



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 the latest information

Date	Event Description
Sunday October 4	Open Day 10am – 3pm (85 for 85 exhibition)
Sunday October 18	Open Day 10am – 3pm (85 for 85 exhibition)
Sunday November 1	Open Day 10am – 3pm (85 for 85 exhibition)
Saturday November 14	Tobruk Conference (see page 10)
Sunday November 15	General Meeting and Open Day from 10.30am Please note this is the final day of the 85 for 85 exhibition
Sunday December 6	Christmas lunch – bookings essential. (see page 11)
January 2027	No Meetings in January.
Sunday February 21	Annual General Meeting and lunch (Details in the December THN)

Last Chance!!

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: DECEMBER 2026

DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 2

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will not be published.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 – October 2026

Dear Members,

It's my pleasure to report on your association's recent activities throughout this winter period.

The Rats of Tobruk were invited to participate in this year's Open House programme by the Open House Melbourne organisation. This wonderful initiative opens up free admission to all who would like to see unique properties within the municipality of Melbourne. Most of these properties would not otherwise be available to the public to view.

You can read our report on the day on page 5. It is not an understatement to say that the day was a resounding success, given the number of interested members of the public who, without exception, were most complimentary of our presentation of the hall.

On Sunday 23 August we conducted our annual service at The Shrine of Remembrance to honour our past veterans of the Polish Independent Carpathian Brigade who fought side by side with our Rats of Tobruk. I was honoured to act as master of ceremonies and provide some context to the story in my introduction.

The service was held in the sanctuary with all seats taken. It was standing room only for the late arrivals. We were delighted to welcome the Consul General of The Republic of Poland Mr Piotr Rakowski along with the honorary Consul General of Melbourne Victoria, Mr Andrew Soszynski as our honoured guests. It was an inspiring ceremony. The story and pictures are on page 6.

For those who can, don't forget to view our very special museum display called 85 for 85 exhibition. We have collected 85 pieces of important memorabilia to mark the occasion of it being 85 years since the Rats of Tobruk thwarted the ambitions of the German military at the siege of Tobruk. The remaining opening dates are listed on page 2 of this issue of Tobruk House News. We look forward to seeing you at this very memorable exhibition.

The committee has designed a voluntary and anonymous survey for all members to make suggestions. This is in line with our policy of continued improvement. We are very encouraged by the response of significant numbers of members to date and look forward to reporting the findings to you in due course. If you haven't yet responded, please take the time to do so as it will assist the committee to deliver to its members what you think is important for the continued growth of the association. Here is the link – [ROTA Survey](#)

Before long Christmas will be upon all of us. Your committee is looking forward to hosting again our annual Christmas Party. It's a time to enjoy the company of other members and invite those special friends who might feel a little left out during the festive season. Please make your booking early to assist with catering. The details are on page 11.

I conclude with my best wishes for your good health.

Paul F Dipnall
President

ps. For anyone interested in military history the Tobruk Conference in November is a must! P10 for details.



FROM THE ARCHIVES *(by Lachlan Gaylard)*

As part of our continuing series exploring ROTA through the last eight decades, we now arrive at the 2000s, a decade which brought one of the most significant changes in the history of the Rats of Tobruk Association. As the number of surviving Rats continued to decline, questions increasingly arose about the future of the association and, in particular, its long-standing home at Tobruk House in Albert Park.

Tobruk House had been purchased by the Victorian Rats in the 1950s and had served as the centre of association life for more than fifty years. It was a place where veterans could meet old friends, attend reunions and commemorate those who had not returned from Tobruk. By the beginning of the new millennium, however, the association was facing the reality that the number of original Rats was becoming smaller each year.

The decision was eventually made to sell Tobruk House, with the proceeds to be used in some charitable way. Although the decision was financially sensible, it was nevertheless an emotional one. Tobruk House was not simply a building; it represented decades of friendship, remembrance and the continuing connection between the men who had served together at Tobruk.



The property was placed on the market in 2007, with considerable interest generated by the proposed sale. The auction was eventually held on 19 April 2007 presided over by Bill Shelton whose father Jack had been killed at Tobruk. National publicity surrounding the future of the Rats' headquarters generated much interest. The successful bidder was Melbourne businessman Bill Gibbins, who purchased the property for an extraordinary \$1.735 million.

What followed was an act of generosity which ensured that the sale did not mean the immediate loss of the Rats' home. Having heard of the proposed sale and the story of the ageing veterans, Bill Gibbins decided that the Rats should be allowed to remain at Tobruk House for the remainder of their lives. He also expressed his desire that the building should continue to be available for the association and other military organisations.

The result was an unusual and fitting conclusion to what had initially appeared to be the end of an era. The association had sold its property, securing a significant financial legacy, while the remaining Rats could continue meeting at the place they had called home for so many years.

