge in 2017, flying for 25 days and covering 16,000 kilometres.)

Our story begins in 2000 when the young neurosurgeon Andrew Kornborg joined the staff of the Royal Children's Hospital. He quickly realised that cancer research was at the top of the pecking order for funding and that neurology was the relatively 'poor cousin'. His vision was to build the neurology department to be up with the best in the world. Andrew firmly believed that the field of neurology had the greatest potential to alter the lives of children for the better and he wasted no time in outlining his vision to the powers at the hospital.

At this time Brian Mullin was the CEO of the RCH Foundation and he, along with Simon Harvey, the then head of neurology, embraced Andrew's vision enthusiastically. The Rats of Tobruk had been long time regular donors to the foundation and Brian began to court them with a view to getting them more involved.



Associate Professor Andrew Kornberg pointing out to Stuart Tolliday the original location of the Rats of Tobruk Neurology ward on the eighth floor at the old hospital

By the time the decision to sell Tobruk House was made, there was a strong relationship between the two organisations. The Rats were clear that they had fought for freedom and future generations, and they wanted to have continuity for that goal. Brian explained that a Fellowship which would contribute to the training of a young neurosurgeon would be a very fitting legacy.

The neurology ward would be re-named the Rats of Tobruk Neurology Ward and a display at the entrance to the ward would explain the story of the Rats and the siege.

And so the neurology ward on the eighth floor of the old RCH became the Rats of Tobruk ward and the awarding of the Rats of Tobruk Neurology Fellowship commenced.

Several years later discussions about the new hospital were getting down to details and the hospital administration made it clear that the name of the neurology ward was to change to the Cockatoo Ward and the Rats of Tobruk name would be dropped.

Andrew Kornberg, by then the head of Neurology, was incensed. There was a strong feeling amongst all the neurology staff that the name and association with the Rats had to stay! He began a campaign to retain it across multiple areas including the hospital administration, the architects of the new hospital and the RCH Foundation.

The architects quickly came on side, but the hospital administration were not to be swayed from their initial position. Andrew laughs that in the end he probably just wore them down, and finally the original plan was scrapped, and the neurology ward was to be known as the Rats of Tobruk Cockatoo ward. However the new name and retention of the signage telling the story didn't make it in time for the opening of the new hospital. In fact it was some two years later that the signage (which had been kept in storage) was finally reinstated as we know it today.

Meanwhile the annual visit by the Rats to the hospital continued but, sadly the number of Rats attending was dropping, and the interest on the original endowment was no longer covering the full cost of the fellowship. The balance was being made up from hospital funds as the relationship with the Rats was cherished. However by 2018 it had become obvious that the original donation needed topping up if the Rats connection was to be properly protected.



The tribute to the Rats of Tobruk was eventually retrieved from storage and reinstated in the entrance to the new Rats of Tobruk Cockatoo ward in the new hospital.

Following a meeting between ROTA's Stuart Tolliday and Donna Aranyi and Sue Hunt from the RCH Foundation, it was decided to hold a special fundraising drive. The then president of ROTA and Rat of Tobruk, Bob Semple, wrote to all members in 2019 explaining the issue and requesting donations. A combination of immediate donations and bequests helped push the funding back towards positive territory.

In 2024 the RCH Foundation made a generous donation to the fellowship and restructured it, with a view to ensuring its long-term future. Of course costs continue to rise and so ROTA has continued to encourage members and friends to consider the importance of the Rats' legacy in their estate planning.

A CAMPAIGN TO AWARD A VICTORIA CROSS TO A RAT GATHERS PACE

Story from the Hobart Mercury 12 Nov 2025

Australia's most decorated living war hero has thrown his weight behind a push to honour another brave Queensland veteran with a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Warrant Officer Stanley Richard Walsh, a famed "Rat of Tobruk" and former Warwick mayor, received the second-highest bravery award, the Distinguished Conduct Medal, for rescuing a wounded comrade while under heavy fire in Egypt in WWII.



