



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.

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

Date	Event Description
Sunday July 26	Open House Melbourne Open Day 10am - 4pm
Sunday August 9	Open Day 11am - 3pm
Sunday August 23	General Meeting and Open Day from 10.30am Shrine of Remembrance service 12.00pm
Sunday September 6	Open Day 10am - 3pm
Sunday September 20	Open Day 10am - 3pm
Sunday October 4	Open Day 10am - 3pm
Sunday October 18	Open Day 10am - 3pm
Sunday November 1	Open Day 10am - 3pm
Sunday November 15	General Meeting and Open Day from 10.30am
Sunday December 6	Christmas lunch - bookings essential, details Oct THN

Immediate past Patron: Bill Gibbins AM

Committee of Management:

President - Paul Dipnall

Secretary/Treasurer - Lachlan Gaylard

Committee Chair - Stuart Tolliday

Other Committee Members -
Gayle Sherwell, Glenda Garde,
Andrew Balcerzak, Tony Codd,
Karolina Sevcikova

TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS

NEXT ISSUE: OCTOBER 2026

DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 3

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will not be published.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

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE – AUGUST 2026

Greetings fellow members!

The dark cold winter days are now upon us as we sink into the chill of winter. However, as always, it's my very great privilege to report upon events and happenings of your hard-working committee and association.



As is the tradition, the Royal Children's Hospital Foundation invited all members to a wonderful morning tea at the hospital to learn more about the issues surrounding childhood epilepsy and the work being done to counter this dreadful disease. The hospitality and warmth shown by the Foundation was, as always, splendid.

Presentations by the Associate Director of Neurology, Gladys Navarro and the current holder of our ROTA neuroscience fellowship, Dr Justin Kuang were most stimulating. (You can read more about this on page 14.) The highlight for me was seeing our rather special fig tree cutting firmly planted in a beautiful sunny position in the lovely, landscaped grounds of the hospital. As I remarked to all "I look forward to its first fruiting". Thanks to Marlene Bingham for its propagation.

Our much celebrated 85 for 85 years museum display opened last month with many members present. Attendance has been excellent to date. The quality of artefacts along with accompanying stories of the veterans is spellbinding. The museum display will continue over the coming months so make sure you don't miss it. Special thanks must go to Lachlan Gaylard, Glenda Garde and Gayle Sherwell for their fantastic preparatory work prior to launch day. Check open day dates in this issue of the Tobruk House News.

In keeping with our museum display, our much-celebrated book "The Rats Of Tobruk " sold out of its first printing. The second release has now become available. It's a magnificent telling of the story of the siege and can be purchased online, or at Tobruk House. It will make an excellent Christmas present for anyone interested in this special publication.

Your committee has made a point of holding regular open days for all members to visit Tobruk House. On days when I am in attendance I have been struck by members and guests who have made a special trip to Melbourne to view our exhibition. Don't miss the opportunity to witness history .

On Sunday July 26 (10 am to 4 pm) our historic hall will be open to the public. Your association has been invited to participate in Open House Melbourne for the first time. This event is the celebration and free entry to the public of many of Melbourne's best kept architectural and historic gems. We are honoured to be chosen this year to participate in this wonderful event which coincides with our 85 for 85 exhibition.

Warm wishes to you and your family. With winter upon us I conclude with my best wishes for your good health.

Kind regards,

Paul F Dipnall
President

FROM THE ARCHIVES (Story by Lachlan Gaylard)

As part of our continuing series exploring ROTA through the last eight decades, we now arrive at the 1990s, a decade of transformation for Australia. The Cold War had come to an end, Australia entered a period of economic recovery following the recession at the beginning of the decade, and renewed confidence accompanied the nation's rapid embrace of new technologies and a changing global outlook. While Australia looked to the future, the Rats of Tobruk entered a quieter chapter of their own. Most had since retired from working life and were beginning to feel the weight of advancing years.

The defining moment of the decade for the Rats came at the beginning in 1991, the fiftieth anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk. Across Australia, commemorative events honoured the courage and sacrifice of those who had defended the Libyan fortress in 1941, ensuring that their remarkable story would continue to be remembered by future generations.

One of the most significant commemorations took place in Canberra, where a time capsule was placed at the *Tobruk Memorial on Anzac Avenue. Intended to remain unopened for fifty years, the capsule was created as a message to future Australians, preserving tangible reminders of the siege and the Rats of Tobruk Association itself.

The capsule is buried on the memorial's lower step, just beneath the original marble inscription stone retrieved from the original Tobruk War Cemetery memorial.

Among the items placed within the capsule were a map of Tobruk, a Siege Medal, a German propaganda leaflet urging Australian troops to surrender, a citation recognising Victoria Cross recipients, the Rats of Tobruk Association badge and constitution, a Polish Eagle badge, and a collection of Australia Post commemorative stamps. Together, these objects captured not only the history of the siege but also the enduring legacy of those who had fought there.