The proceeds of the sale ultimately allowed the association to make a substantial contribution to the Royal Children's Hospital.

The sale of Tobruk House therefore became more than a property transaction. It marked the passing of one generation while helping to establish a legacy for another. The building, which had been purchased by the Rats after the war, continued to tell their story, while the funds released through its sale were put towards helping future generations.

In many ways, the events of 2007 captured the spirit of the Rats of Tobruk Association. Having spent their lives remembering those who had served with them, the surviving Rats ensured that their final substantial gift would not simply preserve their own memory but would provide something of lasting benefit to others.

We are forever indebted to the memory of Bill Gibbins AM and his family.

OPEN HOUSE MELBOURNE AT TOBRUK HOUSE

On Sunday 26 July, Tobruk House hosted its first Open House Melbourne open day. Extensive advertising for this annual event ensured that we had a great number of visitors – 193 in fact.



Our wonderful volunteers at Open House Melbourne ensured that all of our visitors had a great experience

with many people who were not familiar with the story of the Rats of Tobruk, and we hope to be invited to participate again next year.



The Open House Melbourne precinct manager was most impressed with the amount of time each visitor spent with us, but we weren't surprised, as there is so much to see at the moment with the '85 for 85' exhibition in place, as well as the story of the Tobruk Siege panels and the usual pictures and artifacts lining the walls.

It was a great opportunity to engage

Remember that the 85 for 85 exhibition will be here until Sunday November 15, so there is still plenty of time to visit. For those unable to make the journey, committee member Gayle Sherwell has made a short video which is in the image gallery on our website and can also be accessed by clicking on [this link](#).

YOUR ROTA SUBSCRIPTION IS DUE FOR PAYMENT ON 1ST JANUARY 2027

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

As in the previous year, \$5 from each subscription will be contributed to our Royal Children's Hospital Rats of Tobruk Neurology Fellowship fund.

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 assists with our budgeting and would be greatly appreciated.



For payment information please refer to the 2026 Annual Subscription Payment Form on page 16. **We are also pleased to offer you an automatic re-subscription service.** To activate this service call 0432 232 502.

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

If you are paying by EFT, ensure you include a unique reference such as your surname and membership number. This is important for correct matching of payments, as bank deposits do not have adequate referencing. Payment can also be made using a credit or debit card.

Please note that Tobruk Veterans widows are exempt from paying the annual subscription. Life and Honorary members are also exempt.

THE RATS OF TOBRUK SERVICE AT THE SHRINE (Story Andrew Balcerzac, photos Przemek Jaskulski)

On Sunday, 23 August 2026, the Rats of Tobruk Association held its Annual Commemoration Service and wreath-laying ceremony in the sanctuary of the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance.

This service honours the sacrifice of the Australian 9th Division with a focus on the introduction of the Polish Independent Carpathian Brigade who provided relief during the Siege of Tobruk.

ROTA President Mr Paul Dipnall welcomed guests and acknowledged the immense sacrifices made by Australian and Polish soldiers during the Second World War.

The keynote address was delivered by ROTA committee member Andrew Balcerzac, who outlined the extraordinary odyssey of the Polish Independent Carpathian Brigade. He brought this history to life through the story of Mr George Krzysica, the last living Rat of Tobruk in Australia.

(Ed: George's story was also covered in the April 2026 issue of the THN.)



Andrew Balcerzac gave the keynote speech

Particular emphasis was placed on the remarkable bond that developed between the Australian and Polish soldiers at Tobruk. When the Polish soldiers relieved the Australians, the Rats did not forget the plight of their Polish comrades, many of whom were homeless and displaced after the war. The Australian veterans subsequently lobbied the Australian Government to allow these Polish soldiers to come to Australia. This act of solidarity remains a powerful and enduring example of the friendship forged under the most difficult circumstances.

Wreaths were then laid before the Shrine Guard on behalf of the Rats of Tobruk Association, the Royal Children's Hospital, the Republic of Poland, Polish Veterans in Australia, the Polish Community Council of Australia the Polish Museum and Archives in Australia and Polish Scouts in Victoria.

The solemnity of the wreath laying was heightened by the Shrine Guard standing at present arms and the haunting strains of lone piper Bruce McFarlane of the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums. The service concluded with the Last Post, the Rouse and the national anthems of Poland and Australia.