Warrant Officer Stanley Richard Walsh

Now his family and the Warwick community have launched a bid to have the honour posthumously upgraded to a VC in recognition of his heroic deeds. They are being supported by Keith Payne, Australia's most decorated living war hero. Mr Payne received the VC for saving 40 wounded comrades in the Vietnam War while under enemy fire. Speaking from his Mackay home, Mr Payne, 92, said he had read Mr Walsh's official citation and "If that's not a Victoria Cross action, then I've never seen one. It's definitely worthy of a VC," he said.

Stanley Richard Walsh is the recipient of the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Mr Payne, who also won a Distinguished Service Cross and Silver Star from the US for his Vietnam War service, said Mr Walsh's deeds were comparable to those of Afghanistan War hero Trooper Mark Donaldson who received a VC for exposing himself to enemy fire

while protecting injured troops and then rescuing an interpreter while under heavy fire during the 2008 Battle of Khaz Oruzgan.

Gold Coaster Doug Baird OAM, whose son Corporal Cameron Baird was posthumously awarded a VC in 2014 for his gallantry in Afghanistan, said Mr Walsh's exploits sounded as if they were "probably up to the standard" of the top medal. "Why it wasn't awarded at the time I don't know," he said. "There's always an argument for a VC and if it's going to be successful, I think his family needs to act reasonably quickly." If the campaign is successful, Mr Walsh will join just 102 Australians awarded the Victoria Cross and become the first Queenslander to do so since Nambour-born Afghanistan war hero Corporal Daniel Keighran in 2012.

Mr Walsh's family have submitted an application to the Directorate of Honours and Awards to have him elevated into the ranks of the bravest of the brave. His granddaughters, Warwick-based Larissa Mack and Alana Hurse, are the principal drivers of the project along with John Telfer, a local military historian and former RAAF serviceman.

National Party leader David Littleproud, Warwick mayor Melissa Hamilton, local MP James Lister and the Warwick RSL have also thrown their weight behind the campaign.

"I was proud to support the application to upgrade Mr Walsh's Distinguished Service Medal to a Victoria Cross after the Warwick RSL also supported the application," Mr Littleproud said this week. "I have written to the Defence Minister giving my support and asking for consideration, and hope that the family is given that opportunity."

Ms Hamilton said Mr Walsh was "a true leader, both in war and during peace", and backed the push to get him a VC. "Stanley's service records from his time in the Australian Infantry prove him to not only having been a man of great leadership but also one of courage and bravery," she said. "He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his bravery during the battle at Tel el Eisa. Showing strength and great loyalty he put a fellow soldier's life ahead of his own, ensuring a wounded Australian was not abandoned, but was carried by him to safety."

Warwick RSL Sub Branch immediate past president John Skinner said Mr Walsh, who died in 1998, was both a war hero "and a really good fella" and the town would be "absolutely overjoyed" to see him honoured with a VC. The bid for an upgraded military medal comes as the Australian Senate recently rejected a Labor government bid to impose a 20-year time limit on reviewing or reclassifying Australian military medals and honours.



Warrant Officer Stanley Richard Walsh's Service Medals - the Distinguished Conduct Medal is on the left.

Mr Walsh enlisted at Kelvin Grove on May 17, 1940, was assigned to the 2/15 Battalion, and spent July to September 1940 in Darwin before shipping out to the Middle East. He participated in heavy fighting and also holds the distinction of belonging to the famed 'Rats of Tobruk'.

During the Battle of Tel el Eisa in Egypt in 1942, Mr Walsh risked his life to retrieve a wounded comrade under heavy shell fire, carrying the soldier for around 360m, stopping occasionally to dress the man's wound while they were both under fire. He also helped destroy a working enemy party of 25 and was cut off behind enemy lines in a series of actions that earned him the DCM.