Addressing veterans and guests at the ceremony, the Minister for Veterans' Affairs reflected upon the significance of the campaign, describing Tobruk as one of the most celebrated actions involving Australian forces during the Second World War and recognising the defenders' vital role in keeping the Mediterranean and Suez supply routes open. The ceremony also witnessed the symbolic placement of the time capsule by Immediate Past National President Charles Routley, alongside newly elected National President Joe Madely, linking one generation of Association leadership with the next.



While the happenings of the 1990s lacked the scale of earlier decades, they reflected a changing chapter in the Association's history. As the ranks of the original Rats slowly diminished, the focus increasingly shifted from reunion to remembrance, from celebrating shared experiences to preserving them. The time capsule stands as a fitting symbol of that transition—a promise that, long after the last Rat had answered the final parade, their story would endure, waiting to be rediscovered by generations yet to come.

**Editor's note: The memorial was unveiled on 13 April 1983 by the Governor-General of Australia, Sir Ninian Stephen, and mention of this was missed in our previous issue covering the 1980's. The replica memorial is based on the original 1941 memorial in the Tobruk War Cemetery, built by Australian soldiers during the siege, which has since been destroyed. Incorporated into the memorial is the original inscription stone, the only surviving relic of that memorial, and at one time a front step of the Tobruk Post Office.*

The memorial was designed by architects Denton Corker Marshall and takes the form of an Obelisk. Surrounding walls portray the perimeter defences; the design recalls the area within which the siege took place; the coastline and harbour are at front, with the defence positions at the rear of the memorial. The eternal flame was fabricated from bronze, sculpted and designed by the Melbourne artist Marc Clark (sculptor) and was installed in 1984.

85 FOR 85 LAUNCHES AT TOBRUK HOUSE

The new exhibition '85 for 85' was launched at Tobruk House on Sunday 24 May with a good crowd in attendance. Perhaps the most comprehensive display of Tobruk related memorabilia ever, there really is something for everyone.

It is no surprise to learn that visitor's 'favourite' items were all different. A very rare uniform from one of the nurses evacuated, against their wishes, from Tobruk the day before the siege began (pictured below) was of great interest. It, amongst other items, was generously loaned to us by the Bendigo Military Museum. Exhibits also include a selection of personal items from the estate of Ron Barassi Snr, the original flag from the Tobruk 2/24th General Hospital (complete with bomb damage) and two koalas made at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. Stories of lives saved by the fortunate location of a bible, drink bottle etc. abound, but here you can see the army issue soldier's pocketbook that actually did stop a piece of shrapnel and saved a life.

Each item is numbered and a booklet with comprehensive descriptions has been produced and is available for purchase at Tobruk House.

There is so much to see and read about. We suggest you allow plenty of time for your visit.



FIG TREE PLANTING AT THE ROYAL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

On the morning of Thursday 21 May, members of the ROTA committee met with Kathryn Sell from the RCH Foundation and Kayte Kitchen, RCH Therapeutic Garden Program Coordinator, to plant our fig tree in the North Court garden. This location was chosen because the garden is used by both patients and staff, and is easily accessible for the general public from Royal Park.

It is a relatively new area that presently lacks any significant shade trees, so the fig tree will grow to become an important part of the garden, appreciated by all who use it. A special plaque in keeping with the garden environment is being developed to acknowledge the Rats.



Pictures from left - Lachlan Gaylard, Glenda Garde, Stuart Tolliday (ROTA) and Kayte Kitchen from the RCH with the new fig tree and garden tools prepared for the planting; the new cutting is placed in the garden; the RCH garden space where the star marks the position of the fig tree.

THE RATS OF TOBRUK NEUROSCIENCE FELLOWSHIP IMPACT REPORT

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 Royal Children's Hospital (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 sixteen 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 Impact Report for 2025 is now available on our website. (You can click on the image here to access it.) This report covers the finances of the fellowship as well as an overview of the work of our 2025 and 2026 fellows



To learn more about how you can contribute to this most worthy cause by adding a gift in your will, and most importantly, to let the Foundation know of your intention, please contact
Kathryn Sell, Deputy Director, Fundraising, RCH Foundation
(03 9345 5539 or email: kathryn.sell@rch.org.au)

THE DIPLOMAT WHO FOUGHT AT TOBRUK AND FOUND A NEW HOME IN AUSTRALIA

Story by *Lucyna Artymiuk*

In the swirling sands of North Africa during the Second World War, a young Polish corporal moved with quiet determination through the chaos of the battlefield. Jan Zanoziński, already a seasoned diplomat having served as Polish consul in China, found in the smoke-filled trenches of Tobruk. Later he served in India.



As an interpreter with the Polish Army Medical Corps, Zanoziński's role was far from glamorous. Yet it was crucial. He organised the Brigade's medical services with precision and compassion, ensuring that wounded soldiers were evacuated efficiently during the gruelling siege of Tobruk and the Gazala offensive in December 1941. His extraordinary service earned him the British Empire Medal, a rare recognition that underscored his courage and dedication.



