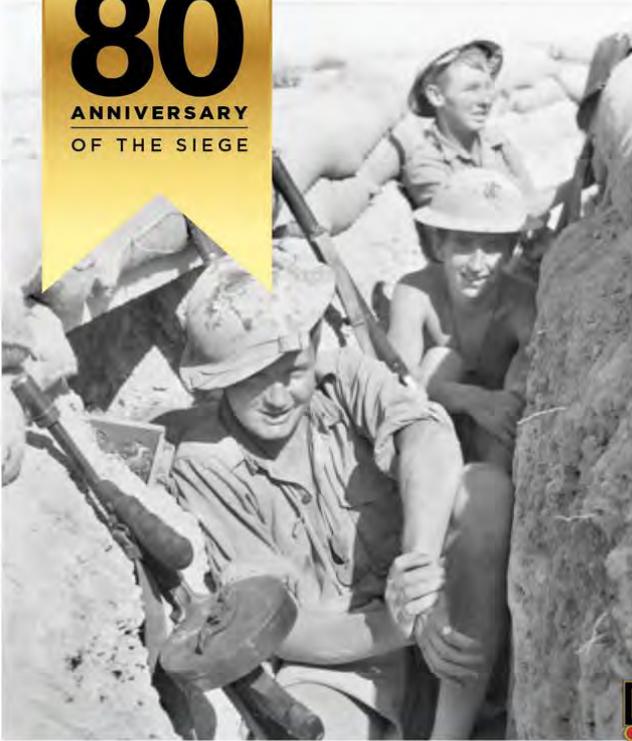


COMMEMORATING THE

**80<sup>TH</sup>**

ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE SIEGE



# TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION



THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION  
NEUROSCIENCE FELLOWSHIP FUND

**RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC.**  
**44 VICTORIA AVENUE, ALBERT PARK, VIC 3206**

[www.ratsoftobrukassociation.org.au](http://www.ratsoftobrukassociation.org.au)

PHONE No 0432 232 502

GENERAL MEETINGS NORMALLY START AT 10.30AM

(NO MEETINGS JANUARY, MAY, JULY, SEPTEMBER AND NOVEMBER)

THE DATES BELOW ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. FOR MORE UP TO DATE INFORMATION CALL 0432 232 502

Month / Date	Event Description
April 11	Tobruk Sunday
April 25	Anzac Day & Open Day at Tobruk House
June 25	General Meeting
August 27	Shrine of Remembrance Carpathian Brigade Commemorative Service
October 22	General Meeting
December 6	Christmas Lunch – Details TBA

Patron: Bill Gibbins

Committee of Management:

President – Graham Gibson

Vice President – Mike Kiernan

Secretary – Glenda Garde

Treasurer - Mike Kiernan

Other Committee Members –

Christine Mulvaney, Bob Horton,

Graeme Clifford, Tony Smith,

Heather Macfarlane, Ian Marr,

Karolina Sevcikova, Stuart Tolliday,

Lachlan Gaylard

Tony Codd – Hall Keeper

#### TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS

##### Deadlines

Editorial and Advertising

NEXT ISSUE: JUNE 2021

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Articles or letters with no contact details will not be published.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

#### DISCLAIMER

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CONTACT US : [ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com](mailto: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**

The President and ROTA Inc. members wish to extend our condolences and deepest sympathy to the families and friends of our departed comrades:

**HODGES, Stanley, WX10439, 2/48 Bn, February 2021, 100**  
**DUNCAN, Glenn, Affiliate Member, February 2021**

*Our thoughts and prayers are extended to all families at this sad time.*

## RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC.

### President's Report – April

With the 80th Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk (April 10th, 1941) fast approaching, I just want to remind members about the Tobruk Sunday Commemorative Service (11<sup>th</sup> April starting at 2.00pm) being held in Tobruk Reserve opposite Tobruk House 44 Victoria Avenue, Albert Park, Victoria. The Rats of Tobruk Pipes and Drums Memorial Band will lead the ceremony followed by a service in which the Hon Ted Baillieu will present a short address.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the flag that flew on every car that Lieutenant General Sir Leslie James Morshead, KCB, KBE, CMG, DSO, ED used during WW2, will be presented by his driver's daughter, Valerie Houghton, in memory of her father Alan Houghton VX32422, to the Rats of Tobruk Association, where it will be placed on permanent display. This will be followed by afternoon tea at Tobruk House opposite the reserve, Covid restrictions permitting.

The first ROTA meeting at Tobruk House since February 2020 was a very moving event as we welcomed veteran Tommy Pritchard, members of the Royal Children's Hospital Foundation and the ROTA RCH Neuroscience Fellow for 2021, Dr Nicola Fearn who was presented with her award medallion.

The Deputy Lord Mayor, Cr Marcus Pearl of the City of Port Phillip officially opened our Exhibition, displaying 24 Siege of Tobruk history panels. The panels and their story have received spontaneous acclaim for all who have viewed them. Lisa Cammarano, the designer of the panels and our new website dropped in for the launch and was made very welcome.

Tobruk House Open Day on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> February was very successful with many visitors coming through our doors, please see the full report in this edition of THN. Many thanks to our volunteers who helped prepare for and run the Exhibition, we could not have done this without you, thank-you.

At this date Tobruk House will be an Open House on ANZAC Day from 11.00am to 3.00pm. No meals will be served on the day due to the uncertainty of Covid restrictions.

Wishing you all good health.

Graham Gibson  
President ROTA

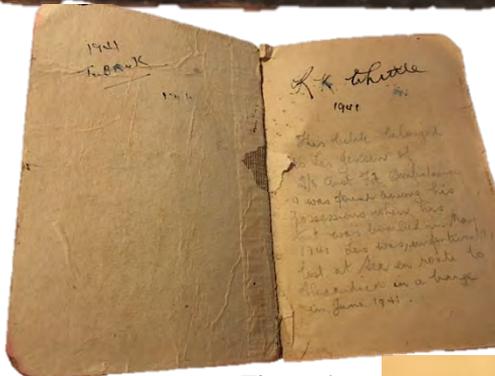
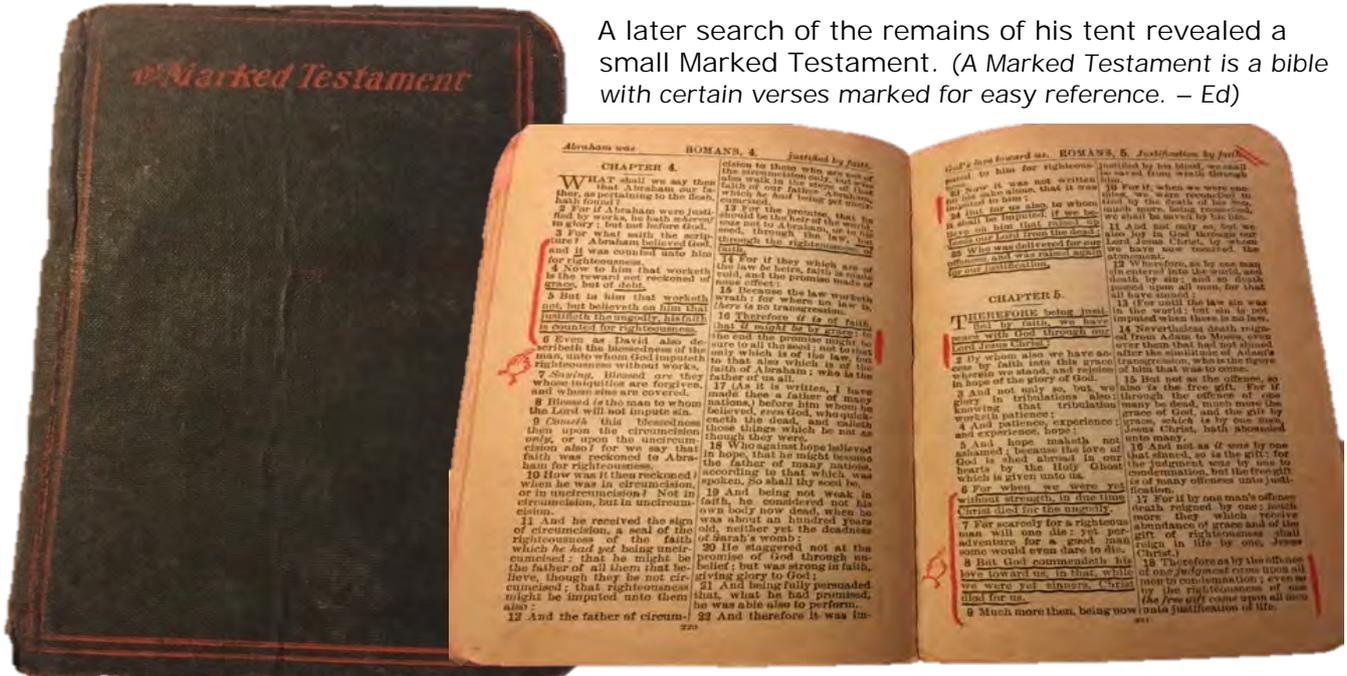
# LOOKING FOR INFORMATION (1)