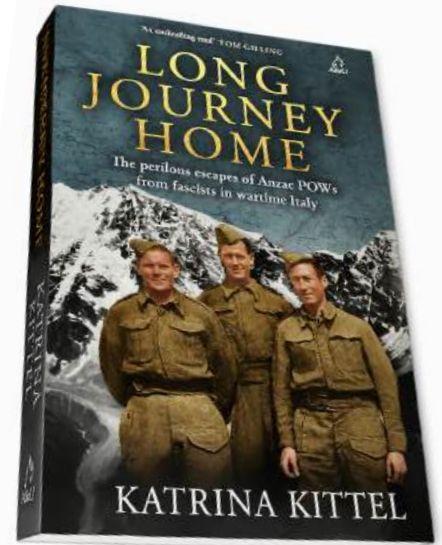
It is always a moving and special occasion and well worth attending.



WHAT ABOUT THE PRISONERS OF WAR ... *"I hope you are not too ashamed of me"*

Back in July, author Katrina Kittel launched her latest book, *Long Journey Home*, at Tobruk House. It was a wonderful afternoon of stories and shared memories and was attended by around 70 people. Katrina was interviewed by her son, Aden, before taking questions from the audience with most of those present being descendants of Australian prisoners of war, making the occasion even more meaningful.

The achievements of the Rats of Tobruk have been celebrated in novels, books, films, and public memorials, but there is often little reference made to those Australians who became prisoners of war prior to and during the siege. For these men, many were forced to labour in factories, down mines or on the land - often in conditions of enormous privation and hardship. They suffered from food shortages, overcrowding and the mental strain of imprisonment. Yet the experiences of these Australian prisoners in North Africa have received scant attention beyond perhaps an appendix in the official history, the odd unit history, and a few soldier memoirs. This is a story which needs to be told.



The following are excerpts taken from an excellent paper written by Karl James, Senior Historian, Australian War Memorial.

Prisoners in the siege of Tobruk, 1941', Prisoners of war: A conference on the Australian experience of captivity in the 20th century, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT, 5-6 June 2013.

Tobruk has become a story of defiant victory. As the Rats of Tobruk Memorial on Anzac Parade states, it was here that the Germans received their "first major reverse on land" in the Second World War, and where Australian soldiers "confirmed and enhanced" their "reputation for heroism won by their fathers on Gallipoli in 1915". Yet few people probably realise that in 1941 more of the 9th Division's casualties were prisoners of war than were killed in action. The total losses for the 9th Division and attached troops from March to mid-December amounted to 832 killed, 941 captured, and 2,177 wounded.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL
Allied prisoners of war in transit to Germany from Italy by cattle truck 132903

The Australian Private Basil Brudenell-Woods described his first day as a prisoner as the saddest and longest of his life, during which he felt "utterly dejected and numb with despair". Often mixed with this fear and despair was a sense of shame. The 2/28th Battalion's Private Harold Gaby was taken prisoner with Captain Conway in the Salient on 3 August. Gaby reported his guilt at being captured, and perhaps his family's tradition of military service added to the young soldier's burden. In addition to serving alongside his older brother in the same battalion, their father had served as a sergeant in the Boer War while their uncle, Lieutenant Alfred Gaby, was posthumously awarded a Victoria Cross for his service in the Great War.

Writing from a prisoner-of-war camp in Italy, Harold Gaby's first letter began: *'Dear Dad, I must start this letter by apologising for any worry I may have caused you. By now you will have been told I am a Prisoner of War. I hope you are not too ashamed of me, but we took the only sensible course open to us.'*

Like Conway and Gaby, the decision to surrender was taken by many soldiers when death seemed the only alternative. According to family sources, Gaby's parents felt no shame in their son's capture. Harold Gaby died in captivity on 4 June 1944 and was buried in Poland.

A fortnight later (in late April), some 200 Australians of the 2/24th Battalion were captured when Rommel attacked the Ras el Madauuar feature. Major Leonard Fell was among those captured, and his diary entry for 1 May vividly describes the moment when the decision to surrender was taken: Terrific dust falls over everything. Could hear [machine-gun] fire all sides ... Verey lights ... explosive bullets used by enemy ... No communications ... vehicles burning ... saw tanks in front both self [in Post S2] and Walker [Lieutenant Lachlan Walker in neighbouring Post S1] ... saw Walker come out and then we were for it. Shelled by tank guns then a grenade rolled down. All came out. [At this point Fell surrendered the post] ... officers separated from men ... [Fell was asked] ... moved off under tank escort.

Sergeant Bill Williams, who was captured with Fell, afterwards likened surrender to being in a state of shock: "It was a totally unreal experience." Their training, he said "had prepared us for death or incapacity", but not for becoming a prisoner of war.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL
Huts for prisoners of war (POWs) at Campo 57 in Gruppignano, Italy, about 1941. More than 1,200 Australians and 1,000 New Zealanders were held in this Italian POW camp. P02793.009

In keeping with the terms of the 1929 Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, British prisoners of the Germans were usually evacuated quickly from the battlefield. Since the Afrikakorps was not organised to administer or care for large numbers of prisoners, captured British and Australian soldiers were handed over to the Italians after only a brief interrogation.

