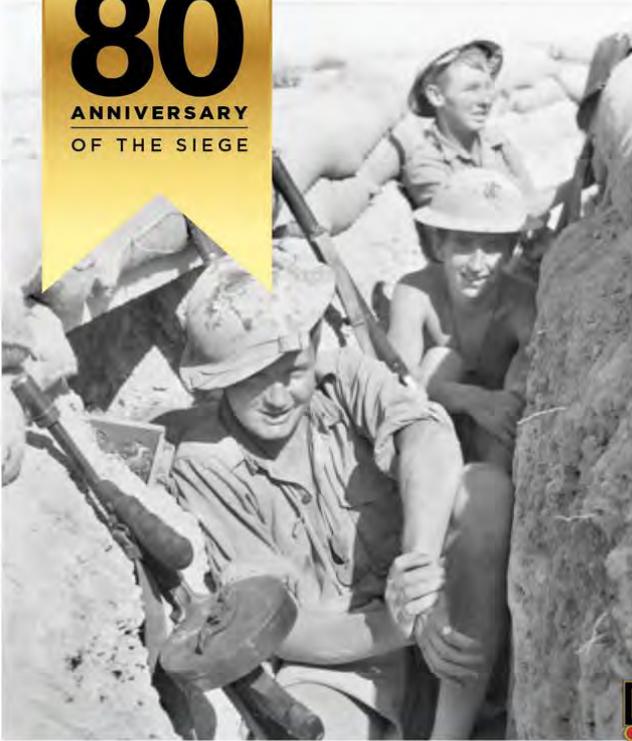


COMMEMORATING THE

**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, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER AND NOVEMBER)

**\*\*THE DATES & EVENTS LISTED BELOW ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. FOR MORE UP TO DATE INFORMATION REGARDING THE IMPACT OF CURRENT GOVERNMENT COVID RESTRICTIONS CALL 0432 232 502**

Month / Date	Event Description
October 17	Tobruk House Open Day – Family Day TBC **
October 22	General Meeting TBC **
December 5	Christmas Lunch – Details TBC **
January 1 2022	Annual Subscriptions due. (refer pages 24 & 25)
February 25 2022	Annual General Meeting
March 25 2022	General Meeting
April 3 2022	Tobruk Sunday

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, Bruce Bingham

Tony Codd – Hall Keeper

TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS

Deadlines

Editorial and Advertising

NEXT ISSUE: DECEMBER 2021

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will not be published.

Main writers: Glenda Garde, Mike Kiernan,  
Ken Butterworth

Editor: Stuart Tolliday

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this Association.



## 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.

**McMILLAN, Melville Roy (Mel), 21428, HMAS Vampire, HMAS Stuart, 21 July 2021, 101**

## RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC.

### President's Report – October

To all our members and friends of ROTA Inc.,

With the biting winds of winter slowly warming as spring arrives, we are looking forward to getting back to some sort of new normal as the covid restrictions are eased.

Regrettably we had to cancel the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemorative ceremony of the landing of the Carpathian Rifle Brigade into Tobruk to relieve the 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Division and its associated support units.

The Shrine of Remembrance Melbourne replayed last year's ceremony in the Cenotaph, which was available online for viewing. Also the Open Day event at Tobruk House had to be cancelled on the same day but there is another scheduled for Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> October. We are looking forward to catching up with you on the day if the government restrictions permit.

And sadly, our annual Christmas breakup is in doubt again this year with uncertainty surrounding the covid restrictions, we have a number of options planned but until the path ahead covid wise becomes clearer it is very difficult to prepare too far in advance. As soon as possible we will advise you if we can go ahead in one form or another or regrettably cancel.

At our last committee meeting it was voted to bring the date of the Annual General meeting forward one month to the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2022. This will enable the new incoming committee some additional time to prepare for Tobruk Sunday and Anzac Day. As part of the preparations for the new committee, we are currently working through the roles of each executive committee position to ensure a smooth transition from the existing executive, as well as preparing for Tobruk Sunday and Anzac Day 2022.

We are very pleased to announce that the Rats of Tobruk 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Siege of Tobruk display (which was generously funded by the Victorian Government) has been picked up by many organisations around the country and you can read about some of these in this edition. The decision by the multiple award-winning National Anzac Centre and Princess Royal Fortress to feature our full 24 panels in a dedicated display is a wonderful acknowledgement of its comprehensive and accurate portrayal of this important event.

Thank you for your continued support, we wish all our members in poor health a speedy recovery and please stay safe and well.

Thank you once again for your support.

Graham Gibson, President

## LOOKING FOR INFORMATION

This issue we have several follow ups to the request for photographs of Rats Of Tobruk memorial places in the August issue. We received this response from Bob Baker in Adelaide:



Hi,

As per your request in the August newsletter, I have attached photographs of a 'Rats' memorial situated above the Torrens Parade grounds on King William Street in Adelaide's CBD in case you do not have this one on your records.

Keep up the great work

Kind Regards,

Bob Baker  
R0313



The memorial sits on the 'Pathway of Honour' which runs along the northern boundary of Government House. The Pathway of Honour commemorates those who have served in various conflicts in which Australia has been involved. There are memorials on each of the thirty-six stone blocks along the pathway.