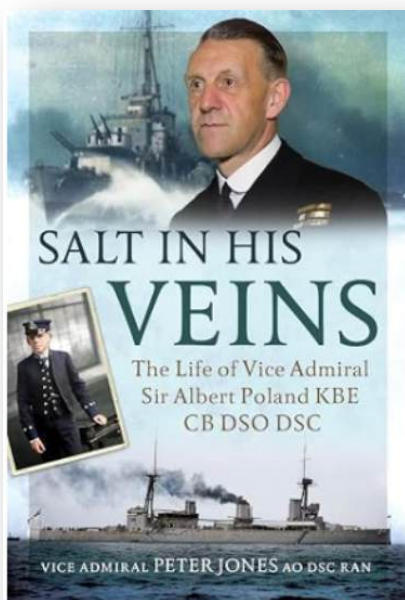
War over, Zanoziński set his sights on a new mission: helping his fellow Poles find a fresh start. In April 1947, he arrived in Sydney, where he immediately joined the Rats of Tobruk Association (ROTA). He marched alongside his Australian brothers-in-arms in the Anzac Parade. With relentless energy, he worked in ROTA to lobby Australian authorities to bring more Polish Tobruk veterans to these shores, ensuring that the bravery and sacrifices of his comrades were not forgotten.

But his contributions didn't stop there. Zanoziński became a pillar of the Polish-Australian community, active among the Carpathian Brigade veterans, the Polish version of RSL, and serving as a delegate to the first conference of the Polish National Council in 1950. His diplomacy, honed in distant embassies, now served a deeply personal mission: helping displaced Poles build lives in a new land.

Jan Zanoziński passed away in Sydney in 1979, but his legacy lives on in the communities he helped shape and the lives he touched. From the deserts of North Africa to the streets of Sydney, his story is a testament to courage, resilience, and the enduring bonds of comradeship.



A NEW TOBRUK FERRY STORY (From the Australian Naval Institute)



Albert 'Patsy' Poland is best remembered as the commander of the Tobruk Ferry Run during 1941-42. His ships were a motley collection of Australian, British and South African ships ranging from destroyers and sloops to schooners and lighters. The book gives a commander's insight to the operation. Usefully, Poland had very productive working relationships with the Major General 'Merciless Ming' Morshead and his staff, as well as with the officers and sailors who plied the dangerous waters from Alexandria to Tobruk to sustain the then largely Australian garrison.

Captain Levitt noted that on Poland's death in 1967 that among the letters of condolence to Lady Poland was one from the Australian Rats of Tobruk, which, in part, read, "Sir Albert was better known to us as Captain 'Patsy' Poland. He was a magnificent man and served his country and empire with distinction. He will be sadly missed by a host of friends and ship mates throughout the world".

WHAT ABOUT THE DIARIES? (Story by Glenda Garde)

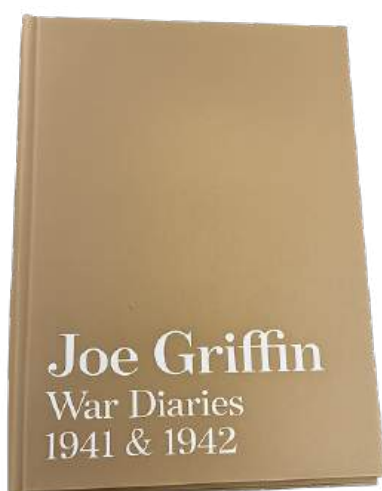
The Rats of Tobruk Association is often approached by descendants seeking information about a father, grandfather or other relative who served at Tobruk. Sadly, beyond researching service records held by the National Archives of Australia, there is often little information available that we can provide. For many families, no photographs, letters, diaries or keepsakes have survived to provide a glimpse into their loved one's wartime experiences. We frequently hear the words, "He never spoke about the war."



Perhaps this is one reason why our current '85 for 85' exhibition, on display at Tobruk House until November, has resonated so strongly with visitors. The objects on display have become the 'storytellers', helping to preserve and share the experiences of the men who served. Fortunately however, there are some families who do possess treasured mementoes and among the most valuable of these are personal diaries, which provide a rare and intimate insight into daily life during the siege and allow the voices of the Rats of Tobruk to be heard once more.

Many soldiers at Tobruk kept personal diaries, despite unofficial diary-keeping being discouraged because diaries could be captured and, in some cases, reveal valuable military information. Nevertheless, many soldiers recorded their daily experiences, and a significant number of these 85-year-old diaries have survived. The Australian War Memorial holds numerous Tobruk diaries and letters which provide detailed first-hand accounts of life during the siege, describing everything from combat and casualties to food shortages, dust storms, boredom, and of course the constant shelling and air raids.

In addition to personal diaries, every Australian military unit was required to keep an official war diary, recording operations, movements, and significant events. Whilst these official records are an important source of information for historians, the personal diaries often provide a more intimate insight into what individual soldiers experienced and felt.