From Tobruk, they were evacuated by road through Derna and moved to either Benghazi or Tripoli for transport to Italy. Packed into overloaded lorries, prisoners stood exposed to the sun and dust storms.

On arrival in Italy, most POWs were in a pitiful state having endured many months with limited supplies on the North African front. They were held in Italian prison camps, known as 'campos' and conditions in these camps varied considerably. Some were described as 'almost bearable', such as a camp near Rome, called Sulmona, where the food was adequate, hot water was available, and the Italian captors were relaxed in their treatment of POWs.

However, in Campo 57 at Gruppignano in north-east Italy, POWs were treated with brutality. Even the most minor offence was punished and some prisoners were shot. Added to the misery of such harsh discipline, every day the prisoners dealt with disease, lack of medical care, overcrowding and poor food.

When Italy surrendered in 1943, some POWs were rounded up by the Germans and transported by train to Poland and Germany where they were forced to work as slave labour in coal mines. There were 40 major camps, from Lithuania to the Rhine. The POWs called the camps 'Kriegies', which was short for the German word, 'Kriegsgefangener' (war prisoner). Many camps were overcrowded and dirty. Limited warm clothing and boots made cold, damp weather conditions difficult. Poor sanitation meant diseases like diphtheria and dysentery and conditions like diarrhoea spread easily. Red Cross parcels would sometimes be the difference between survival and starvation for many prisoners.



A much valued and often withheld Red Cross Prisoner Of War relief parcel

Other Allied POWs in Italy escaped incarceration and made the extremely hazardous journey to Switzerland. (Katrina Kittel's father was one of them.) They were sometimes assisted by sympathetic locals who were risking their own lives by providing shelter, food and clothing. It is an extraordinary story skilfully told by Katrina Kittel in Long Journey Home. During 1941 and 1942, some 8,600 Australian soldiers were captured by German or Italian forces in North Africa, the Middle East, Greece and Crete. About 265 died during their captivity. The experiences of these Allied prisoners of war in North Africa is an integral, yet overlooked, element of the story of the Tobruk siege; one that should not be forgotten.

THE RATS OF TOBRUK NEUROSCIENCE FELLOWSHIP

The Neurology Department at the Royal Children's Hospital is made up of a dedicated team of health professionals and administrative staff, working together to improve the health outcomes of children and adolescents with disorders of the brain, nerves and muscles.

They provide outpatient and inpatient services for the diagnosis and management of neurological disorders such as epilepsy, neuromuscular diseases, stroke, neuroimmunology, neonatal neurology, neurogenetics and movement disorders. Parents often live in constant fear that their child may die from a seizure.

The Vision:

To be leaders in child neurology, providing high quality, compassionate, evidence- based care that empowers children and families to reach their full potential.



The team currently comprises:

- 17 Senior Medical Consultants
- 3 Fellows
- 1 Registrar
- 1 Resident
- 8 Clinical Nurse Consultants
- 10 Neuroscientists
- 5 Administration staff
- 3 Physiotherapists
- 2 Psychologists
- 38 Honorary staff involved in Research & Clinical Trials

The funding from the Rats of Tobruk Association provides the opportunity for the RCH to train neurologists to learn about the diagnosis & treatment of Epilepsy

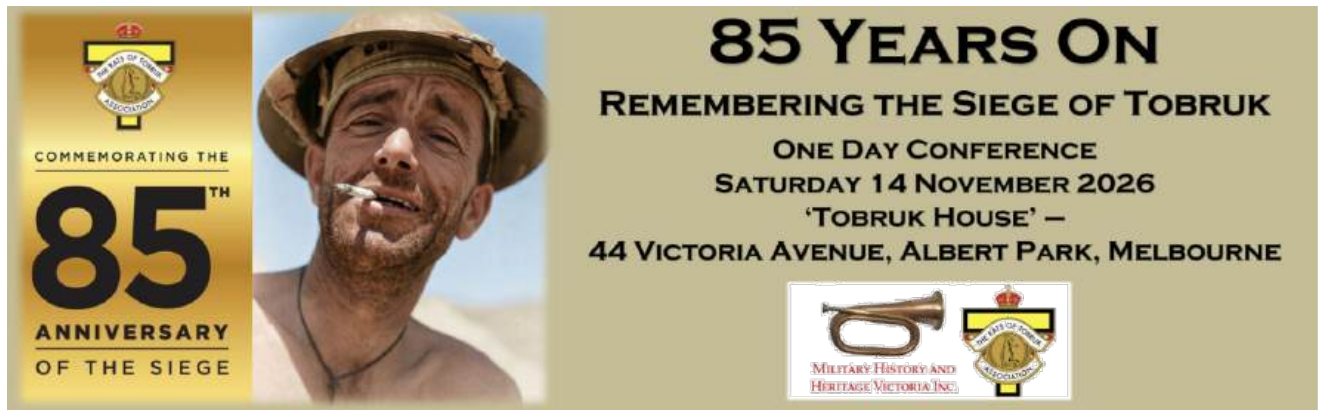
Doctors who are awarded the Fellowship gain knowledge about care of children with epilepsy where they have the opportunity learn about and gain experience in specialised treatments including surgery to remove parts of the brain causing seizures.