Testament To A Lost Rat – A request from Brenton Whittle



My father, Ralph Keith Linthorne Cresdee Whittle (nicknamed Taffy) Sgt SX9054, served with the 2/8 Field Ambulance in Tobruk, and while there in 1941, during one of the many bombing raids by the Germans, the tent of a fellow member of the 2/8, Les Jensen (SX8529), was hit. Les lived, but I believe he was wounded and sent to Alexandria.

A later search of the remains of his tent revealed a small Marked Testament. (A Marked Testament is a bible with certain verses marked for easy reference. – Ed)

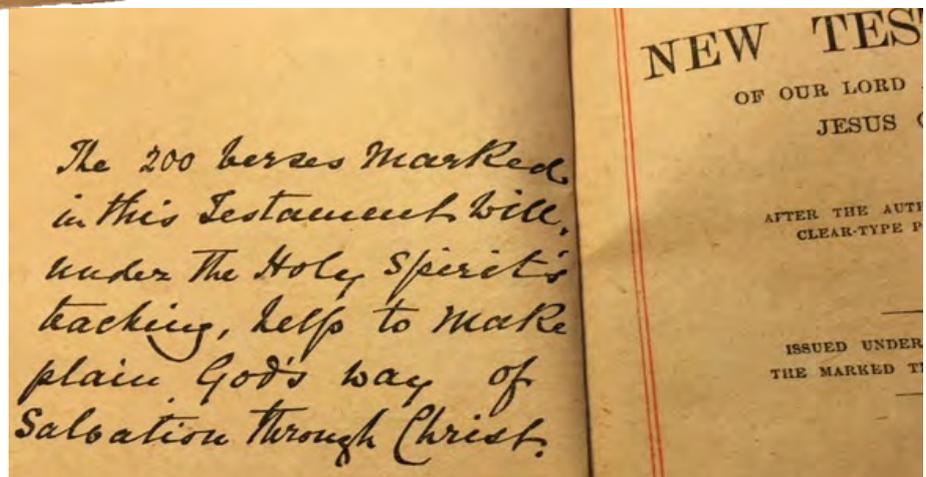


I found this recently in my late father's war memorabilia, and discovered a note written by my father in pencil inside the little bible, which reads:

"This book belonged to Les Jensen of 2/8 Aust Fd Ambulance & was found among his possessions when his tent was bombed in May 1941. Les was unfortunately lost at sea en route to Alexandria in a barge in June 1941."

There is also a touching note inside the cover written in beautiful script, possibly by the person who gave this to Les as he went off to war. Maybe his mother, or wife.

I am not sure now of the accuracy of the mention that he was lost at sea in June 1941, as a search of the available records show that an Andrew Leslie Jensen of the 2/8 Field Ambulance was discharged in 1943.



I would very much like to know if anyone has any more information regarding Les Jensen, as I would like to return the little book to his relatives. Please contact ROTA if you can assist.

## LOOKING FOR INFORMATION (2)

We received the following request relating to the Tobruk Barracks Sergeants Mess. If you can assist in any way, please contact the writer directly.

### OFFICIAL

Sir/Ma'am,

The Tobruk Barracks Sergeants Mess in Puckapunyal holds several historic artefacts from Tobruk we would like to add background stories to. We are starting with two of the larger and more prominent items on display.



**Folio 146** WWII German vehicle recognition flag. This item is identical to one in the AWMM captured at Tobruk by CAPT A F Smith 2/5 BN (EDITOR'S NOTE: we have chosen to blank out the Nazi emblem on this flag in the THN)



**Folio 148** Italian aircraft marking roundel.

I have funding available to add brass plates to these items to replace the current plastic plates and I would like to know if there is any history of these items that can be added to the display. Any assistance you may provide will be appreciated.

For your consideration.

Darrin Neale  
Warrant Officer Class Two  
LOGWO  
Army School of Transport  
Puckapunyal MILPO Vic 3662  
Ph:03 573 56883 Mob: 0439 883 97

# FROM THE ARCHIVES

While doing some research for the presentation of the 10<sup>th</sup> Rats of Tobruk Association Neuroscience Fellowship we discovered a 'picture book' record of the first award, made in 2011. These images mark the establishment of this valuable legacy. See page 14 to find out how you can help support this fund.



The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation  
Melbourne  
50 Flemington Road, Parkville  
Victoria 3052, Australia  
T. +61 3 9345 5037  
F. +61 3 9345 5037  
E. rich.foundation@rch.org.au  
www.rchfoundation.org.au



Announcement Rats of Tobruk Neuroscience Fellow 2011  
Rats of Tobruk Children's Neuroscience Centre  
Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne  
Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2011 @ 11am

Proudly supported by:-  
Members Rats of Tobruk Association  
Andrew Kornberg - Associate Professor & Director Children's Neuroscience Centre, RCH  
Christine Kilpatrick - Chief Executive Officer, RCH  
Dr Peter McDougall - Executive Director Medical Services, RCH  
Katherine Howell - Rats of Tobruk Neuroscience Fellow 2011  
Julian Clarke - Chairman, RCH Foundation Board  
Sue Hunt - Executive Director, RCH Foundation  
Bobby Skilton - RCH Foundation Ambassador  
Donna Aranyi - Donor Development Manager, RCH Foundation  
Other/s



the 'rats of tobruk' ward



# FEBRUARY MEETING REPORT

The February meeting at Tobruk House was supposed to be a big 'Welcome back' event but unfortunately Covid-19 restrictions put a damper on our plans with strict attendance number limitations. (Those limitations were actually lifted the following day, which allowed the first Tobruk House Open Day to proceed.)