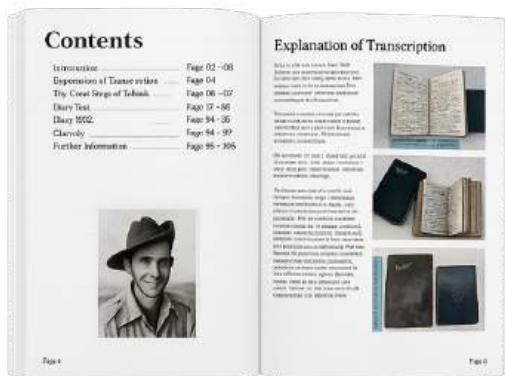


At one of our June open days, the family of VX22934 Joe Griffin of the 2/4 AGH generously donated a remarkable book of transcripts of his wartime diaries, which we were most grateful to receive. The original diaries were donated to the AWM last year and the transcripts were written using the rules set by the AWM, requiring exact transcribing line by line, including grammatical and spelling errors. Interestingly, Joe's diary entries are largely unemotional; only once did he write, "I wish I was home."



Joe Griffin was born into a large family in Gunnedah NSW in 1900 with his early life being shaped by bush skills. In 1940, with the war raging in Europe and North Africa, Joe and his wife Edna lived in Red Cliffs, Victoria, where Joe ran a successful gymnasium, teaching boxing and physical fitness. In June of that year, at age 39, Joe enlisted in the AIF.

Older than most recruits, his grit and determination earned him a place as a medical orderly with the 2/4th Australian General Hospital. His diaries are raw, unfiltered and deeply human. They capture the mundane; chess games, tea, letters from home, and the extraordinary; air raids, the shipwreck of the Knight of Malta and, of course, the relentless work of saving lives under fire. Joe recorded happenings every day, following are just a few entries....



February 27, 1941

Pay day 1 pound 2/2. CCS* moved in to take over camp. Rumour that we are going to Tobruk. Lots of tales by 2/2 CCS about fighting up Bardia way over now. Plenty of Jerry air raids at Tobruk and Benghazi.
[*Casualty clearing station]

March 3, 1941- (wreck of Knight of Malta)

Ran ashore 0345. Was trying to sleep in engine room. Waves breaking right over boat deck. 100 yards shore, Greek engineers & firemen had been most kind last night making coffee for me & Bill Hayes. Extra good coffee. Abandon ship 0530. Got ashore 0700, ship 50 yards out.

big job ahead. Started to walk back Bardia 1220, got to road 1640, 6 miles from Bardia. We walked 14 miles. Got to 15th CCS, Camp 1900, Tea, Bed.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

021233

May 5, 1941

Air raid last night, 1900, 4 men crying, one fainted. I got them out of dug out after raid. It's rotten, one crying on each shoulder: Took 4 for wash in sea today, they wouldn't undress. Wanted to go shelter all time. 1700. Bombed hospital, beach mugged by 8 bombs. 300yds. Boys stood raid better. They will do anything for me now. They have confidence in me. Worst cases speak very low.

[Editor's note: The image below of the aftermath of the hospital bombing clearly shows the damage inflicted.]

June 18, 1941

Despite clear hospital signage on the roof, the main Tobruk hospital was bombed on multiple occasions
bother to look just rolled over and went to sleep again. Could hear planes right overhead, but didn't worry. Cooler today. Good lot of patients. Dysentery 15, no trouble.

Heard only 2 planes today. 0300. A lot of planes over, lot of eggs, must have been near AA Gun and Fort. I didn't



July 2, 1941

Pretty hot today. 1815hrs, lots of eggs on AA, half mile away. Terrific row. Plane over us. Rotten few minutes. Had a game poker with patients won 60 akers. Fleas and flies bad. Heard Lord Haw Haw said Aussies will do more damage Alex, than German bombs. Artillery heavy now.

August 15, 1941

1500 hrs. over 30 Jerries in dive raid all over Tobruk. Lasted ½ hr; 4 shot down. Several one plane raids later; lots of damage in Tobruk, buildings blown down. Don't know of casualties. Lots of eggs in harbour: Cool day and night.

September 26, 1941

Naval battle last night a long way off. Could see gun flashes & hear them. Lots of shells in harbor. Few planes during day and eggs. Yesterday someone ordered parade at staging camp where those blokes were killed*.

[*Joe is referring to a direct hit on a gun position on the previous day, resulting in 10 dead and 20 wounded.]

October 17, 1941

62nd BGH* officially took over this hospital today. I have to be on parade 1500hrs ward 11, town hospital. I think I go tonight. Left hospital for boat. 2100 hrs. Aboard HMAS Jackal 2340hrs. Left Tobruk 0300hrs.

[*British General Hospital]

Post war, Joe and his wife Edna settled in Melbourne raising 2 daughters. Joe died in November 1964. We are extremely grateful to the Fahey family for allowing us to share some of Joe's story. If you do happen to be in possession of a diary, they obviously provide a rare insight into life in Tobruk and so you are indeed fortunate. Keep it safe!

A DESERT RAT'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE SIEGE...