This fellowship was established to be their legacy in 2010 by the Rats, using funds from the sale of Tobruk House. To date the Rats of Tobruk Royal Children's Hospital Neurology Fellowship has provided opportunities for sixteen young doctors to advance their studies and knowledge of child epilepsy. These doctors are now contributing to the efforts to discover the cause and find treatments for child epilepsy at the RCH and in hospitals around Australia and the world.

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)

A VERY SPECIAL CONFERENCE ON THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK

We are pleased to announce a very special one day conference focused on the Siege of Tobruk.



2026 marks the **85th anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk**. With no surviving participants still alive, a new generation is taking the opportunity to re-examine the Siege at a special one-day conference, jointly presented by **Military History and Heritage Victoria (MHHV)** and the **Rats of Tobruk Association**.

Leading military historians and subject experts will examine key aspects of the Siege and, in a concluding panel discussion, consider one of its enduring questions: **Why were the seemingly superior Axis forces unsuccessful in recapturing Tobruk during the Australian defence?**

Major-General Jim Barry will open the conference and be joined by a distinguished group of speakers. **Dr Daryl Moran** will introduce the Keynote speaker, **Dr Robert Lyman** who will deliver the keynote address *A Brief Overview of the Siege* via a recorded video presentation.

Next will be an ADVA short film of the recollections of six Australian servicemen, followed by a guided tour of the 85th Anniversary Exhibition.

David Mitchell-Green will examine the commanders, their forces and actions during the Siege and **Major-General Jeffrey Rosenfeld AC OBE** will talk about medical facilities at the Siege.

Mike Rosel will look at the Edmondson VC and other gallantry awards, while **Andrew Mackinnon CSC RAN Rtd** will tell the story of the famous "Scrap-Iron Flotilla". **Adam Lumney** will examine the often-overlooked contribution of the RAAF, and **Dr Daryl Moran** will discuss the importance of the media through radio, print and artworks.

Following afternoon tea, the speakers will come together for a Q&A and panel discussion addressing the central question: **Why were the Axis forces unsuccessful in recapturing Tobruk during the period of the Australian defence?**

This is a rare opportunity to hear the story of Tobruk examined in such depth by an exceptionally well-informed panel of experts.

85 Years On – Remembering the Siege of Tobruk is the 18th One Day Conference staged by MHHV since 2010 and is one not to be missed. Tickets include morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea as well as a free parking permit.

The conference will run from 9am to 5pm with registration from 8.30am.

Members of the **RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION** should register for the conference by purchasing a ticket via this special try-booking link <https://www.trybooking.com/DPWBU> or call 0432 232 502 to book by phone.



Your Invitation to the 2026 TOBRUK HOUSE CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

Sunday December 6, 12 – 3pm

\$35 Per Person

BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL. SEE BELOW OR [CLICK HERE](#)

Payment must be made no later than Friday 20th November, 2026

Payment Options:

Payment of **\$35 per person** can be made using the TryBooking platform link above or by electronic funds transfer. We also accept credit cards.

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

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

Credit Card Payment. Please provide the following details:

Name on Card: _____ Amount \$ _____

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

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

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

Attendee's name:.....(please print) No. of tickets.....

Contact phone number:..... Email address:

Address:.....Post code:

All enquiries to email address; ratsoftobrukassociation41@gmail.com Phone: 0432 232 502
Or please forward to: The Secretary, ROTA INC. 44 Victoria Avenue, ALBERT PARK, VIC 3206

85 YEARS ON – REMEMBERING AUSTRALIAN SERVICE IN WW2

Story from Vet Affairs Vol 42 No2 August 2026

This year marks 85 years since Australians served in key battles in Libya, Syria, Greece and Crete during the Second World War. Bardia, in the Italian colony Libya, was the site of the first land battle fought by Australian troops in the war. The 6th Australian Infantry Division, alongside British and Indian soldiers, helped defeat a much larger Italian army, resulting in the loss of 130 Australian lives.