There were two very important items on the agenda for the meeting, and they were formal awarding of the annual Rats of Tobruk Association Neurology Fellowship medallion and the official opening of the Rats of Tobruk Exhibition\* by local Councillor and Deputy Mayor Marcus Pearl. In addition to the committee members, other special guests included Professor Monique Ryan, RCH Foundation CEO Sue Hunt, Philanthropy Executive Donna Aranyi, and 2021 Fellow Nicola Fearn from the Royal Children's Hospital, veteran Tom Pritchard, and graphic artist Lisa Cammarano, creator of the exhibition and revamped website.

*\*The Exhibition was generously sponsored by the Victorian Government*



*President Graham Gibson addresses the first meeting for 2021*



*Professor Ryan talks about the impact of the ROTA Fellowship*



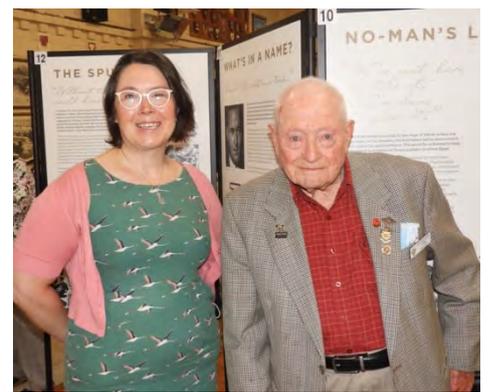
*President Graham Gibson presenting Doctor Fearn with the ROTA Fellowship medallion*



*Deputy Mayor Marcus Pearl officially opens the Exhibition*



*Committee member Ian Marr inspects the Exhibition*



*Dr Nicola Fearn with veteran Tom Pritchard*

## TOBRUK HOUSE OPEN DAY AND EXHIBITION

On Saturday February 27 a special Open Day was held, primarily to allow people to view the newly opened exhibition which tells the story of the siege and the history of our association. Lachlan Gaylard prepared a fabulous memorabilia display and a special panel showing photographs of all the known living Rats from 1941 and today. Many ROTA members gave up their time both in the preparation of the hall and to guide visitors on the day.

In excess of 200 people visited during the day, Merchandise Officer Graeme Clifford reported significant merchandise sales and we gained a few new members, and we 'found' another Rat! His name is John Selby Campbell and he served with the 2/3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

Many of the visitors were from the local area, but due to Vice President Mike Kiernan's plug for the Open Day on "Australia All Over" on ABC radio the week prior, many people travelled some distance specifically to see the Exhibition. All agreed that it was a great success. Tobruk House will also be open to visitors on Anzac Day from 11am to 3pm. See page 17 for information regarding the exhibition being displayed in Coffs Harbour leading up to Anzac Day.

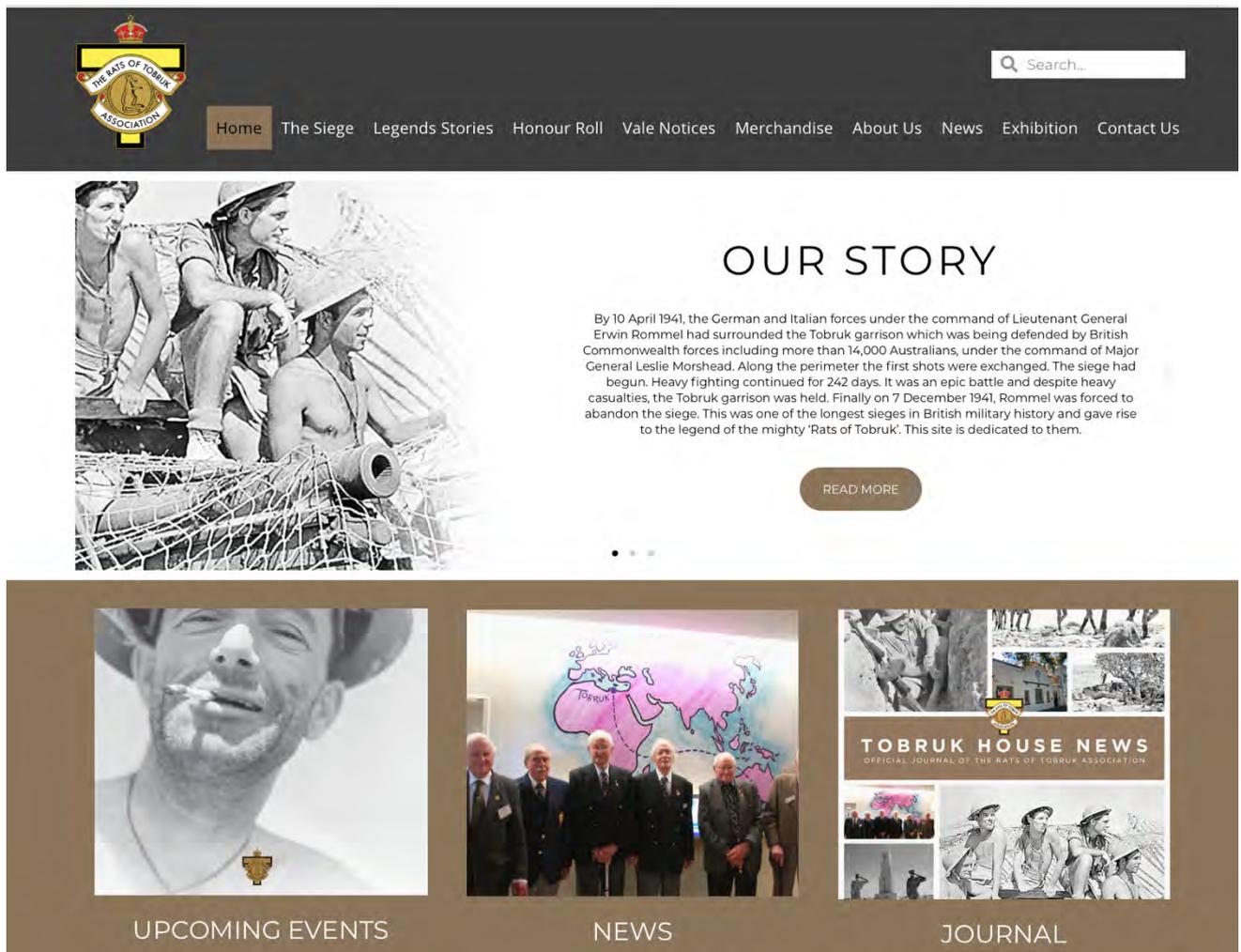


# ROTA WEBSITE UPGRADE

In this, the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Siege, we are very pleased to have achieved a completely new look for our website. A great deal of work by Vice President Mike Kiernan and graphic designer Lisa Cammarano has resulted in a total redesign of our on-line presence, in keeping with the theme of the Exhibition and the 2021 Tobruk House News.

The latest issue of the Tobruk House News is available to view or download, and the panels from the new exhibition are also there.

We also want to acknowledge here the wonderful assistance given by Bob Gannaway during the past 3 years. Bob ensured that we were able to maintain an on-line presence during a difficult period and we take this opportunity to express our gratitude.