ROTA is contacted by many people, including, on occasion, those from overseas with personal connections to the siege of Tobruk. Recently, we heard from Guy Sisson, who lives in France and whose father, J. Sisson, served during the Second World War with the 8th Army Royal Army Ordnance Corps and was involved in the siege of Tobruk.



Guy told us that his father often said that, if ever he found himself in a fight, he would want an Australian by his side. He has kindly shared with us a wonderful collection of photographs, together with the following information about his Desert Rat father.

'My father was a basic a squaddie conscript of the lowest private rank in the British Army RAOC and was stationed right in the harbour of Tobruk where the ammunition stores were kept. He had been about to take his accountancy exams in London in 1939 when he was 'called up' to join the army and was unable to sit the exam to become an articled clerk/accountant.

He ended the war as a Sergeant Major and passed his accountancy exams in London in 1948. He died in 1985.

The siege in 1941 and the following battles in 1942/43 and 44 had a profound effect on his life and was one of the most important character forming events of his life (in his opinion).'



My father's shell hole/billet in Tobruk harbour during the siege of Tobruk 1941

30 Days	APRIL, 1941	40 Days	APRIL, 1941	30 Days
13 things worse	5	More cheerful tone	THUR	17 1/2
Encirclement	Choc 3	Report - conflicting	13.45 hrs - 14.40	5%
being not complete	2	Report - Standard	Heavy rain	Choc 3
Harbour open		Went to	10.45 hrs as on	18
Moved to		10.45 hrs as on	Worked	Choc 13
14 things worse	NIL	Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Encirclement	2	Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Harbour open		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Moved to		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
15 things worse	Choc 13	Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Encirclement		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Harbour open		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Moved to		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
16 things worse	Choc 13	Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Encirclement		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Harbour open		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Moved to		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
17 things worse	Choc 13	Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Encirclement		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Harbour open		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Moved to		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
18 things worse	Choc 13	Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Encirclement		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Harbour open		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Moved to		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
19 things worse	Choc 13	Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Encirclement		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Harbour open		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Moved to		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
20 things worse	Choc 13	Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Encirclement		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Harbour open		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18
Moved to		Report - Not working	10.45 hrs as on	18

Guy also sent us some diary extracts from his father's collection which make for interesting reading.

'His diary starts getting exciting (you can see he lists all his money and purchases in the right-hand column of each day (Choc is chocolate) and other comments on the left-hand side).

Wed 9th April 1941, "more cheerful- heavy attack by air morning and night".

Thursday 10th April, "Dive bombed-up late. Derna reported taken. Situation critical- Gun fire heavy and units app. 10 miles away"

Friday 11th April "Things getting worse, gun fire heavier, 3 daylight raids bombing, planes down".

Saturday 12th "Raids eased, Tobruk

encircled by armoured units, harbour open, worked very late. Tired!"

Transcribed from the image on the previous page:

Sunday 13th April 1941 (Easter day) " Things worse. Encirclement being more complete, Harbour open, moved billets"

Monday 14th April 1941:" Intense air raid of 40 planes- followed by 'Stand By' from 7.30am-10.30am. "Easter eggs?"- Sollum gone"(next few words unintelligible)

Tuesday 15th April 1941:" Rumours of recapture of Sollum later Bardia xxxxxminised by heavy gunfire- Hurry hurry! More German troops"

Wednesday 16th April 1941: "Appears Sollum Bardia not taken-Bad. Very disconsolate. Later Fort Capuzzo taken. Night off. Read".

Thursday 17th April 1941: "more cheerful tone. Road to Alex (Alexandria) open per S.M- Conflicting reports. 'Stand To' 13.45-14.40. On guard night-heavy raid"

Friday 18th April 1941: "Went to work 10.45 as on guard- pxxx xxxxx. Intense raid at night."

Saturday 19th April 1941: " Worked hard all day.. several raids until terrible one about 15.10 hrs bomb RSN overhead shook us-"

Sunday 20th April 1941: " Germans outside. Where are our troops??. "