In a remarkable historical twist, Mr Walsh's father, Richard Walsh, also received a DCM during the Boer War in South Africa in the late 19th Century. That may make the two men the only father and son in the Commonwealth to have received the DCM, but that remains unconfirmed.

Military historian and Victoria Cross expert Michael Madden said earning a VC was "extraordinarily difficult" and usually involved a process that took "years and years". "The only person on earth who can award it is the King – it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks or says," he said. Mr Madden said Mr Walsh's DCM citation was "impressive" but, when measured against the deeds of Australia's most recent VC recipient Richard Norden, the DCM was "absolutely suitable. That's not to discourage the family from trying, because they have absolutely nothing to lose," he said.

Defence Minister Richard Marles, who makes VC recommendations to the Governor-General, declined to comment specifically on the Walsh family application. "This and every Remembrance Day, we remember all those who have served our nation and all of those who have lost their lives, or carried the wounds of service in defence of our country," Mr Marles' office said.

Larissa Mack, who was aged nine when her grandfather died in 1998, remembers a quiet and reserved man who was an integral part of her and her sister's lives.

"So many people in this town who knew him well always referred to him as a real gentleman," she said. "He was very quiet and I remember he always leaned to one side on his walking stick because he carried shrapnel in his back. We when we were kids and grandad was always very kind to us but I do not remember any stories that he told us directly about the war."

But there is one story regarding her grandfather which everyone in the family knows, relating to an incident decades after the war had ended. A man approached Mr Walsh while he was shopping with his wife in Queen St in Brisbane, possibly in the late 1970s, and began weeping. "My grandmother always told us how emotional that man became on seeing my grandfather, and how he kept thanking him and shaking his hand," Ms Mack recalls.

That stranger was the man Mr Walsh had carried to safety in the Battle of Tel el Eisa.

JOHN L. COLLINS PT.2... NOT SUCH A LONGSHOT AFTER ALL? *(Story by Glenda Garde)*

You may recall that in the last (December) edition of the THN, we featured a story about the face of Pte. John L Collins, which adorns the first panel of our exhibition currently on permanent display at Tobruk House. This George Silk photograph was originally chosen back in 2020 by our designers from amongst the vast AWM collection simply because John's face seemed to epitomise all that we know of the Rats, a steely determination with perhaps a touch of the larrikin as well.

At the end of the article, we asked for further information about John because we were interested in discovering more about the man behind this wonderful 'face of Tobruk'. To be honest, we had little hope of hearing from anyone, but on the day of our Christmas party at Tobruk House a message was left on our phone from a Peter Collins. You guessed it; it was John's son, who, having seen the story, called from Adelaide and in a returned phone call was able to fill in a few gaps for us about his dad.



John's enlistment papers tell us that he enlisted in 1940 aged 35 and was discharged in June 1946. However, Peter informed us that his father had actually tried to enlist 3 times, including once in Victoria under an alias, before finally being accepted and being assigned to the 2/10th, the first South Australian battalion formed for the 2nd AIF. He had previously been knocked back deemed medically unfit because of a peptic ulcer.

John was on the first troop ship out of Australia, the Mauretania, in May 1940 bound for the Middle East, but Collins family folklore tells us that he somehow went missing for a short time at a stopover in Capetown, South Africa before travelling on to the UK. (The 18th Brigade had been diverted to the United Kingdom to bolster its defences following the fall of France.) The 2/10th disembarked at Gourock in Scotland on 18 June and was subsequently based at Lopcombe Corner, near Salisbury, in England. Peter tells us that his father had kept a haversack full of loveletters, as the Aussies proved to be very popular with the local Scottish lassies whilst stationed there.

The 2/10th arrived in Egypt on 31 December 1940 and, with the rest of the 18th Brigade, took part in the defence of Tobruk until it was withdrawn at the end of August.