The screenshot shows the ROTA website homepage. At the top left is the ROTA logo, a crest with a crown and the text 'THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION'. To its right is a search bar with the text 'Search...'. Below the logo is a navigation menu with the following items: Home, The Siege, Legends Stories, Honour Roll, Vale Notices, Merchandise, About Us, News, Exhibition, Contact Us. The main content area features a large historical black and white photograph of soldiers in a trench. To the right of the photo is the heading 'OUR STORY' followed by a paragraph of text: 'By 10 April 1941, the German and Italian forces under the command of Lieutenant General Erwin Rommel had surrounded the Tobruk garrison which was being defended by British Commonwealth forces including more than 14,000 Australians, under the command of Major General Leslie Morshead. Along the perimeter the first shots were exchanged. The siege had begun. Heavy fighting continued for 242 days. It was an epic battle and despite heavy casualties, the Tobruk garrison was held. Finally on 7 December 1941, Rommel was forced to abandon the siege. This was one of the longest sieges in British military history and gave rise to the legend of the mighty 'Rats of Tobruk'. This site is dedicated to them.' Below the text is a 'READ MORE' button. At the bottom of the page is a grid of three sections: 'UPCOMING EVENTS' with a portrait of a man, 'NEWS' with a group of men in suits in front of a map, and 'JOURNAL' with a collage of images and the text 'TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION'.

## NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members to ROTA:

Judy Stewart   Tom Afford   Neville Smith   Angela Smith

Greg Fitzpatrick   Richard Friend   Allan Willingham   Dale Peacock

Andrew Rice   Nicola Fearn   Patrick Grubb   Robert Hughes



YOUR MEMBERSHIP HELPS TO ENSURE THE LEGACY OF THE RATS OF TOBRUK

## DR PETER BRAITHWAITE & THE FIG TREE

The fig tree is one of the iconic images of Tobruk and even to this day it is often referred to by veterans we speak to. Located inside the Tobruk defences, the tree was the only feature in a barren landscape and marked the entrance to a series of caves which were used as a regimental aid post. Despite frequent bombings in this vicinity, the tree managed to survive to the present day.

ROTA was recently contacted by Maura Braithwaite, the widow of Dr. Peter Braithwaite, and she told us of a watercolour painting of the fig tree in her possession. The painting was signed E. Marlowe and for many years it has been on display at her home in Tasmania.



Peter was a captain and Regimental Medical Officer with the 2/12th Battalion during the siege and in a 1989 interview with the AWM gave some insight into working in the RAP under the fig tree.

“At the fig tree I had a cave for the RAP and I found a basin somewhere in the desert and we had the basin up on a couple of ammunition boxes and I was privileged to have the hot wash all over every day. The only one in the battalion who did. The living conditions were fairly primitive.

I, of course, being the medical officer, had a stretcher I could sleep on. You could even stand up in this cave. The one next door where we used to keep some patients you couldn't stand up.

We didn't do any operating; if anything had to be operated on, they were evacuated eight miles back to the hospital.

Ambulances could go a certain distance in the day. They might be shot at or something, but nevertheless they could do that, but they couldn't get right up to the front line. What we did, the stretcher bearers either had to carry them back or you could get a Dodge utility and drive it up to within 400 yards of where the enemy were, and a utility would just take two stretchers – with the tray down – and it was a very useful way. Otherwise, the stretcher bearers had to carry them all the way back. But you could get to within 400 yards, with certain hazards you know, being shot at, but you could do it.”

Peter also mentions that neurosis was, understandably, a common problem. “You see there wasn't a moment of the day or night, when you weren't liable to be – to be killed. Now, myself, when I was in this cave, I got a badly infected foot and I had to stay in the cave lying down, for a couple of weeks, and someone was coming up in the ambulance and treating it. At the end of a couple of weeks when I got pretty right, I went to the entrance of the cave and a few yards over there, there was an outside urinal, and it took quite a while before I could pluck up courage to go to it. And when I realised what was happening to people when they were enclosed like this, I used to insist that everyone in every place had to get up and walk around in the open for a period every day, wherever they were, otherwise, you know, that was making them get neurotic.”

If you want to hear the full interview with Peter, it can be found at the sound archive of the Australian War Memorial (below) and is well worth a listen.

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C87937>

But our story does not end there, as there is also a tale to be told about the artist of Peter's fig tree painting. Peter sadly passed away in 1990, but Maura and her brother Rory were quite sure that Peter had told them that the artist, E. Marlowe, was also a Rat of Tobruk. However, a search of the National Archives proved fruitless.

There were no listings under that name, but with a little perseverance (and a bit of Googling!) it was discovered that E. Marlowe was in fact Edward Oleszkiewicz who was indeed a Rat, but a Polish one, so here is his remarkable story also.



Edward Marlowe

In 1940, Edward fled the invading Nazi army by being smuggled onto a boat which eventually led him to the Palestine and the Polish Carpathian Brigade, where he fought alongside the Aussies. In Tobruk, he gained the nickname 'Grenade Eddie' due to his fondness for using grenades in all sorts of situations.

At age 21, in 1943, Edward joined the Polish Airforce and went on to pilot Lancaster bombers out of Britain. After the war, Eddie was given only 10 minutes to decide whether to emigrate to Australia and, taking his chances, like many other Poles, he ended up working in Tasmania on the Hydro Electric Scheme. Edward passed away in 2015, but spent most of his life in Opossum Bay, Tasmania, where he used his skills in building and electronics to make a living. There, under the shadow of Mt Wellington, he was also able to pursue his passion for landscape painting, one of which is, of course, the fig tree, which proudly adorns Maura's living room wall. Edward was also interviewed by ABC Radio National:

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/verbatim/edward-oleszkiewicz-part-1/2947576>  
<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/verbatim/edward-oleszkiewicz-part-2/2947458>

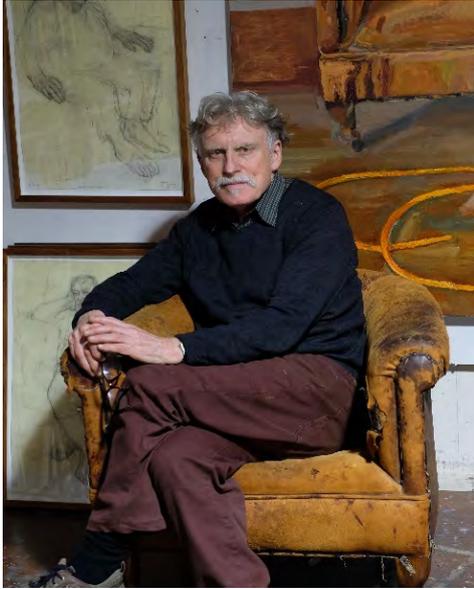
So, there you have it. A picture does indeed tell a thousand words.

\*\*\*Many thanks to Maura and her brother Rory, for contacting us and we are hopeful that they will be able to join us on April 11 for this year's commemorative service at Tobruk House.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL 021026  
A SCENE IN THE UNDERGROUND "FIG TREE" REGIMENTAL AID POST. WOUNDED ARE LYING DOWN AS THEY WAIT TO GO TO THE MAIN DRESSING STATION. (AWM)

## ...AND SPEAKING OF PAINTING...



Artist Peter Wegner is quite well known to the Rats of Tobruk but is very well known in the Australian art world.

As a Melbourne-based figurative painter, sculptor and draughtsman, Peter has held solo exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne, and his work has been included in group exhibitions including at the Art Gallery of New South Wales Sydney, the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra, and the National Portrait Gallery in London.

Over several years, Peter has also worked on the development of a series of portraits of the Rats of Tobruk, and another project on people who have reached one hundred years of age, *The Centenarian Project*. We were therefore extremely pleased when Peter recently contacted ROTA to organise additional 'sittings' for some siege veterans he had not yet painted.

First cab off the ranks was Tommy Pritchard and it was fascinating to watch Peter at work in Tom's living room. In a seemingly short period of time, this talented artist had whipped up an extraordinary likeness of our Tom, as you can see below. Other veterans, Don Simpson 2/32 Btn., Joe Darley 2/23 Btn. and Ted Stone 2/5 Field Amb. have also had their portraits painted since then.