B 72920 Reproduction rights: State Library of South Australia

## RATS OF TOBRUK DEDICATED SPACES

Members were quick to point out that there is a special Rats of Tobruk Reserve directly opposite Tobruk House in Albert Park. Here, in this clipping from 'The Age' October 26 2008, is the story behind it:

### DEFENCE

## Special space to honour the 'Rats'

By JASON DOWLING

ONCE they held a strategically vital port in North Africa. Now they will forever hold a little corner of Albert Park.

Rats of Tobruk Reserve was named yesterday, with Victorian veterans from the famous 1941 siege of the Libyan port in attendance.

A plaque will commemorate the Rats, set directly opposite the veterans' headquarters at the corner of Victoria Avenue and O'Grady Street in Albert Park.

Rats of Tobruk president Alan Eldridge described it as "a great honour" to have the park named after the veterans.

The Australian soldiers, battling from tunnels and trenches at Tobruk, were dubbed "the Rats" by British Nazi propagandist William Joyce, better known as Lord Haw-Haw.

Gili Easton, now 84, was just 15 when he lied about his age and enlisted in the army.

At 16 he was facing the might of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's advancing forces at Tobruk.

Mr Easton said the reserve would be a living history lesson for the local community.

"People tend to forget what happened in World War II. It will encourage people to learn more about what happened," he said.

Fellow veteran Murray Burles said naming the reserve after the Rats meant a lot to the veterans. "We are very grateful and we shall honour that," he said.

Mr Burles said there were about 1600 Rats left Australia-wide, including about 80 in Victoria.

Albert Park ward councillor Judith Klepner championed the cause of renaming the reserve. She described the Rats yesterday as an important part of Australian history.

Port Phillip Council mayor Janet Cribbes said the Rats had made us all proud.



Alan Eldridge (right) and Murray Burles (centre) give Harry White a hand with his medals at the reserve yesterday.

PICTURE: PENNY STEPHEN

The reserve has been the location of the Tobruk Sunday service for more than 10 years and now features a plaque and a fig tree which was propagated from the original Tobruk fig tree.

## TOBRUK, THE HORSE

Streets, reserves and memorials are not the only repositories of this name, as ROTA has recently become aware of a horse from the NSW Police Mounted Branch with the incredibly special name of 'Tobruk'.

The NSW police were helpful in providing an answer to our question, "Why Tobruk?"

In a phone call, we were told that, originally a racehorse, this thoroughbred came to the Mounted Branch via the granddaughter of a Rat of Tobruk. Originally named Louis, the Police like to give their newly acquired horses an Australian name or something relevant to Australia's history, and so in this case 'Tobruk' was the obvious choice.



Upon further investigation, the grandfather in question is our own Ernie Walker, who lives in the Southern Highlands of NSW and has featured in some of our THN stories. Last year, 105yo Ernie helped us out in solving the mystery of how the original Tobruk medal, on which our 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary medal is based, came about. Ernie also has a lifelong love of horses.



No doubt, Tobruk is a great asset to the NSW Mounted Branch. With a name like that, how could he not be!

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

Special thanks to ROTA member and ROTP&D secretary Ken Butterworth who provided the following story and photographs. Unfortunately, we don't have the names of the individual girls in the photographs.

In New Zealand and Australia, a competitive sport involving marching teams of young women grew up and became established during the Depression of the 1930s, when teams were formed to keep young women fit and healthy. The sport became more organised during the 1940s with a system of scoring developed to ensure teams could compete against one another. Points were deducted for lack of precisions, dressing, movement and length of pace. At its peak, marching competitions drew large crowds of spectators.

Teams marched not only in competitions but also frequently appeared in parades and social occasions such as blossom festivals, agricultural shows and car racing events.

In September 1960 an article in the Tobruk Echo advertised canvassed interest in forming a marching girls' troupe. However only one girl, Mary Lowe, showed any interest. Undeterred, in July 1961 another attempt was made. This time it was made clear that a Rats of Tobruk Marching Girls group would be formed. The Echo called for a chaperone and girls 6years old and above. Approximately 20 girls and their parents attended the meeting at Tobruk House and in September 1961 three teams were formed. They were to be named the Tobrukettes.

The groups were The Midsets, aged 6 to 10 years, the Juniors, aged 12 to 15 and the Seniors for those older than 15.

Their uniform was a Macleod of Harris tartan skirt, white shirt, red vest and black tie with white boots and Glengarry headware.

By November 1961 they has two instructors – Elaine Blair for the younger girls and Margaret Ruffin for the Seniors. Practice was on Monday evenings at Tobruk House and Saturday afternoons in the Alexandra Gardens.

The original girls chosen to represent the Rats of Tobruk were:

Jan Hardie	Pamela Meany	Janet Black
Judy Prince	Gail Blackman	Ruth Loury
Pat Parker	Susan Cox	Janis Leeden
Helen Grant	Shirley Sandman	



Wendy Leeden	Phylis Parker
Susan Newman	Rhonda Cunningham
Karen Rainsbury	Cheryl Cunningham



They put on their first display in Queenscliff at the Rats picnic on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1962. They performed regularly at half time at North Melbourne home games at Arden Street. They would march with the Pipes and Drums in the "Old Buffers Association" Parade in South Melbourne to raise funds and also participated in a massed marching girls display at the Royal Melbourne Show.