Peter tells us that his father spoke very little of his wartime experiences, but he has been told by some of John's 2/10th mates that after his time in Tobruk John became known as 'Stuka' Collins. One such soldier who Peter met on an Anzac Day after his father had passed away, explained that this name came about because John had shot down a Stuka with his rifle! Peter is still trying to confirm this through battalion diaries, although he has now heard this story from more than one of the John's mates.

After jungle training in Queensland, John also went on to serve in New Guinea and Borneo, as many Rats of Tobruk did.



Tobruk. Pte. J. Collins, in a front line section post during shelling wonders where the next shell will land. (negative by g. Silk).

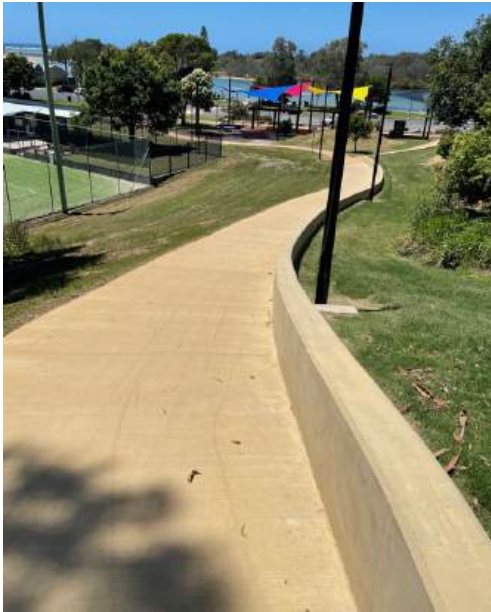
So, whilst we now know quite a bit more about John, unfortunately, we still don't know why John seemed such a favourite with the official war photographers, and particularly George Silk. We can only hazard a guess that it was because of 'that' face which perhaps was seen to accurately portray the image of the Australian soldier at that time.

Many thanks to Peter Collins for helping us with this quest. I am quite sure that his father John would be pleased and would probably have had a quiet chuckle about it.

RATS OF TOBRUK WALK REDEDICATED IN NAMBUCCA HEADS

Story and photos by Mick Birtles, from Nambucca Heads News of the Area November 20 and December 5, 2025

The path, which winds from Gordon Park up to Fraser Street opposite Woolworths in Nambucca Heads, officially retains its meaningful name, "Rats of Tobruk Walk", following significant commitment by Council, community consultation and veteran support.



The newly dedicated Rats of Tobruk Walk and the bench for reflection with the illustrated signage at Gordon Park



Mr Mick Birtles addressed the attendees at the dedication service, pictured here with Nambucca Heads RSL sub-branch President Mr Denis Lane.

The rededication service took place at 11am on Friday, 28 November 2025 at Gordon Park, Nambucca Heads. First dedicated in the 1990s to mark the 50th anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk, the walkway once featured a commemorative plaque and signage. Sadly, due to repeated acts of vandalism, these elements were relocated to the Nambucca Heads Cenotaph, and the significance of the path faded from public memory until now.

As part of a recent Council initiative to upgrade local walkways and public spaces, the opportunity arose to reaffirm the path's commemorative value. With endorsement from the local veterans' community, Council commissioned Anna Fisher of Fisher Design and Architecture to create a new sign for the Walk, marking a proud new chapter for this site of reflection.

Presided over by Nambucca Heads RSL sub-Branch President Denis Lane, the ceremony was attended by Nambucca Valley Mayor Gary Lee, members of the public, and family members of veterans who once proudly bore the Rats of Tobruk name.

Their presence added profound meaning to the event, reaffirming the legacy of those who served in one of Australia's most defining military campaigns.

After consulting with respected members of the veteran community, including John Kent OAM and Bill Shepard, Mr Birtles confirmed that the pathway had been dedicated by the local RSL and veteran community to mark the 50th anniversary of the siege.

When Council sought to upgrade the pathway, Mr Birtles was invited to work with artist Anna Fisher from Fisher Design and Architecture to help develop a concept that honoured military history with appropriate protocol and accuracy.