We thank Peter very much for his interest and his work, and we are hoping that in the not-too-distant future, there may be a public exhibition of his work for others to enjoy.

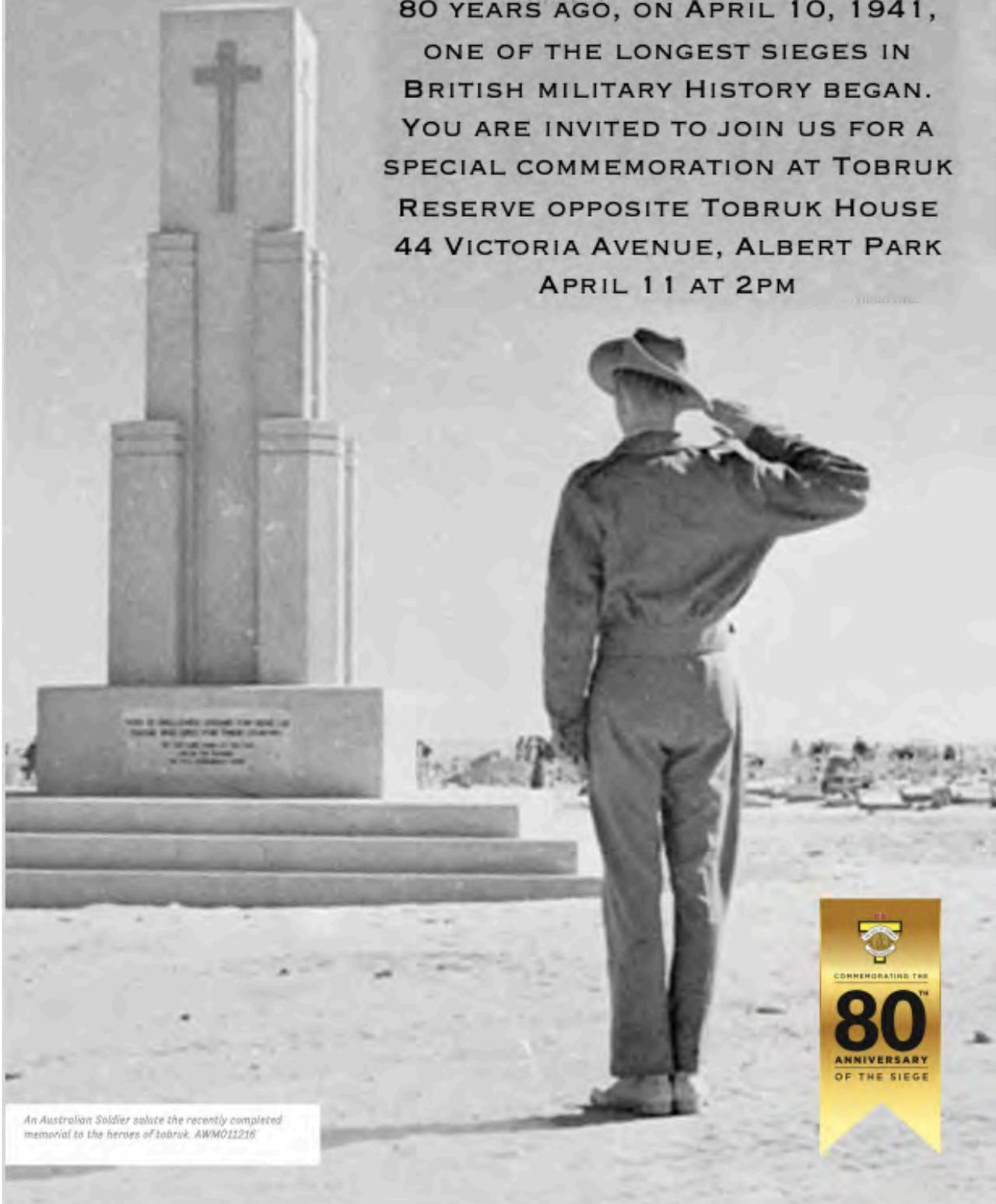
# TOBRUK SUNDAY APRIL 11 2021

*'The sands neither of the desert nor of time will obscure the splendid achievement of the men of Tobruk. Their real monument is their name and their most honoured resting place is in the grateful hearts of their fellow men.'*

*Chester Wilmot*

**80 YEARS AGO, ON APRIL 10, 1941,  
ONE OF THE LONGEST SIEGES IN  
BRITISH MILITARY HISTORY BEGAN.  
YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN US FOR A  
SPECIAL COMMEMORATION AT TOBRUK  
RESERVE OPPOSITE TOBRUK HOUSE  
44 VICTORIA AVENUE, ALBERT PARK  
APRIL 11 AT 2PM**

*YIPPOO.COM*



*An Australian Soldier salute the recently completed memorial to the heroes of Tobruk. AWM012216*



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR THE ROTA AGM - MARCH 2021

During the year many special people were lost to us: -

Veterans: - Arthur COUTTS, Gordon WALLACE, Ray MYERS, Jim CAMPBELL, Stan HODGES, Murray WILLING,  
Affiliate members:- Marcus De RIJK President of the ROTMP&D Band, Betty MUNRO, Glenn DUNCAN, Joyce EVANS & Peter Mc DONALD.

### 2020 Events:

A shaky start to the year eventuated as Covid -19 restrictions started to close down many meetings and events, we cancelled all face-to-face meetings and events, our AGM was postponed until September when we had a Zoom meeting to ratify all the committee positions.

Tobruk Sunday and ANZAC Day at Tobruk House were all cancelled but we took up the 'Front Gate Project' where households were encouraged to come out to their front gate at 6.00am on ANZAC Day and recite the ODE and bow their head for a minute of silent reflection. We received many positive comments from our members who share this very moving experience. Thank-you to all who participated.

We presented an Honourary Life Membership to Bob Horton and Margaret Burchill for their services provided to ROTA over several years. Thank you, Bob & Margaret, for all your generous support, it has been very much appreciated.

This year we will be presenting the Honourary Life Membership Award to Rayda Noble for her support to the committee of ROTA. As our veteran numbers dwindled, Rayda became assistant secretary and she also re-kindled the Junior Rats program and there are many today who still recall very fond memories of numerous parties and outings organised by Rayda. Thank-you Rayda for your dedication and support to Rota and the Junior Rats we appreciate all the time and effort that you put in to keeping the spirit of the Rats of Tobruk alive.

Warrantdyte PS planned visit to Tobruk House was postponed but a Zoom meeting with 35 children was set up & it was a great day with Helen Robinson, Glenda Garde, Heather Macfarlane, and Alastair Davison presenting stories of their father's time and experiences in Tobruk.

Students wrote reports for the annual ROTA prize. Heather MacFarlane graded them and presented the annual prize in December at the School's Award night.

All committee meetings from April to December were conducted using the Zoom platform to enable us to meet regularly and this enabled us to run and maintain your association. Thank-you to our committee members for your support and understanding during these challenging times.

A generous grant of \$9500 was received from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet Veterans Grants program to design and produce 24 story boards with stands telling the story of the Siege of Tobruk. Many thanks to Mike Kiernan, Glenda Garde, Stuart Tolliday and Lisa Cammanaro for their dedicated work in creating these panels.

John Turner was presented with a Cheque for \$1000 to present to Morwell Central Primary School. The \$1000 was split between two students who showed great determination against adverse conditions during the year.