In November 1962 the Midsets won their first ever medals, placing third in the Best Team section.

Several years later 'Rat' Ron Ballard and his wife took over the tutoring of the girls and in May 1967 the Junior team won 3 gold medals at the Cheltenham competitions – 1<sup>st</sup> in Display, 1<sup>st</sup> in March Past and 1<sup>st</sup> in Best Team. At the same competition the Midsets won a gold medal coming 1<sup>st</sup> in the March Past section.



That year Gordon Bramley's wife Marjorie became the Chaperone (pictured here). Susan Bollard and Lorraine Bramley joined the senior team and went on to tutor the younger girls.

Over the ensuing years the girls were very successful, winning many medals and competing at National titles in Adelaide, Brisbane and Sydney.



*Members of the three teams of Rats of Tobruk Marching Girls, pictured above with Ron Barassi, whose father was killed in Tobruk*

As the girls got older interest waned, as did the general interest in the Marching Girls concept and by 1971 there was only a Midset team and the groups folded.

Two other activities also attracted the interest of Rats' daughters around this time. There was an annual Debutante Ball held at Tobruk house and we are also aware of a Country Dancing troupe pictured here. If you have any memories or photographs of either of these activities, we'd love to feature them in a future edition of the THN.



## THE SCRAP IRON FLOTILLA

In this issue we sadly record the death of Leading Seaman Melville (Mel) McMillan, the last veteran of the fabled Scrap Iron Flotilla. Mel was just a few months short of his 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday and in 1941 had served on both HMAS Stuart and Vampire.

No story of the Tobruk siege is complete without mention of the important role played by the navy. As many a siege veteran would say, "without the navy, there would have been no Tobruk."

Upon their arrival in the Mediterranean in late 1940, Nazi Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels had ridiculed the Australian ships. He labelled them a consignment of scrap iron and mocked them for their lack of size, speed, and armament. His words, although intended to be derogatory, were accurate, as the destroyers were aged, having been constructed in 1918.

The Scrap Iron Flotilla was pitted against the finest aircraft of the Luftwaffe and the fastest ships of the Italian Fleet. However, what Goebbels did not mention was the spirit of the men who crewed these ships of scrap iron. Goebbels neglected the mindset of these men, who took the taunt and happily christened their ships as part of the Scrap Iron Flotilla. They took the insult from Hitler's most zealous follower and made it their own.

In April 1941, as the Allied Forces were digging in for the long haul, there was the problem of how to obtain supplies, as well as providing reinforcements and the evacuation of the injured. The answer to the dilemma came from the seaward side of Tobruk, which had not been surrounded by Axis forces and could be used to resupply Tobruk. Thus began the 'Tobruk Ferry Service'.

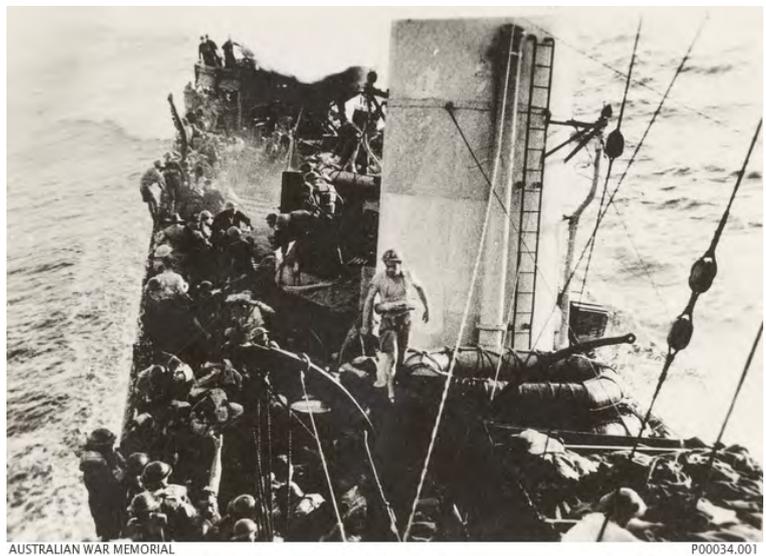
On many occasions, the 'Scrap Iron Flotilla' consisting of the Stuart, Waterhen, Vampire, Voyager and the Vendetta, along with numerous Allied ships, made the perilous journey from Alexandria and Mersa Matruh to Tobruk, laden with ammunition, medical supplies and food. They would race along the coastline wary of bombers, mines and enemy ships.

When they reached their goal of Tobruk, the dangers did not cease, for the perils that they encountered at sea were just as great in the harbour of Tobruk. While the ships docked at Tobruk, supplies were swiftly removed from the ships and replaced with wounded soldiers before they refuelled and headed back to Alexandria.

In September 1941, the destroyers, except for HMAS Waterhen which had been lost, returned to Australia to undergo their first refit since before 1939.

These ships were vitally important, an integral part of the story of holding out against the siege, and their crews displayed acts of courage, bravery, and honour. They are well worth remembering.