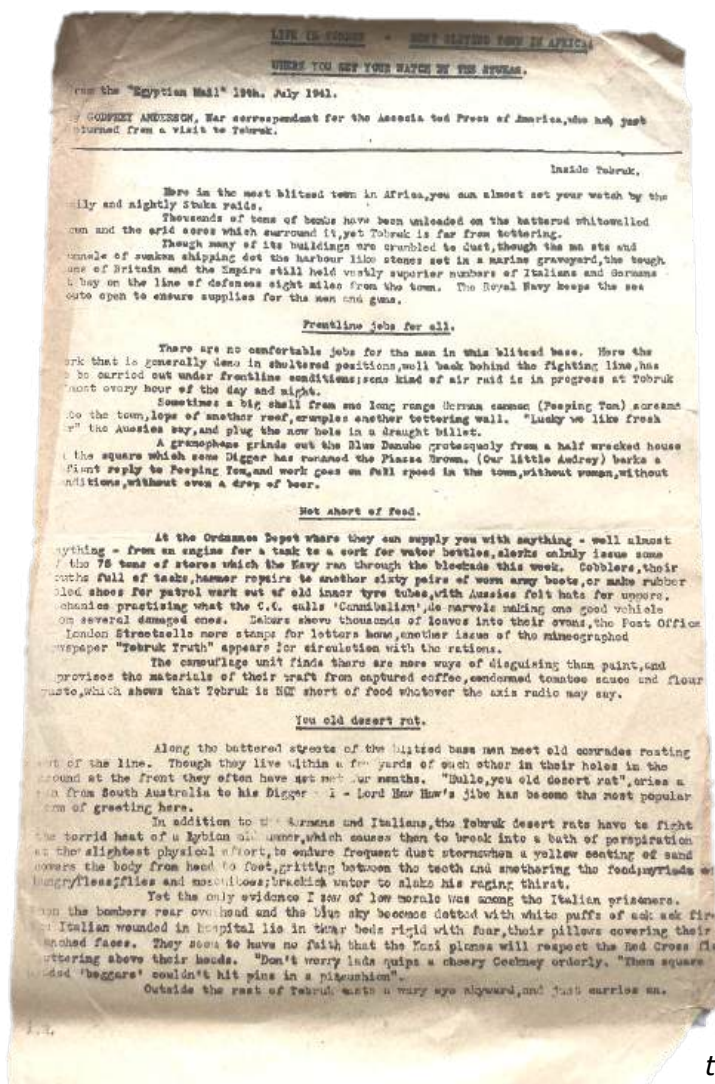


Guy writes that, 'One thing to mention is that the war in North Africa was different to the war fought in the East/Russia. My father, who died in 1985, told me it was a war without hate and great respect was paid by both sides to each other's prisoners/injured etc.'

My father took this photo shortly before or after the siege of Tobruk in 1941.

Another of Guy's father's photographs (below) shows the Royal Navy gunboat HMS Ladybird which was sunk in Tobruk Harbour on 12 May 1941 during a Luftwaffe air raid. She was hit by German dive bombers and settled in shallow water, later being used as a stationary anti-aircraft platform in the harbour.





Among Guy's father's collection is this remarkable account of life in Tobruk from July 1941, published in the *Egyptian Mail* and written by war correspondent Godfrey Anderson. Entitled 'Where You Set Your Watch by the Stukas', it provides a vivid glimpse into the daily realities of the siege.

LIFE IN TOBRUK- WHERE YOU SET YOUR WATCH BY THE STUKAS (TRANSCRIBED)

From the Egyptian Mail July 1941

Written by Godfrey Anderson War correspondent Associated Press of America Just returned from a visit to Tobruk.

Inside Tobruk

Here in the most blitzed town in Africa, you can almost set your watch by the daily and nightly Stuka raids.

Thousands of tons of bombs have been unloaded on the battered white walled town and the arid desert which surrounds it, yet Tobruk is far from tottering.

Though many of its buildings are crumbled to dust, though the masts and funnels of sunken shipping dot the harbour like tombstones in a marine graveyard, the tough sons of Britain and the Empire still hold vastly superior numbers of Italians and Germans at bay on the line of defence eight miles from the town. The Royal Navy keeps the sea route open to ensure supplies for the men and guns.

Frontline Jobs for All

There are no comfortable jobs for the men in this blitzed base. Here the work that is generally done in sheltered positions, well behind the fighting line, has to be carried out under frontline conditions; some kind of air raid is in progress at Tobruk almost every hour of the day and night. Sometimes a big shell from one long-range German cannon (Peeping Tom) screams into the town, tops off another roof, and crumples another tottering wall. "Lucky we like fresh air!" the Aussies say and plug the new hole in a draughty billet.

A gramophone grinds out the Blue Danube grotesquely from a half-wrecked house in the square while some digger has renamed the Piazza Brown. (Our little Audrey) barks a defiant reply to Peeping Tom, and work goes on as usual in the town, without women, without conditions, without even a drop of beer.

Not Short of Food

At the Ordnance Depot where they can supply you with anything - well, almost anything - from an engine for a tank, to a cork for water bottles, clerks calmly issue some of the 75 tons of stores which the navy ran through the blockade this week. Cobblers, their mouths full of tacks, hammer repairs to another sixty pairs of worn army boots or make rubber-soled shoes for patrol work out of old inner tyre tubes, with Aussies felt hats for uppers, mechanics practising what the C.O. calls "Cannibalism"; the marvels making one good vehicle from several damaged ones. Bakers shove thousands of loaves into their ovens, the Post Office of London Street sells more stamps for letters home, another issue of the mimeographed newspaper "Tobruk Truth" appears for circulation with the rations.

The camouflage unit finds there are more ways of disguising than paint and improvises the materials of their craft from captured coffee, condensed tomato sauce and flour paste, which shows that Tobruk is NOT short of food whatever the Axis radio may say.

You Old Desert Rat

Along the battered streets of the blitzed base, men meet old comrades resting out of the line. Though they live within a few yards of each other in their holes in the ground at the front, they often have not met for months.