We were unable to visit the Royal Children's Hospital for the annual morning tea to present the of ROTA Neuroscience Award. As Covid restrictions eased at the start of 2021 we were able to invite the RCH Foundation and the 2021 ROTA RCH Neuroscience Fellow to a morning tea at Tobruk House in March this year.

- The recipient was Doctor Nicola Fearn and she was also granted honorary membership of ROTA. Congratulations and welcome Nikola!
- We set an aim to raise \$100000 for the ROTA Neuroscience Fellowship. To date we have a little over \$2500.

Our Christmas Party- was cancelled due to Covid restrictions but a small group of committee members met with veteran Tommy Pritchard to welcome the spirit of Christmas at Tobruk House. A very relaxed day was enjoyed by all who attended.

The ROTA website was revamped thanks to Mike Kiernan and our website designer Lisa Cammanaro, the feedback from our members and the general public has been very positive, thank-you again. Also we would like to sincerely thank Bob Gannaway would helped us to establish and maintain an interim website during the transition from the old website to the new one. We are very much indebted to you Bob, for all that you were able to provide for us. Thanks mate.

We started 2021 with an Open Day at Tobruk House, 200 people visited us on the day with many interested in learning about their father's, grandfather's or uncle's time in Tobruk. It was a collective effort by all committee members and friends of ROTA to prepare for the day and to run the event. From the success of the day, we are planning to run another two during the course of this year. Our next Open Day will be held on ANZAC Day from 11.00am to 3.00pm.

A very big thank-you to our committee and to those who have generously supported us over the year. We could not run this organisation without your generous support and time.

THANK-YOU, one and ALL.  
Graham Gibson  
President 2020  
Rats of Tobruk Association Inc.



## TAFFY'S TALES

We recently received some mail from Brenton Whittle (Assoc Member RO311). His father, Ralph Keith Linthorne Cresdee Whittle (nicknamed Taffy) Sgt. SX9054, served with the 2/8 Field Ambulance. Brenton had been going through all his dad's memoirs of his time in Tobruk and El Alamein and archived his stories of that time. He has been kind enough to send some to us and we will share them with THN readers over coming issues.



"Taffy" Whittle

### GOODBYE ALEXANDRIA - HELLO TOBRUK

After the delights (and that's another story) of Alexandria, it was almost time to head for Tobruk. A couple of nights before we left, a group of us went to see a film. As I remember it was "The Boys from Syracuse".

The most memorable part of this night to a small town South Australian, was to see a liquor bar in the foyer of the theatre open to all, with all manner of alcoholic drinks available, and the fact that smoking in the theatre was allowed.

That day we had official leave passes until midnight, so we caught the late train back to Ameriya Camp in safety. Usually when we were AWL (yes, we all did it) we travelled in the mail sorter's van to avoid detection. But this night we travelled First Class, only to be invaded by dozens of small Cypriot soldiers, who, finding all seats occupied, had no difficulty in climbing into those hammock-like luggage racks and promptly falling asleep. How they knew which station to get off at worried us, but at the stop before ours it was a never to be forgotten sight to see dozens of small khaki clad figures dropping from the roof of the carriage and stumbling still half asleep on to the platform.

Next stop Ameriya and so to bed, only to be awakened next morning by the worst dust storm I have ever seen. Movement outside the tent was nigh impossible, and although the toilet block was only a few yards away, I got lost trying to find my way back. Most of us spent that day in the tent, lying down covered by wet towels, nursing our sand-blasted faces and legs.

That was Friday 14<sup>th</sup> March 1941, and early next morning we embarked on the "Ulster Prince", a nice, neat packet which formerly ran between Liverpool and Belfast. There were quite a few Libyan (Arab) prisoners on board who were being taken back to Tobruk to work. It took all day to load, and it was not until Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> that we sailed at 2pm for Tobruk in the roughest Mediterranean swell I've ever seen.

A lot of our blokes were sea-sick, and so were the Libyans who were herded in the lounge in a circle. I was on guard from midnight till 2am and it was a distressing sight to see these blokes squatting in a heap. When one would scratch, all would have to move and then all would scratch. They too were sea-sick, and the sight of regurgitated gruel was not exactly settling to us. To make matters worse they had to be escorted to the latrines, which were lashed to the ship's rails in the scuppers. One could have forgiven them if they had jumped overboard as few of them had any idea of what was going on. After a most eventful experience we arrived in Tobruk at 3.30pm on Monday 17<sup>th</sup>.

The harbour was a graveyard of sunken ships, and we disembarked via the deck of one of these unfortunate vessels which formed part of the dock area. Trucks were waiting to transport us further up the Libyan coast just south of Benghazi near a place called Agedebia. After unloading we heard later that the next ship which went through the channel (outwards) struck a mine and many Italian prisoners and Australian guards were lost. Apparently, it was a magnetic mine, which worked on a count system. The seventh ship to go over it set it off. We were the sixth!

So much for the gambler's idea of "lucky seven".

## THANKS FOR PLAYING ..... HARD!

Watchers of the ABC program Hard Quiz would have been interested in the episode featuring a chap whose special topic was Tobruk.



Unfortunately he wasn't quick enough on the buzzer and so we didn't get to hear the in-depth questions that come in the final round. The five questions in the first round were as follows:

1. What was the name of the German General who led the siege?
2. Tobruk's importance was related to protecting which artificial waterway?
3. The German army's first defeat was at a battle named after what Christian holiday?
4. The first Tobruk medals, made during the siege from parts of a crashed German aircraft, featured what animal?
5. The prolonged offensive which led to the end of the siege was named after what type of medieval soldier?

The answers can be found at the bottom of this page.

## AN INTERESTING CONNECTION

Eagle-eyed committee member Tony Codd spotted a small story in the Sunday Herald Sun on January 30 regarding commercial real estate agent Bill Shelton. Bill is now 84 years old but with a well-known remarkable zest for life. He recently shot a personal best round of golf 10 under his handicap!

But what caught Tony's eye was mention of his dad Jack who died at Tobruk when Bill was only 5 years old. It turns out that Bill was the auctioneer who sold Tobruk House on behalf of the Rats back in 2008.

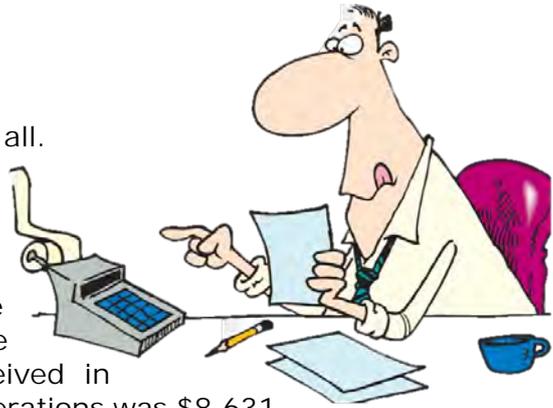


1. Rommel 2. Suez Canal 3. the Easter Battle 4. rat 5. Crusader.

## 2020 FINANCIAL REPORT TO MEMBERS

COVID-19 meant 2020 was a challenging year for us all. This was true for the association which saw all its major events cancelled, denying us of important fund-raising opportunities.

It is therefore pleasing to report that for 2020, the association achieved a small surplus of \$1,631. The expenditure includes \$7,000 of grant money received in 2019. Therefore, the under surplus from ordinary operations was \$8,631.



This fantastic result is primarily due to sales of the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Medal, which contributed \$16,000 to revenue.