*The Australian W Class Destroyer HMAS Waterhen takes water over her bow after she has been crippled by German dive bombers while en route to Tobruk. The Waterhen sank the following day, 30 June 1941.*



## LOOKING FOR HAROLD

ROTA was recently contacted by member, Rod Tingate, whose father VX1596 Thomas Rex Tingate served in Tobruk alongside another young soldier, NX58428 Harold Ramsay Cazneaux, in 9<sup>th</sup> Div. Signals.

Rod informed me that whilst going through his father Rex's photo album during lockdown, he had come across a photo of Harold, and also a photograph of his grave. Sadly, Harold had died in an accident in Tobruk during the 1941 siege. Fortunately, Rod's dad had written details on the back of the photos and Rod had rung to ask if we could perhaps assist in locating a member of the Cazneaux family as he was very keen to return the photographs to them.

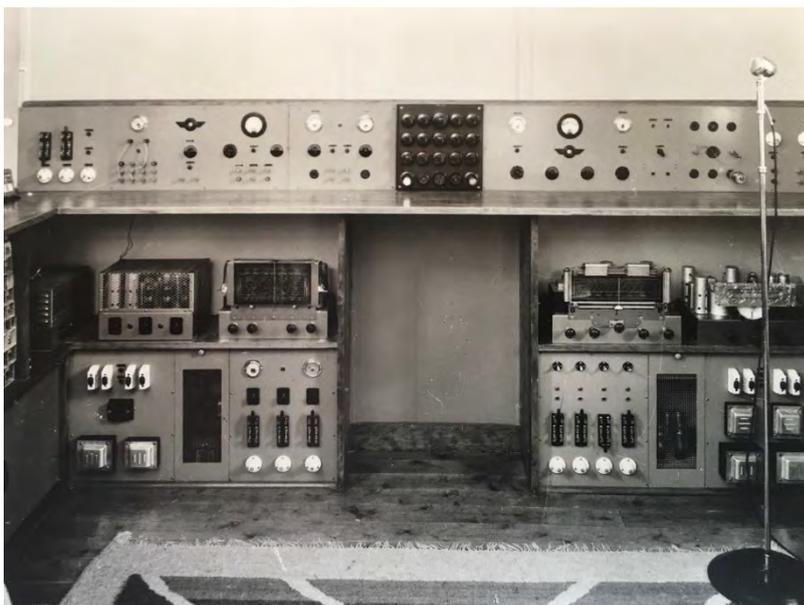
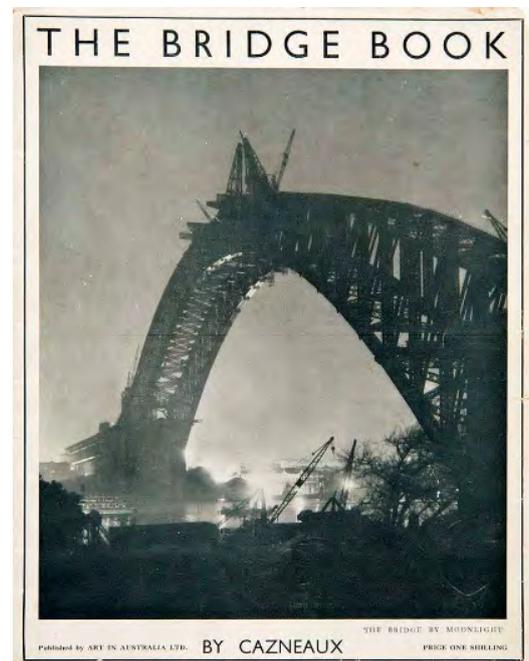
Despite this request seemingly being like the proverbial 'looking for a needle...' the association has had similar requests in the past and sometimes we have been able to 'connect' people through posting a 'Looking for..' segment in the THN, and so the search began! A quick Google of the Cazneaux name revealed that young Harold's father, Harold snr., was one of Australia's great photographers; a pioneer whose style had an indelible impact on the development of photographic history in Australia.

Harold P. Cazneaux had created some of the most memorable images of the early twentieth century, but during the war years, the possibility of exhibiting widely and internationally gradually wound down. Materials shortages impeded his practice, but it was the loss of young Harold in Tobruk 1941 and, in 1943, also his son-in-law Hugh, which distressed him terribly.

But our story doesn't end there.

With a tip from Rod, our investigation of Rat of Tobruk Harold R Cazneaux somehow led us to his nephew, Dick Smith. After emailing Dick to ask if he would like to have the photograph being offered by Rod, ROTA received the following wonderful reply.

*"At the present time I am writing my autobiography and in it I credit my Uncle Harold for getting me into electronics and starting the business*



Dick Smith's Uncle Harold's room from whence came his interest in electronics

*When I was a young boy of about 5 years of age, I would go over to my Grandpa's place (Harold Cazneaux Senior) and if I was being good, and a little bored, I would be given the key to Harold's room. Harold had left for Tobruk and his parents had closed up the room, waiting for him to come back. Of course, they were completely destroyed when he died.*

*Five years later, when I was allowed to have the key to Harold's room, I could fiddle with all the electrical bits and pieces (have a look at the photograph) and that started my interest in electronics, which was the reason for starting Dick Smith Electronics.*

The story is in the book which comes out in November.