"Hullo, you old desert rat", cries a man from South Australia to his digger pal. Lord Haw Haw's jibe has become the most popular form of greeting here.

In addition to the Germans and Italians, the Tobruk desert rats have to fight the torrid heat of a Libyan midsummer, which causes them to break into a bath of perspiration at the slightest physical effort; to endure frequent dust storms when a yellow coating of sand covers the body from head to foot, gritting between the teeth and smothering the food; myriad hungry fleas; flies and mosquitoes; and brackish water to slake his raging thirst.

Yet the only evidence I saw of low morale was among the Italian prisoners. When the bombers roar overhead and the blue sky becomes dotted with white puffs of anti-aircraft fire, Italian wounded in hospital lie in their beds rigid with fear, their pillows covering their blanched faces. They seem to have no faith that the Nazi planes will respect the Red Cross flag fluttering above their heads.

"Don't worry", adds a cheery Cockney orderly. "Them square-headed beggars couldn't hit pins in a pin cushion."

Outside, the rest of Tobruk casts a wary eye skyward, and just carries on.

About the author...

There appears to be very little readily available biographical information about **Godfrey Anderson**, and he does not appear among the better-known Associated Press correspondents of the period. However, we know that Godfrey H. P. Anderson was a British born Associated Press war correspondent who reported from the Middle East during the North African campaign.

Having visited Tobruk during the siege, he wrote this vivid account of life in the fortress capturing the resilience and humour of the men who endured the daily bombing, shelling and hardships of the besieged port. Quite active in the North African campaign during the war, he was captured in Libya and spent three and a half years as a German prisoner of war, where he edited a camp newspaper before being released in 1945.

We would like to sincerely thank Guy, who has now joined the association, for contacting us and for sending us these great photos taken on a Box Brownie....(for those of us old enough to remember what that is!) and for the other items from his father's collection.

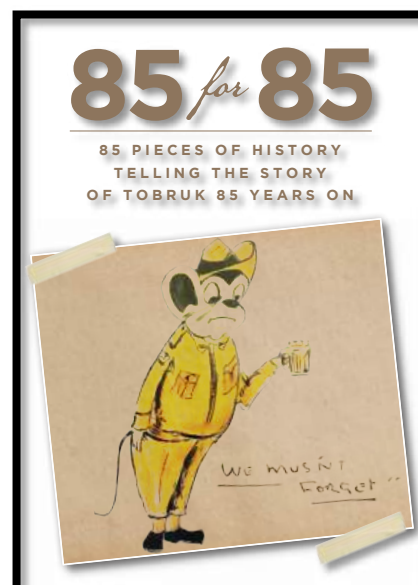
'85 for 85' ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION AT TOBRUK HOUSE

Anyone who has visited Tobruk House would no doubt have looked at some of the memorabilia scattered around the hall. If you found that to be of interest, then you are in for a treat.

ROTA is pleased to announce an expanded exhibition displaying 85 individual pieces of memorabilia with descriptions and short biographies of a number of Rats of Tobruk, as well as information about their units. (See p6)

We have gathered a wide variety of items from many different sources – private loans, museum loans as well as our own collection and we look forward to sharing this unique exhibition with you.

This display includes the expanded panel series (which is now available in book form) and will be open to the public on an increased number of open days throughout this special 85th siege anniversary year. See the calendar of events on page 2 for dates.



OUR ANNUAL VISIT TO THE ROYAL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL



Twenty ROTA members and guests attended the annual morning tea at the Royal Children's Hospital. Laura Buck, the Director, Fundraising, gave an introduction, recapping the amazing legacy of the Rats of Tobruk Neurology Fellowship. She pointed out that the majority of previous ROTA fellowships were predominantly still working at the RCH in neurology. We were introduced to Gladys Navarro who is the new Head of Department, working alongside Professor Mark Mackay.

Gladys and 2026 Rats Fellow Justin Kuang told us the story of Daisy, one of their recent patients, and we are thrilled to be able to share it with you here, as told by them.

Daisy is 3yrs old, with mum- Anna and dad- Tom. They live in Bendigo. In 2024 at 21mths old, she was diagnosed with epilepsy.

One day her parents started to notice trembling of her arm and legs, head and eye rolling, and increased drooling which increased in frequency from once a week to 2-3times per day.

Prior to these symptoms Daisy was a healthy toddler, who was walking and running, starting to speak and was able to scribble with a pen.

She originally presented to Bendigo Hospital and was subsequently referred to RCH for further investigations. Her dad shared with me, "He will always remember sitting with the doctor and nurse to discuss Daisy's diagnosis and his world collapsing."



In March 2025, Dr Emma [Macdonald Laurs, a previous Rats Fellow] met with Daisy and her parents to discuss the option of epilepsy surgery, as Daisy had Drug Resistant Epilepsy.

Her seizures were significantly impacting her quality of life. At this appointment, they were told of the risks of surgery such as difficulties with language, infection, blood clots, bleeding, and the risk that the

surgery may not fully control her seizures. Seizure freedom in this case is usually around 80%.