Revenue from members fees was \$14,348, which is down on the previous year and likely due to the impact of COVID-19 on members.

Donations were made to:

- Morwell Central Primary School (formerly Tobruk Street Primary School) for the annual ROTA Achievement Awards: \$1,000
- The Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums: \$1,000

	PATRIOTIC BUILDING FUND	ROTA INC	CONSOLIDATED
Receipts (Operations):	\$2,825	\$39,153	\$41,978
Receipts (Grants):		\$ 9,500	\$ 9,500
Expenditure:	\$6,442	\$43,405 <sup>(1)</sup>	\$49,847
Surplus/(Deficit):	(\$3,617)	\$ 5,248	\$ 1,631
Cash Reserves:	\$63,720	\$58,169	

*Note 1: Includes \$7,000 grant received in 2019 and spent in 2020.*

There were 50 new Affiliate members for the year. At the end of the year there were 566 financial Affiliate members.

The association remains in a strong financial position with very good cash reserves.

By Mike Kiernan, Treasurer

## THE SIEGE EXHIBITION GOES TO COFFS HARBOUR, NSW

ROTA was recently contacted by a marketing manager from Gowings, a company based in NSW which owns several large shopping centres. We were asked if we could provide them with some information regarding the Tobruk siege, as each year, around Anzac Day, they have been highlighting an aspect of Australia's military history through displays at their shopping centres.

In this, our 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, it was indeed great timing, as we were able to provide Gowings with a copy of the recently installed Siege exhibition currently on display in Tobruk House. Our exhibition will be shown at Coffs Central shopping centre in Coffs Harbour in mid-April where we believe it will promote much interest. If you happen to be in the vicinity, please pop in and have a look!

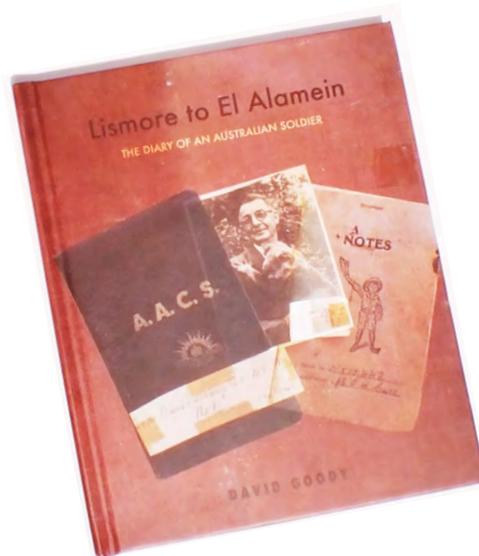
We hope that the exhibition will travel to additional areas during this year and are in discussion regarding several other possible destinations. We will keep you informed.

## LISMORE TO EL ALAMEIN – WILLIAM THOMAS CURE'S STORY

This is a wonderful book detailing the day-to-day life of William Thomas CURE, NX15442. The book was prepared by his great nephew David Goody.

Our President writes to the author: "It is very rare to find such a detailed book covering the personal thoughts and feelings of the everyday events from enlistment to the major battles like the Siege of Tobruk and El Alamein to coming home in 1943. We have received many diaries over the years, but they do not contain the continuous notes that your great uncle's does. Full credit to you for taking the time to put this together, adding pictures and footnotes throughout the book make it a very informative read.

Congratulations on an excellent publication, detailing the story of one man's life during World War 2 from enlistment to the Middle East and back home in 1943, thank-you."



David has also given us permission to print the link below which enables our members free access to the digital form of the book.

[https://issuu.com.davidlgoody/docs/lismore\\_lismore\\_to\\_el\\_alamein\\_ebook](https://issuu.com.davidlgoody/docs/lismore_lismore_to_el_alamein_ebook)

## A POLISH RAT'S MEMOIR – TOBRUK HOUSE BOOK LAUNCH

Our Polish friends from the Polish Museum and Archives in Australia will be at Tobruk House sometime in May for a book launch. The book is an English translation of the memoirs of a Polish Rat who settled in Hobart post war and was a prominent member of the Carpathian Brigade community there.

Unfortunately we don't yet have a firm date but look out for that event also! Details will be provided as they become available.

## TASMANIAN COMMEMORATION

To celebrate the 80th anniversary of the siege of Tobruk, the 80th anniversary Tobruk Committee (Tasmania) will be holding a wreath laying ceremony on the 27th November 2021 at 11am, at the Cenotaph, Queen's Domain, Hobart.

This will be followed by a formal dinner at 6pm in the evening, at the Lenah Valley RSL. The guest speaker will be Tasmanian military historian and author Reg Watson. All interested people are invited to the wreath laying ceremony. The dinner in the evening is by invitation only. If you wish to attend, or for any more details please contact Reg Watson. [reg@regwatson.com](mailto:reg@regwatson.com)

# RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION NEUROSCIENCE FELLOWSHIP FUND

In the February edition of the Tobruk House News, the launch of the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary appeal was announced. The aim is to raise during 2021, \$100,000 that will go into the 'Rats of Tobruk Association Neuroscience Fellowship Fund', which has become a 'virtual' monument to the mighty Rats of Tobruk.



Since the fellowship fund was established by the surviving veteran's, an annual Fellowship has been awarded to a young doctor so that he or she can undertake studies associated with paediatric neuroscience. The Fellowship has had an inspirational track record of success and achievement. It is a sought after, prestigious fellowship. The growing number of recipients is contributing to an international network of paediatric neuroscience specialist.

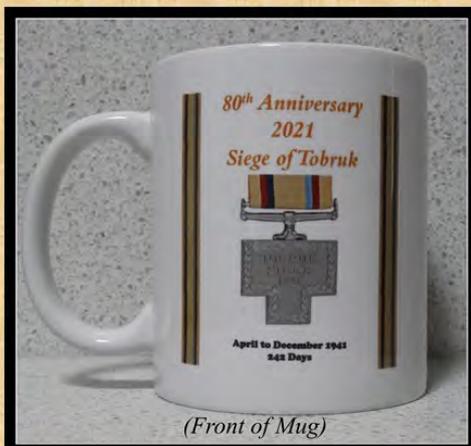
The initial response to the appeal has been good with over \$2,500 being raised to date. Thank you to all those who have contributed. Nevertheless, there is a considerable way to go. There is no better way to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the siege than by donating to the appeal. With the support of all descendants and others, the ambitious target will be achieved.

The link to this appeal is <https://www.mycase.com.au/page/241888/siege-of-tobruk-80th-anniversary-appeal>

Adding a gift in your Will is another way to help ensure the continuation of the Fellowship.

To learn more about how you can contribute to this most worthy cause by adding a gift in your will, or most importantly, to let the foundation know of your intention, please contact Jessica Freaan, Planned Giving, RCH Foundation (03 9345 6389 or email: [jessica.freaan@rch.org.au](mailto:jessica.freaan@rch.org.au))

## 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mug - Siege of Tobruk



(Front of Mug)

2021 is the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk which lasted for 242 days from April to December 1941. This mug has been produced to commemorate this very special milestone.

(9.5 x 8.2 cm ceramic mug which is dishwasher and microwave safe.)

# \$18

plus postage

(Postage anywhere in Australia: \$8 for a single mug or \$12 for up to four mugs.)



(Back of Mug)

To order please use the Merchandise Order Form printed in the Tobruk House News or available from our website: [www.ratsoftobrukassociation.org.au](http://www.ratsoftobrukassociation.org.au). Alternatively please send an email to [ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com](mailto:ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com). All enquiries to the Merchandise Officer (Graeme Clifford) 0418 882 323. If sending order by post please mail to ROTA, 44 Victoria Av, Albert Park, Vic, 3206. Cheques should be made out to the Rats of Tobruk Association.