I would love to have a photograph of Harold, and also a photograph of the grave site. My wife Pip and I have always wanted to get to the grave site in Tobruk, but we think we have left it too late – it is such a risky place to visit. My Aunt Jean (my mother's sister and Harold's sister) did actually go to the grave site many, many years ago.



We would greatly appreciate it if you can pass on our details and a copy of this email to Rod Tingate.

It was quite extraordinary, given the timing of Rod's initial phone call, to discover that Dick Smith was Harold's nephew and had given Harold much credit in the book he is writing.

Rod was just incredibly pleased to discover that someone from Harold's family was interested in receiving the photos shown here, and we suspect that his dad, Thomas, who had held onto those images for so many years, would have been chuffed also. The photos have now been forwarded to Dick, who was very appreciative to receive them.

Many thanks to Rod. ROTA was pleased to be able to help out.



*You remember Harold Cazneaux who died in Tobruk? This is an enlarged picture sent back by his father (late AIF 14) to the boys in the section. Jack May and Ernie King built this grave from scrap out of the town. Comparing it to the other, plainer graves, you can imagine how his people appreciated the boys work. Rep.*



*To The Section  
Cpl. H.R. Cazneaux  
9 Div Signals  
H. R. F.  
Tobruk  
Dow. Sep. 14. 1941  
From H. Cazneaux  
  
from Rep.*

## ROTA EMAIL REQUEST FROM ITALY... Christiana Faccini in search of her grandfather

Readers may not be surprised to learn that as the number of veterans is diminishing, ROTA receives an increasing number of 'looking for' requests from far and wide, and this one from our recent email correspondence is a good example.

Last month we received an email from Cristiana Facchini in Italy, requesting information about her grandfather, Stanislaw Janik, born in 1910. As Cristiana described it, 'I am trying to collect every clue to rebuild my grandfather's history'.

After coming across the web site of the Polish Museum and Archives, Cristiana discovered that her grandfather was a Rat of Tobruk and, after arriving in Fremantle on 9 December 1947, he had settled in Tasmania and had died there.

Cristiana dearly hoped for any information and perhaps even a photograph of her grandad. ROTA and our good friends at the Polish Museum and Archives were able to assist and provided information, including the sought-after photograph of Stanislaw, to a very grateful Cristiana, who until then knew very little of what had happened to her grandfather, or even where he had died.



*"How can I thank you properly?? I am crying...40 years in wondering where he could have died...40 years of my life asking for information everywhere...Forever grateful" (She posted on FB)*

The Polish Museum and Archives does an amazing job in researching the Polish soldier immigrants who came to Australia post-war and we are delighted to work with them whenever possible.

In fact their exhibition at Tobruk House in 2019 was in a large part the inspiration for our own exhibition which is currently being displayed in many places around the country and earlier this year we hosted the book launch for the memoirs of a Polish Rat.

ROTA takes much pleasure and pride in being able to connect people and the Polish Museum and Archives serves as a great resource and partner in this regard.

## EVERY MEMBER CAN BE A RECRUITER – SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY OFFER

### NO JOINING FEE, AS LITTLE AS \$2 PER MONTH MEMBERSHIP.

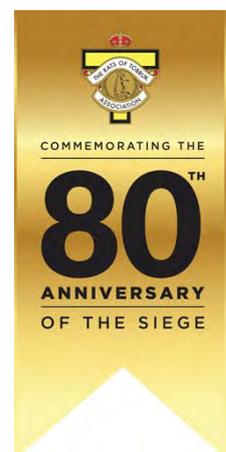
This 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year is quickly approaching the end. COVID-19 has made this a difficult time for many and the famous words 'No Surrender' could not be more apt.

As part of its commemoration activities this year, the association is undertaking a membership drive.

For a limited time, the family of members (wives, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, grandchildren, nieces and nephews), can join the association with no joining fee. In addition, the \$30 annual subscription fee payable with the application, will apply to 2022. This means that the new member can benefit from up to 15 months of membership for \$2 per month, depending on when they join.

To take advantage of this special offer, simply write the words 'No Surrender' on the Application Form (see page 26).

Offer ends 31 December 2021.



## CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON 2021

This has been such a difficult year for most people, for many reasons, as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In this environment, celebrations become even more special, perhaps none more so than Christmas. When the ROTA Committee began to plan for the annual Christmas luncheon this year it soon became obvious that there was no certainty that it would be possible to hold this special activity in 2021.

However, the committee has decided that, if at all possible, there may be some form of a casual Christmas Luncheon at Tobruk House, pending government restrictions at that time. So please keep that date (Sunday December 5) in your diary. We will provide details of the plan in the next (December) issue of the THN. Stay tuned!

In the meantime, stay safe and stay well.

2021 DECEMBER						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 ?	2 ?	3 ?	4 ?
5 <i>ROTA XMAS Lunch</i>	6 ?	7 ?	8 ?	9 ?	10 ?	11 ?
12 ?	13 ?	14 ?	15 ?	16 ?	17 ?	18 ?
19 ?	20 ?	21 ?	22 ?	23 ?	24 ?	25 
26 ?	27 ?	28 ?	29 ?	30 ?	31 	

## AFFILIATE MEMBERSHIP – 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY CONGRATULATIONS

A little over ten years ago, the veteran members of the Rats of Tobruk Association, Victorian Branch, decided to open membership to their descendants and others. Since then, the organisation has grown to well over 500 Affiliate Members located across Australia and a few from overseas.