The new signage explains the importance of the memorial to the Rats of Tobruk

"My role was to provide military advice and keep things on track from a military protocol perspective," Mr Birtles told News Of The Area. The resulting memorial includes a striking park bench and interpretive signage installed midway along the walk. The signage features a powerful image taken by renowned war photographer Frank Hurley, showing diggers days before the siege with Tobruk in flames behind them, alongside maps and historical context.

The plaque inscription recounts the harrowing eight-month siege of Tobruk, during which some 14,000 Australian soldiers of the 9th Division and 18th Brigade, alongside British and Indian troops, held firm against German-Italian forces under General Erwin Rommel.

Though dubbed the Rats of Tobruk by Nazi propaganda, the soldiers proudly adopted the name as a badge of honour still revered today. Mr Birtles also liaised with the Rats of Tobruk Association to ensure historical accuracy and consensus.

"This is a place of reflection, dedicated to the Rats of Tobruk," he said. "Many paid the ultimate sacrifice, and all made an indelible mark on the fabric of this great nation."

The Rats of Tobruk Association in Melbourne has offered to provide a tree grown from a cutting taken from the entrance to the original Casualty Treatment Point in Tobruk. This tree, once planted near the memorial bench, will provide shade and continue the living memory of those brave soldiers for generations to come.

10 YEAR MEMBERS ANNIVERSARY

We congratulate the following members who have reached the tenth anniversary of their membership and thank them for their continued support.

**John Sunter Faye Macfarlane Robert Young Ronald Young Maureen Rush
Joy Jorgensen John Shea Jillian Cox Anthony Cox Wayne Trenear Kaye Lee
Tracey McIlroy Errin Begley Deni Gliddon Hugh Whittle Robert Baker
Catherine Cox Graham Gaby Donna McIntyre Bernice Short Suzanne Kirby
Geoffrey Schubert Stuart Gouldthorp Doreen Chenoweth Brendon White
Bruce Bingham Brian Wallis Heather Harcus Corina Urwin Carol Vince
Sally Shilling Paul Knersch Elizabeth Napier Cheryl Hayes Peter McIntyre
Damien Henty-Anderson Colin Watts Penny Curtis Jim Wallace Roslyn Hogan
Christine McDonald Jennifer Green Bruce McDowell Kenneth Ashton
Peter Walpole Linda Chapman Thomas Oram Pauline Sparks Elayna Bell
Brent Clarkson Billie Fogarty Felicity Batchelor Allen Shatten Noel Shelton**

TOBRUK SUNDAY 2026



COMMEMORATING THE 85TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMMENCEMENT
OF THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK

SUNDAY APRIL 12TH 2026

A COMMEMORATIVE SERVICE WILL BE HELD AT **11AM** IN MOUBRAY ST
(AROUND THE CORNER FROM TOBRUK HOUSE).

FOLLOWED BY LIGHT REFRESHMENTS IN THE HALL.

PLEASE JOIN US FOR THIS SPECIAL OCCASION.

ANZAC DAY 2025

TOBRUK HOUSE

44 VICTORIA AVENUE

WILL BE OPEN ON ANZAC DAY

FROM 9AM TO 3PM

PLEASE REGISTER YOUR INTEREST

VIA LACHLAN GAYLARD

0418 882 323

A STOLEN PIECE OF TOBRUK HISTORY

The Goulston family and Rats of Tobruk association, are deeply distressed by the theft of a rare and irreplaceable Tobruk Medal belonging to Major Stanley Marcus Goulston MC, a decorated wartime medical officer, distinguished physician and lifelong servant of the community.

Major Goulston served as regimental medical officer to the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion during the Siege of Tobruk. Working under constant enemy fire, he treated wounded men in some of the most dangerous conditions faced by Australian forces during the Second World War. For his bravery, he was twice mentioned in dispatches and awarded the Military Cross.