The 6th Australian Division Cavalry Regiment near Tobruk in Fiat-Ansaldo medium tanks captured from the Italians at Bardia.

After the Allied capture of the strategically important port of Tobruk, in January 1941, a multi-national garrison made up of troops from Britain, Australia, New Zealand, India and Poland, held the city. In April, German and Italian forces laid siege to Tobruk forcing its Allied defenders to endure extreme desert conditions, water scarcity, and disease along with constant air and artillery attack for 8 months.

The Tobruk garrison aggressively defended the port, patrolling and hitting the enemy day and night, denying Axis forces the initiative. More than 850 Australians died

during its successful defence, becoming part of Australian wartime legend. The determination and resilience of the defenders led pro-Axis propagandist Williams Joyce (Lord Haw-Haw) to call them the 'Rats of Tobruk' – a nickname that the Australians proudly embraced.

To resupply the defenders during the Siege of Tobruk, Commonwealth ships had to run a dangerous gauntlet of Axis air attacks. On 29 June, Australia lost HMAS *Waterhen*, the first RAN warship ever lost to enemy action, though fortunately all on board were rescued. On 27 November 1941, HMAS *Parramatta* was sunk by German torpedoes, with the tragic loss of 138 lives.

Australians also took part in the Syria-Lebanon Campaign against Vichy French forces, participating in the initial invasion from Palestine into Syria and Lebanon. On 21 June, despite some heavy fighting, Allied forces captured the Syrian capital, Damascus. Beirut, the Lebanese capital, fell 3 weeks later, ending the campaign. Eighty-five years on from these important battles, we pay tribute to the sacrifice of nearly one million Australians who served in the Second World War.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members:

**Brian Smith David Law Lynette Allen Rosa Miot
Judy Stirrett Catherine Dare Rebekah Sproule
Paul Anderson Christine Anderson Neil Smith
Brian Kelly Elizabeth Egan.**



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

THOSE WHO WERE THERE

In our August edition, we focused on diaries and have been delighted by the response. Since then, several families have contacted us to share treasured diaries, letters and post-war recollections written by their fathers and grandfathers. These personal accounts provide a priceless glimpse into what life was really like during the Siege of Tobruk. While history books and online sources can tell us what happened, there is nothing quite like reading the words of the men who were actually there. Their own stories bring the siege to life in a way that no history book or a 'google' ever can.

A recent publication entitled *The War Years- Some Memories*, sent to us by the family of VX18661 Stuart Marriner, 7th Aust. Division Supply Column, does just that. Here are some excerpts from Stuart's personal story of Tobruk.



And then of course, Tobruk

'By the 11 April 1941 it seemed certain that Tobruk was surrounded by land, but nobody seemed to worry, we had enlisted to fight and if Rommel wanted a fight he would get it. We were a bit fortunate that Rommel was not in a position to make a full-scale attack at once. He had advanced further and faster than he had expected and took a few days to get his army organised to make an attack. By that time, our men had got the old Italian defences into fairly good shape and a lot of mines laid and the artillery hampered the German preparations by attacking any enemy movement in range. The Italians had built very good defences with an anti-tank ditch protected by barbed wire on the outer side and concrete defence posts inside. Our men dug extra defence posts and laid boxed minefields covered by anti-tank guns.'

The Salient

The attack that created the "salient" came on the 30 April 1941 when the Germans attacked strongly soon after dark. From where we were camped we couldn't see the battle on the ground but could see most of our guns firing and the streams of tracers, with flares and very lights lighting up the whole scene. Our guns were firing as fast as they could load and fire, and we heard later that the gun barrels were glowing red. The volume of fire poured onto the attackers was incredible, it must have been hell for them. You could see why the German tank Commander called it a devil's cauldron. We sat up late with rifles and gear ready in case we had to fight but the attack was halted. Of course we had a lot of casualties but the enemy had a great many more.

Air raids

The air raids began in the first day or so and kept up for the five months that we were in Tobruk. The raids varied in size from single plane hit and run attacks to raids of well over a hundred planes. In the daytime it was mostly dive bombers, with high level bombers at night. Most of the raids were aimed at the harbour since that was where all our supplies came in but there were a lot of raids on other targets like the artillery and the supply depot and the anti-aircraft (AA) batteries.

In the first dive bombing attacks we saw a bomb hit the ward of the hospital and it killed most of the men there. It was probably accidental, but feelings ran high, so when a bomber was hit by AA fire the next day and the crew bailed out, every machine gun within range seemed to be firing at them as they came down.

... The bombing went on day and night, sometimes the bombers kept coming over in relays so that it was impossible to tell if it was one long raid or a series of raids. Daytime raids were nearly all dive bombing attacks with ordinary bombers attacking at night. The night raids would usually start around 10pm, about the time we would head off to wait for the destroyers to come in. We kept well dispersed; we had a series of holding places along the road out of the town with usually six trucks at each and moved up as we were needed at the wharf.