The following affiliate members have achieved 10 years membership. Their continued support of the association in this way is greatly appreciated.

Wendy Anderson	Alva Anderson	Alan Baldwin	Dennis Bull
Margaret Burchall	Ken Butterworth	Lois Cairns	Graeme Caple
Kathleen Carter	Tony Codd	Kevin Conlon	Teresa Connelly
Alan Curry	Alastair Davison	Bernard Eccles	Suzanne Forbes
Tiffany Forbes	Glenda Garde	Ray Gaunt	Beverley Gittings
Sharon Urquhart	Tony Hampton	Laraine Henderson	Bob Horton
David Hynd	Mirian Jagger	Phyllis Kenfield	Leslie Kenfield
Mike Kiernan	Andrew MacFarlane	Ellen MacKinnon	Heather MacKinnon
Pauline MacKinnon	Peter Marburg	Ian Marr	Ann Marr
Graeme Masters	Lynette Masters	Gregory Matthies	Kathleen Matthies
Rayda Noble	Alan Nurthen	Marjorie Olive	Stuart Oliver
Coral Reynolds	Colin Robertson	Gayle Sherwell	John Spring
Jeanette Tarascio	Suzanne Glendenning		

## NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members to ROTA:

Keith Wallace Warwick Miller Merren Saunders Carmel O'Keeffe  
 Ian Jackson Michael Kroger Emily Kroger Simon Kroger Jack Kroger  
 Edward Kroger Andrew Kroger William Roberts Mike Fogarty  
 Lindsay Girvan Kevin O'Rourke



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

## 9<sup>TH</sup> DIVISION IN THE UK PRIOR TO TOBRUK

As well as sending us the photos of Harry Cazneau, (story on p9) Rod Tingate has also sent some of these gems from his father's collection, which show members of the AIF in the UK before entering Tobruk.

The 9th Division was the fourth new infantry division raised by the Australian army after the outbreak of World War Two. It was first formed in the United Kingdom during 1940, using one of the 6th Division units, the 18th Brigade, as its core. A second Brigade was formed from other Australian units then in Britain. Major General H.D.Wynter was appointed as commander. Some shuffling of component units occurred, and by early 1941, when it arrived in North Africa the 9th Division consisted of the 20th, 24th and 26th Brigades. In February of 1941 Major General Leslie Morshead became commander.

*(Editor's note – the captions are what is written on the back of each photograph)*



*At the start of a route march in the rain. UK 1940*

*Tommy Johnston on the milk for a change. Our workshop in Colchester UK. 1940*

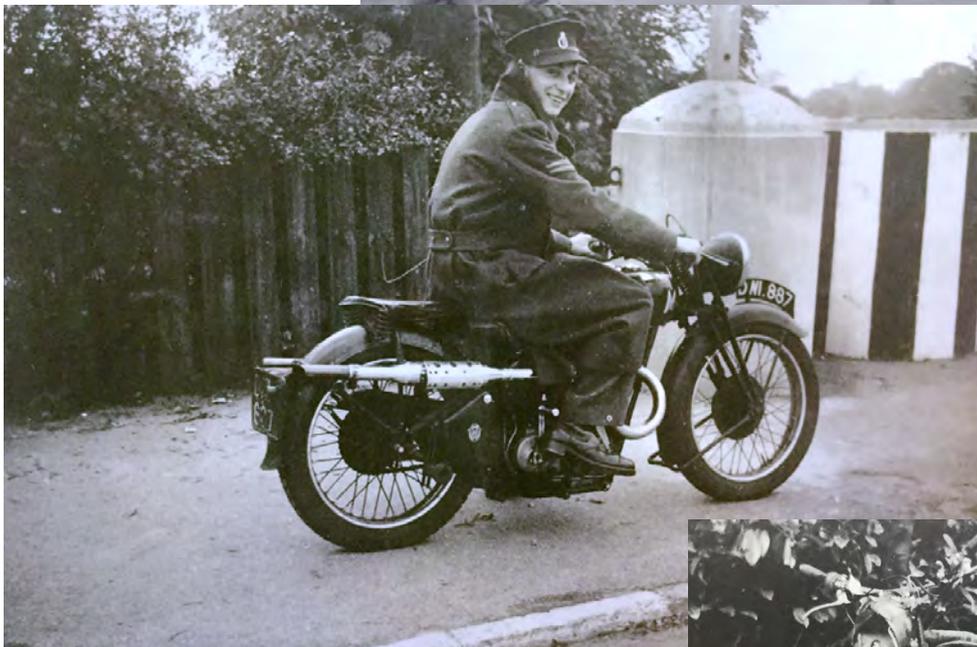


*Some of the boys in our luxurious workshop (ex stable). L Tommy Johnston, Wally Middleton, Keith Eady, Ernie King, Ross Allison, Jack Arnott, Harry North, and Rex Tingate. I took this photo and just managed to get into the picture.*