After returning from wartime he joined Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, where, alongside Sir William Morrow, he helped establish Australia's first specialist gastroenterology unit. He worked at there for 33 years and continued in clinical practice until the age of 79.

Remarkably, after retiring from medicine, Goulston embarked on yet another career. Returning to University in his late seventies, he completed a Master of Philosophy and became a pioneer of medical humanities in Australia. His teaching on literature and poetry in medicine was enormously popular, and in 2007 he published Poetry for Pleasure, the final poem titled Life Continues after Ninety.



Two medals (pictured here) including the rare World War II medal issued to a small number of Australian veterans of the Siege of Tobruk. It's believed the thief broke into a home on Buchan Court in Wantirna South, sometime between 3pm on Wednesday, November 5, and 7pm on Thursday, November 6. Nobody was home at the time.

Among his most treasured possessions, however, was not his official decoration but a hand-made "Tobruk Rat" medal. These rare medals were fashioned by members of the Pioneer Battalion from the debris of war itself, an Italian shell case, damaged German armour and the wreckage of a crashed German bomber. Even the "ribbon" was made of metal. Only a handful were made, and each was awarded as a deeply personal tribute from the men who served alongside the

recipient. It is this unique medal, a tangible link to Tobruk, mateship and battlefield courage that has now been stolen from the family home in Melbourne in November.

This stolen medal is far more than a keepsake. It represents courage under fire, the ingenuity and mateship of the Rats of Tobruk, and the life of an Australian doctor whose service spanned war, medicine, education and community. We appeal to members and the wider public: if you can offer information or assistance that may help recover Major Stanley Goulston's Tobruk Medal, please come forward.

Some pieces of history cannot be replaced, but with goodwill and collective effort, they may yet be returned to where they belong.

Anybody with information is urged to contact Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000 or online.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members:

Anthony Pickett Stephen Duffield David Jarrett Patrick Curran
Gregory Balkin Kerri Hardman Laura Buck Stewart Middleton
Ian Payne John Steinbeck Peter Collins Richard Oates



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

THE IMPACT OF GIVING.

The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation's annual celebration focussing on the impact of philanthropy was held in December. A full report including all the numbers can be found on their website [here](#).

And the numbers are truly impressive! The RCH Foundation distributed \$47.5 million to the hospital in the 2024/2025 year, part of which was the funding for the Rats of Tobruk Neuroscience Fellowship.

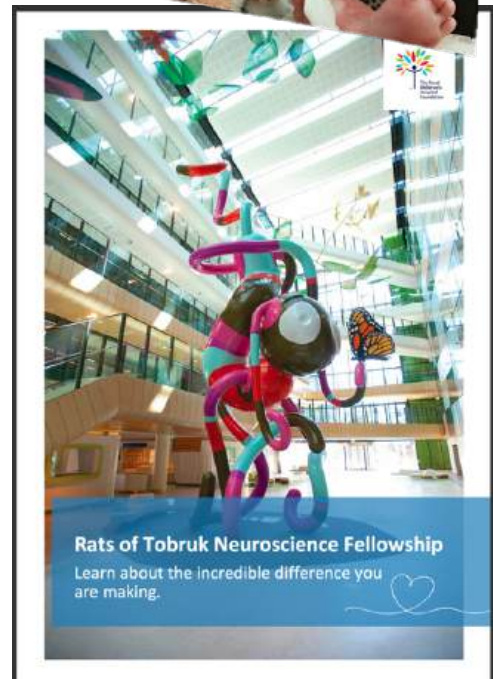
THE RATS OF TOBRUK NEUROSCIENCE FELLOWSHIP

Each year in Australia, over 250,000 people are diagnosed with epilepsy. Yet, for around half of those, including around 35 per cent of children, the cause of the epilepsy is unknown. Thanks to the Rats of Tobruk Neuroscience Fellowship, supported by the Rats of Tobruk Association, teams across the RCH are working with researchers across the world to change that.