If the bombers were very active we would find a small depression in the stony ground, park the truck over it and lay in the hollow and snooze until we were called. It was safer under the truck because there were a lot of AA fragments falling. The bombers would cruise around with motors droning in a lazy fashion until they spotted what they thought was a target then they would go off for a few miles and come in fast on a bombing run. We soon learned to know when they were attacking and when it was safe to go on working so they didn't interfere with the work too much.

They used a lot of flares looking for targets and one night they spotted the section I was leading and straddled us with a stick of five-hundred-pound bombs as we waited just outside the town to go in. Not satisfied with that they kept after us and straddled us four or five more times on the way in. In the first stick I was blown over a heap of stuff and slammed into a rock face and by the time we reached the wharf one truck had a small hole in one door and another had a slow puncture.

Transport

After a while we took over the area transport from an English unit who were shipped out as surplus and from then on we worked our hearts out. We did all the transport jobs in the area by day and except for a few nights around the full moon each month we cleared the wharf of cargo brought in by the destroyers. We worked long stretches at a time. I once did three days and nights in one stretch until my eyes screwed shut and I had to drive back to camp holding one eye open with my hand.

Living Conditions

Except for a few people living in the town, everybody lived in dugouts. The last one I had was a beauty, it was dug out of a small sand dune that was very old and the sand had almost turned to stone. With a well-ventilated roof and room to stand up, three of us lived in "relative" comfort. The heat was intense, the temperature was usually well over 100F and often around 110F. Everything we touched was hot and you didn't lean a bare arm on a truck door in the heat of the day. I will never know how tank crews lived in their steel tanks in that heat.

I'm not sure what caused us the most problems, the enemy or the heat and the flies and fleas. Sometimes the fleas got so bad that we used to splash petrol over the floor of our dugouts and burn them and then rake it over and repeat several times. There was nothing we could do about the flies, there were millions of them and they swarmed over everything. The only way to eat a meal was to sit with the dixie on your knee and eat with one hand while the other hand tried to keep the flies off the food. Probably because of the flies everybody had pretty regular bouts of diarrhoea. My pet remedy was half a tin of army cheese, about the only thing it was good for.

Relief

By August we were all showing signs of wear and tear. We had all lost a lot of weight and most of us had desert sores, a kind of ulcer that started from a knock, especially on the legs, and were very hard to heal. I think they were the result of poor diet. We would have liked to stay and take part in the breakout to meet the attack that we knew was coming from Egypt, but military leaders decided that fresh troops were needed so units of the free Polish Army were brought in to relieve us. In the end one Australian Battalion was left behind because the destroyers going in were damaged and had to turn back. It was close to the full moon and the destroyers couldn't go in again for a few days, so the battalion took part in the breakout...

On the night of 8 September 1941, we boarded the destroyers and went back to Egypt. The destroyers slipped in silently and tied up to the wrecks, and the lighters were put against the other side of them and the sailors worked frantically heaving the load down planks onto the lighters.

As soon as the deck was clear we climbed aboard, a bit hairy in the dark, but we all made it. One English soldier slipped and dropped his rifle in the sea. He had saved up fifty pounds while he was in the desert and the rifle would cost him forty-eight pounds, so we took a hat around and raised enough to pay for the rifle.

While we waited for the destroyers to come in, we had watched the flares out to sea where the enemy planes were looking for them, and it was a repeat on the way out. It was a wild ride. The bombers looked for us most of the night, there was hardly a time we couldn't see flares as they looked for ships wakes. They found us and attacked three times and one near miss caused a slight leak in the Kipling. There were three destroyers that night, the Jaguar (ours), the Decoy and the Kipling. It was good to see them dodge bombs; they must have been using radar which was still fairly secret then.

We had been told that an escort of fighter planes would meet us at daylight and sure enough as the light strengthened a plane appeared out of the clouds ahead and we all cheered as the plane swooped down and dropped a stick of bombs between us and the Decoy. Our last German bombs. As we neared Alexandria we passed two British battleships at gunnery practice. I'd hate to be on the wrong end of those guns. When the shells landed near the target it seemed as if half the ocean rose up into the air. Late in the morning of 9 September 1941, we landed at Alexandria and our episode in the Libyan desert was over.

Tobruk will always be special to those who were there. We had shown the world that the German war machine, the "Blitzkrieg", could be stopped, the German troops could be fought and beaten and the dive-bombers that had dominated until then could be fought and beaten by determined AA gunners. Chester Wilmot, a famous war correspondent said in his book "Tobruk" that the official records showed that while we were there the "Air raid red alert" was sounded sixteen hundred times and since there were very few times that a "red alert" didn't end in a raid there must have been fifteen hundred raids. I developed the ability to sleep through raids unless the bombs were falling close by.