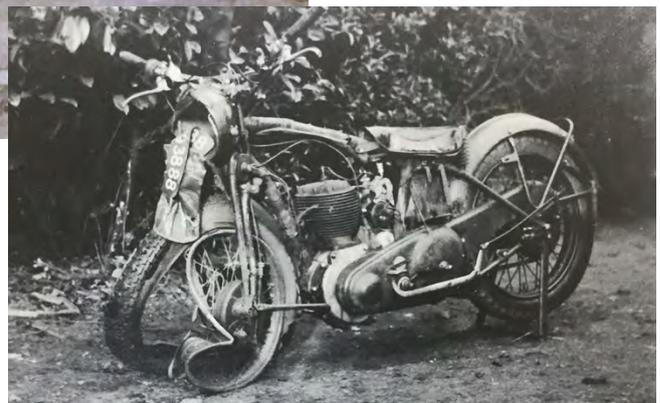
Then the Princess Royal visited our billets. (Princess Mary/ Countess of Harewood.) 1940

Rex on left, Wally Middleton, and Ned Chandler. Self-taken in UK 1940



Cpl Marr, Royal corps signals. On the Matchless while at Prestatyn. Wales. A canal bridge on the way to Liverpool.

1940. A dispatch riders bike ready for "M" section. The rider who went through a car's windscreen reckons he's the unluckiest chap ever... (3rd smash over here). Had a broken wrist, dislocated shoulder and cuts etc. I thought he was rather lucky.





1941. At Stirling Castle with Wally Middleton. Wallace monument in the background.

1941. Rex Tingate. No, it's not a cattle truck! (SS Franconia)



Feb 1941. Some of the Section en route to the East. (Rex back row 3L)

**POST SCRIPT:**

In the meantime, a section of the 9<sup>th</sup> Division was formed in Tobruk, with soldiers coming directly from Australia, including what became part of the 2/32 Battalion.

Joining the two groups together in North Africa was not straightforward due to the very different experiences of each. The challenge is well described by Bill Tolliday in his memoirs:

"We also were told that the rest of the battalion, Headquarter company, AB&C companies were coming across from England to join us. ... When the battalion joined us there was a bit of friendly, (for a start) bickering. They were telling us all about the Battle of Britain which they had won. We called them the Battle of Britainers and they called us the Palestine Militia....

Eventually we got to doing marches with the Battle of Britainers. And they had been training in England of course and had trained on cobblestone streets or asphalt streets, so they're used to doing short paces while we were used to stepping it out in the sand. So when they would be in the lead they would be taking very short paces, and they would be getting quite a bit of flak from the boys in Don company – "When are you going to start marching? Can't you get your legs apart? Are they stuck together? What's the problem?"

Eventually they would change around the company that would lead. B then C then Don company. As soon as (our) Captain Joshua got to the front he would head across the desert and then of course you'd get the other comments – "Slow down in front, slow down in front. Where the hell do you think you're going? Get back on the road." And after that sort of thing, at night in the canteen there'd be all sorts of nasty remarks passed to one another, and quite often a fight would even start.

And I think eventually the army could see it wasn't going to work so they had to split us up. They decided that Don company would be split, one platoon would go to C company of the Battle of Britainers, and a couple of other sections would be put into A and B company. We refused to move. Captain Joshua came through and said to each man in turn "Private So and so, pick up your gear and move across to C company or wherever". "Not going Sir." "Right you are then, you're under arrest." "Righto Sir."

He went to every man, and no one would move, so that left him with a bit of a problem so he went and saw the Brigadier and told the Brigadier that no one would move, what was he to do about it? He came back with a solution that if we didn't move over, we would all be sent to different units throughout Palestine. No two men would go to the same unit and no brothers would go to the same unit. Now we had the Foster brothers, the Cleary brothers, the Benton brothers, the Taylor brothers, quite a number and we couldn't afford that, so we moved over."

## STORY TIME

In this age of apps, social media and all things 'virtual', sometimes it's good to return to something familiar and ageless....books! Nothing beats the anticipation of waiting to find out what happens next and then turning a (real) page to find out.

So, to all of the parents and grandparents amongst our members who may be looking for something to do with little kids, you may like to look for this picture story book. Written by Mark Wilson in 2018, it is a beautifully written and moving story; one which all family members may enjoy.

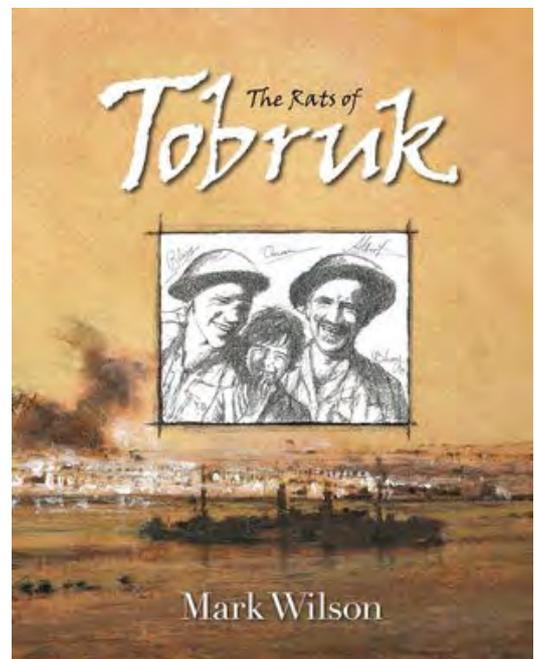
*When a Bedouin boy, Omar, is separated from his family in Libya during WW2, he makes his way to the coast to look for them. Tired and hungry, Omar is taken in and cared for by two Australia soldiers, Bluey and Albert, as they struggle to survive during the Siege of Tobruk.*

*When Bluey disappears during a patrol, Omar is determined to find him, and uses all his knowledge of the desert as he searches for his friend. This is a story of friendship found in the most unusual of places, and a boy's determination against all the odds.*

Wilson also includes a short two-page history lesson about the Rats of Tobruk, the battles fought, and lives lost, amongst the end papers of the book.