Tom and Anna were faced with the hardest decision they had to make but decided to proceed with the surgery. In June of 2025 Daisy went into surgery. Tom remembers this to be the longest 12 hours they have ever had to wait.



The surgery was successful and Daisy went home 6 days following major surgery. The wait then happens to see how Daisy recovers and if the seizures continue.

One year after her surgery Daisy no longer experiences any seizures. She stopped her medications and is achieving all her milestones.

Her parents report she has been able to attend kinder, she is able to go swimming, play; she is talking and doing all the things a 3yr old should. Tom shared, "It's amazing, our lives have changed!"

Tom and Anna want to express their many thanks to all the nurses, doctors of Neurology and Neurosurgery and the staff on Cockatoo ward for the care and compassion they have received. "We received the best care through what was the worst thing that could happen in our lives and we are so grateful! We are always happy to give back to a service that has given us so much"

Following Daisy's heartwarming story, the Therapeutic Garden Program Coordinator Kayte Kitchen then talked about the importance of the gardens for the hospital, of which there are several, each with a different focus. She then took the group down to see the newly planted Tobruk fig tree. (See also the planting story on page 7)



Finally we broke into smaller groups and went to the Cockatoo Ward to see the EMS laboratory where the scientists monitor and investigate the scans of the brains of children who are suffering from seizures.

These visits to see first-hand the work that is being done by the many people in the Neurology team, including the Rats' Fellows, are truly rewarding and we encourage all members to consider the special opportunity afforded by our annual visit.



A CANARY ON THE SPUD RUN

In our June edition, we launched a photo series showcasing some of the remarkable Tobruk-related images held within the Australian War Memorial's vast photographic collection.

Here is the second image in that series. Animals were no strangers to war and many ships, regiments etc had animal mascots. Regular readers may recall the story in our April issue of the bear named Wojtek that became a mascot for the 2nd Polish Corps where he was eventually promoted to the rank of corporal.

However, canaries are certainly not something you would usually associate with war Unfortunately the photographer is unknown (and we have no record of the canary's rank) but it must have been quite a robust bird to survive the rigors of the Spud Run!



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

040580

A canary, pet of a ship running the gauntlet between Alexandria and Tobruk with supplies.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members:

**Bernice Steinfert Alison Macfarlane Wendy Grendfell Eric Sinclair
Peter Murnane Linda Chalmers Susan Randolph Colleen Bolton
Peter Robinson Michael Smart John Joyce George Hannah
Michael Dowling William Anderson William Knight Diana Norris
Anne Phillips Fred Cowie Russell Spooner Cheryl Gunia Richard Saleeba
Kerry Alessi John Moore Rod Wallace**



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



ROTA MERCHANDISE

See Order Form on page 18 for postage costs and other details.



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



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 TOTE BAG
40cm x 35cm
\$15



RATS OF TOBRUK EXHIBITION
BOOK
\$20



'HEROES OF TOBRUK'
STUBBIE HOLDER
\$10



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



'HEROES OF TOBRUK'
MUG
\$15



'HEROES OF TOBRUK'
BALLPOINT PEN
\$5



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



SIEGE OF TOBRUK BAR MAT
\$40



RATS OF TOBRUK 1941
LAPEL BADGE
\$15



RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC

MERCHANDISE ORDER FORM

(PRICES VALID JULY 2026 – DECEMBER 2026)

Item	Cost per Item	Quantity	Size (Refer page 17)	Postage Yes/No	Postage (Ordinary Mail)	Total	Comments
Rats of Tobruk Exhibition book	\$20				\$10		Postage for 2 books to the same address \$15
ROTA badge car window sticker	\$10				\$4		Postage for up to 5 stickers to same address.
1941 Lapel badge (butterfly clip)	\$15				\$4		Postage for up to 2 badges to same address.
ROTA Rugby top	\$60				\$16		
ROTA Polo shirt	\$45				\$11.50		
ROTA "baseball" style cap	\$28				\$11.50		
ROTA Bar Mat	\$40				\$16		
Heroes of Tobruk stubbie holder	\$10				\$10.50		Postage for up to 2 units to the same address
ROTA Tote bag (RATBAG)	\$16.50				\$10.50		Launch special offer – 2 for \$30 (+ post)
Heroes Of Tobruk Mug	\$15				\$11.50		
Heroes of Tobruk pen	\$5				\$3.50		Postage for up to 3 pens to the same address
			Colour				
Ladies Poppy Scarf (light weight)	\$15				\$10.50		Postage for up to 4 scarves to same address
Please call 0432 232 502 for 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.) If you would like to make this an automatic renewal please call 0432 232 502.

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.

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.

SPARTANS & ANZACS



This new exhibition reveals the link between the legendary 480BC battle at Thermopylae and the little-known 1941 stand, where Australian and New Zealand troops faced overwhelming odds. This exhibition draws a powerful connection between these two defining moments, linking ancient and modern soldiers in a shared legacy of courage.