This fellowship was established by the Rats themselves to be their legacy and has to date provided opportunities for fifteen young doctors to advance their studies and knowledge of child epilepsy since it began in 2010.

These doctors are now contributing to the efforts to discover the cause and find treatments for child epilepsy in hospitals around Australia and the world.

The 2024 Annual Report for the fellowship fund is available on our website and can be found using [this link](#). It includes updates on the careers two of our previous fellows as well as the financial information.



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)

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Your Association needs interested members to join the committee and help drive the organisation forward.

**We have great plans for the future of ROTA,
but we need help to realise them.**

For more information about joining the committee please call:

PHONE 0432 232 502



RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC

Registration No: A0054511Y

NOMINATION FORM

Committee Members for 2026

In accordance with the Association Rules (2017), at the 2026 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 2026. (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: _____



ROTA MERCHANDISE

See Order Form on page 22 for postage costs and other details.



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



\$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



ROTA TOTE BAG
40cm x 35cm
\$16.50



'HEROES OF TOBRUK'
STUBBIE HOLDER
\$10



'HEROES OF TOBRUK'
BALLPOINT PEN
\$5



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 JAN 2026 – JUNE 2026)

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				\$11.50		Postage for up to 2 medals to same address.
ROTA Rugby Top	\$60				\$15		
ROTA Polo Shirt (navy blue with red stripes)	\$45				\$11.50		
ROTA “baseball” style cap	\$28				\$11.50		
ROTA Bar Mat	\$40				\$16.50		
Heroes of Tobruk stubbie holder	\$10				\$11.65		Postage for up to 2 units to the same address
ROTA Tote bag (RATBAG)	\$16.50				\$11.50		Launch special offer – 2 for \$30 (+ post)
Heroes Of Tobruk Mug	\$15				\$11.65		
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
\$16.50 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



RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC - APPLICATION FOR AFFILIATE MEMBERSHIP



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

Contact: Email ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com Phone No: 0432 232 502

Name: _____
Title _____ Given Name (s) _____ Surname _____

Address: _____
Suburb / State _____ Post Code _____

Email: _____ @ _____ Contact Phone No _____
Please Print Clearly

Are you over 18 years of age: **YES or NO**

To be eligible for membership the applicant must be over 18 years

Are you a descendant / relative of a Rat of Tobruk: **YES or NO** If yes please print his details below:

Given Name (s) _____ Surname _____ Service ID _____ Unit _____

My relationship to the veteran is: _____

Have you ever served in the Australian Armed Forces? **YES or NO** If yes please print details below: _____

Payment Details:

Payment of **\$30 Annual Subscription** must accompany the application. (There is no joining fee.)

Payment by electronic funds transfer (EFT) is our preferred method of payment. Payment can also be made by credit card.

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 application. A suggested reference is the words 'New Member' followed by your surname.

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

Credit Card Payment. Please provide the following details:

Name on Card: _____ Amount \$ _____

Card No. | _ _ | _ _ | _ _ | _ _ | _ _ | _ _ | _ _ | _ _ | _ _ |

CVC: | _ _ | _ _ | _ _ | (3 digit number on the back of Visa/MC, 4 digit on front of AMEX) Expiry Date _ _ : _ _

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

Privacy Clause:

Information requested in this application form is necessary for the association to determine your eligibility for membership, maintain the members register and to keep you informed about the association, its activities and products. It will not be provided to third parties for direct marketing purposes. As a member you have the right to inspect the members' register.

Promotional Photos:

At the Association's functions, photo's may be taken for promotional purposes and publication in the Tobruk House News. By attending any of these functions you give permission for the use of your image in the manner described above.

By joining the Association, you agree to abide by the Association Rules and policies approved by the Committee of Management from time to time. These are available on the Association's website www.ratsoftobrukassociation.org.au

Applicant's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Membership Approval: _____

Delegate of the Committee of Management

March 2025

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.

DESIGNING REMEMBRANCE



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. 24