If paying by EFT please include a unique reference such as the word MUG followed by your surname. Bank Account Details are: BSB: 013 223 Account No: 2102 51748





# ROTA MERCHANDISE

See Order Form for postage costs and other details.



LADIES SUMMER POPPY SCARF \$15



ROTA ROSEWOOD PLAQUE  
with 'No Surrender' scroll  
\$95



ROTA FACEMASK  
Comfortable soft cotton, 3-layer  
protection. One size fits all  
\$12



80<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY TWO-UP SET  
Includes kip and two 1941 pennies  
\$17



ROTA BADGE CAR  
WINDOW STICKER  
Sticks to inside of window  
\$10



80<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
SIEGE MEDAL \$50



ROTA 'BASEBALL' CAP  
\$20



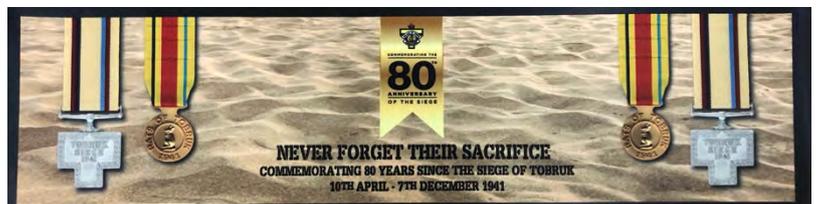
ROTA 80<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
POLO SHIRT  
\$40



STUBBY HOLDER  
Features selected verses  
from a poem written during  
the siege.  
\$9



ROTA 80<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY  
RUGBY TOP  
\$45



80<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY BAR MAT  
\$40



**RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC  
MERCHANDISE ORDER FORM**

ITEM	Cost per Item	Quantity	Size S,M,L, XL,XX	Postage Yes/No	Postage *	Total	Comments
80 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Medal	\$50				\$10		Postage for up to two badges to same address.
80 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mug	\$18				\$10		Postage for up to four mugs to same address.
80 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Rugby Top	\$45				\$10		
80 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Polo Shirt	\$40				\$10		
80 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Two-Up Set	\$17				Inc postage		
ROTA "baseball" style cap	\$20				\$10		
ROTA Face Mask	\$12				\$2		\$50 for five masks plus \$6 postage.
ROTA Bar Mat	\$40				\$10		
Badge Car Window Sticker	\$10				Inc Postage		20% discount for more than one.
ROTA Stubby Holder	\$9				\$6		\$10 postage for up to six.
ROTA Rosewood Plaque	\$95				\$10		
			Colour				
Ladies Poppy Scarf (light weight)	\$15				\$6		
*\$10 TOTAL 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 Details: Account Name: Rats of Tobruk Association BSB: 013 223  
Account No: 2102 51748

Payment can also be made by Credit or Debit Card. To arrange this please ring our Merchandising Officer, Graeme Clifford: 0418 882 323

Purchaser's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Phone No: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please Print)

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_@\_\_\_\_\_

Delivery Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

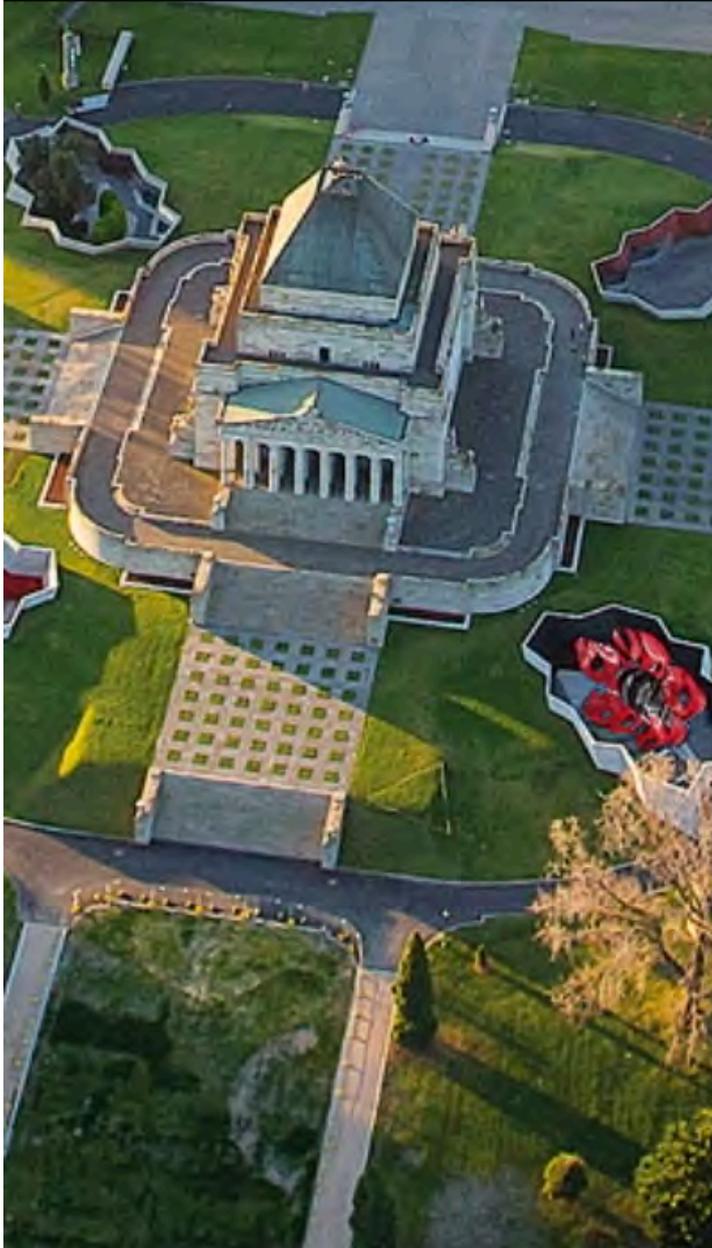
Please forward completed form to: 'Merchandise Officer, ROTA, 44 Victoria Av, Albert Park, Vic, 3206.

If you pay by EFT or card, you can scan this form and email to: [ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com](mailto:ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com)

All enquiries to the Merchandise Officer (Graeme Clifford)

email: [ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com](mailto:ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com) Phone: 0418 882 323

# What's on at The Shrine in 2021



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. Every Sunday at 4.45 pm on the forecourt.

## IMAGINING CENTAUR



The tragic story of the Australian Hospital Ship Centaur, sunk on 14 May 1943. A series of charcoal drawings by celebrated artist Dean Bowen to commemorate the 268 innocent souls lost and the 64 brave individuals who survived.

## THROUGH THE EYES OF THE SON



Photographer, John Williams (1933-2016), left an impressive intellectual and creative legacy that reflected his passion and preoccupation with the impact of the First World War on Australian culture and society. Inspired by his father's service, John's war related imagery provides perceptive reflection that will leave a lasting impression.

## CHANGED FOREVER Images of Conflict



Stories of migrants who have resettled in Australia from war-torn countries are presented beside those of recent veterans of overseas service in the Australian Defence Force. All have been redefined by the emotional and physical dislocation of war and seek to reconcile this with their new lives. Their personal stories reflect the range and depth of experiences in conflict and post-war. This moving exhibition explores the impacts of global and civil conflict in changing lives and shaping contemporary Australia.