Palestine

We arrived at the Beit Jirga camp in Palestine in the early hours of 11 September 1941 and as soon as we walked through the camp, the troops in bed, thinking we were new arrivals, called out the old cry, "You'll be sorry!" The responses weren't a bit polite!

Many thanks to Stuart's daughter, Elizabeth Turner, for sending us Stuart's full story and for allowing us to share these excerpts with you. Stuart was a well-respected member of ROTA and attended the [last luncheon](#) of Tobruk veterans in 2010. He passed away in 2014.

WASH DAY IN TOBRUK



We continue our series of some of the remarkable Tobruk-related images held within the Australian War Memorial's vast photographic collection.

The hardships endured by the Rats of Tobruk are well known, and one subject appears time and again in their recollections—the constant struggle to obtain water. In the unforgiving desert environment, every drop was precious, and coping with severe water shortages became part of everyday life.

Soldiers were required to be clean shaven, and with very limited water, clothes washing was restricted to what was absolutely necessary. Foot health was a very high priority so clean socks were vital for everyone and hence they came top of the list.

Sitting high on a hilltop overlooking the Libyan coast outside Tobruk Harbour, VX41582 Corporal Vernon Jack of East Malvern, Victoria, washes a pair of socks in a small biscuit tin.

The 2027 Annual Membership Subscription is \$30 and is due and payable on 1 January 2027.

RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC - 2027 RE-SUBSCRIPTION PAYMENT FORM

Please forward this form together with payment of \$30 to:
The Secretary of ROTA, Tobruk House, 44 Victoria Ave, Albert Park, Vic, 3206.
Note that personal cheques can no longer be accepted.

Contact Email: ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com

Contact Phone No: 0432 232 502

Membership No: _____

Name: _____
Title Given Name (s) Surname

Contact Details (Only complete if details have changed):

Address: _____
Suburb / State Post Code

Email: _____ @ _____ Contact Phone No: _____
Please print clearly

NOW AVAILABLE: Automatic re-subscription payment. Call 0432 232 502 for details

Please note that if payment is not received by 31 March 2027 your membership will be suspended. The association's rules state that a member is taken to have resigned if the member's subscription is more than twelve months in arrears.

Payment by electronic funds transfer (EFT) is our preferred method of payment. We also accept credit cards. 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 your membership no. and surname.

Bank Account Details:

Account Name: Rats of Tobruk Association BSB: 633 000 Account No: 197 610 603

Credit Card Payment: Please provide the following:

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 form is necessary for the association to 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.

Association Rules:

As a member of 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

Member's Signature: _____ Date: _____



ROTA MERCHANDISE

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



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



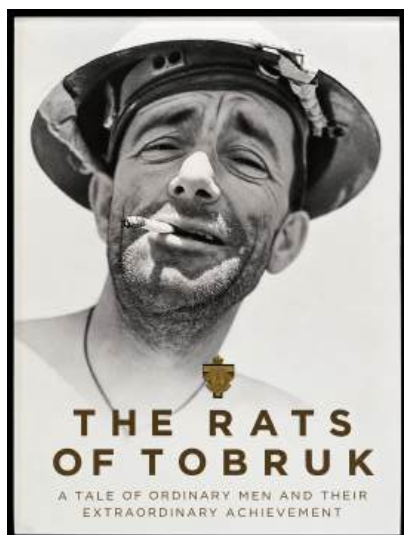
ROTA RUGBY TOP
Sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL
XXXL, XXXXL, XXXXXL
\$60



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



ROTA TOTE BAG
40cm x 35cm
\$16.50



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

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.)

A recurring payment is our preferred method of payment. Please call 0432 232 502 to arrange.

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.

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:**

OFFICE USE ONLY

Membership Approval: Delegate of the Committee of Management

Oct 2026

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 moving ceremony features a piper, bugler and Shrine Guard in historic uniform.

SPARKS IN THE DARK



Created by emerging artists Mursal Azizi and Kat Rae, the exhibition brings together traditional artistry and contemporary artistic practice. At its heart are 260 embroidered handkerchiefs, created by 45 women living in Afghanistan—one for every week since the Taliban regime seized control of the country in August 2021. The exhibition is shaped by the artists' deeply personal connections to conflict.

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



SPARTANS & ANZACS draws a powerful connection between these two defining moments. It reveals how service, sacrifice and mateship transcend time, linking ancient warriors with modern soldiers in a shared legacy of courage. This exhibition invites reflection on the enduring values forged in conflict—and how these stories continue to shape the meaning of remembrance today.