The book is well worth a look and is available here:

<https://www.booktopia.com.au/the-rats-of-tobruk-mark-wilson/book/9781922081711.html>



## WARRNAMBOOL'S LAST RAT OF TOBRUK Story by Mike Kiernan

Recently, my wife and I visited Warrnambool for a few days. (We live in Bendigo, so there were no COVID-19 restrictions preventing this at the time.) We were having a look at various war memorials located next to the local RSL club, when we noticed a paved section consisting of bricks with veteran details engraved on them. One brick caught our attention, it had the words 'Rat of Tobruk'. It was the only brick identified in this way. It was for Digger Smith (VX46676).

When we returned home, I decided to do a bit of research to see what I could find out about Digger Smith. This is what I found.

Ronald Stanley 'Digger' Smith was born in Elsternwick in 1919. He most likely grew up in the area, as he enlisted at Caulfield on 29 July 1940.

After initial training he eventually joined the 2<sup>nd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Australian General Hospital. He was with this unit during his time at Tobruk. He drove ambulances and worked as a stand-in theatre nurse.



After returning to Australia, he was one of the early members of the Victorian Branch of the Association. His badge number was 1055.

At some stage, Digger Smith moved to Warrnambool where he established a sawmill, in partnership with his brother and a neighbour. He worked at the sawmill for 70 years. He married and had four children.

During this time, he also became friends with fellow Rat of Tobruk, Jack Caple (VX33860, 2<sup>nd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> Battalion), who was living in Warrnambool at the time. Jack moved to Melbourne in 2012, which left Digger Smith as the district's sole remaining Tobruk Veteran.



Digger Smith passed away on the 17 June 2015, at the age of 95. Jack Caple returned to Warrnambool for the funeral.

Digger was proud of his war service, but it was only in the last few years that he began to talk about his experiences.

He was a man of many talents, who could make, repair, fix or invent just about anything.

Ronald Stanley 'Digger' Smith is sadly missed by the local branch of the RSL and the community in general.

## WHAT SHOULD OUR FUTURE LOOK LIKE?



We have had a number of responses to this question and will continue to collate the thoughts and suggestions, to be presented to the wider membership in due course. We would like as many people as possible to provide input so please put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboards) with your thoughts.

## VETERAN UPDATE

We are pleased to provide this report on some of our special Rats.

**Don Simpson**

Don is traveling well and looking forward to coming out of lockdown but has been keeping himself active with Zumba classes in his nursing home.

**Joe Darley**

Joe is good as always, spending a lot of time in bed as he calls "hibernating" though the winter. He also made special note of saying he still isn't taking any medications and hopes this will continue for his 100th in January

**John Campbell**

John is recovering at home after a couple of small strokes which has hampered his speech, but he overall is on the mend and is writing a new chapter in his biography with his daughter.

**Hautrie Crick**

Hautrie is traveling tenfold better than he has been in the past and is fed up with lockdown. But His carer Anne has assured me that he's running the show at his nursing home.

**Geoff Pullman**

When Lachlan spoke to Geoff recently, he was in good spirits but missing visits from his daughters but sends his regards to everyone.

**Tom Pritchard**

Our newest centenarian Tom says he is fine, apart from the Tigers (Richmond AFL team) being out of the finals, and is thrilled to have had his second job.

## STOP PRESS: NEW LAPEL BADGES FOR 80<sup>TH</sup> YEAR ANNIVERSARY.



The committee has approved a new merchandise offering. We are excited that a lapel badge/stick pin has been designed. It is based on well known the original medal design, pictured below (left). It will be 25mm in diameter and produced in metal with an antique bronze appearance.

We don't yet have a finished example to show you, but we wanted to give members the first opportunity of obtaining one for themselves.

This is a limited offer at a great price of \$15.00 incl postage. Please contact our Merchandising Officer, Graeme Clifford: 0418 882 323 to reserve your order. (Note it is not yet on our Merchandise order form)



Polished 3D raised





## A SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY FOR OUR WEST AUSTRALIAN MEMBERS

The multiple award-winning National Anzac Centre and Princess Royal Fortress at 67 Forts Road in Albany WA host a range of travelling exhibitions throughout the year. We are thrilled that they have chosen to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk with our 24-panel exhibition. In addition to the panels there is a screen playing John Turner's Rats of Tobruk song with our specially curated Tobruk slide show.

The exhibit can be seen at the Princess Royal Fortress Barracks Building until February 13, 2022.



## THE BIRTHDAY YOU HAVE WHEN YOU CAN'T HAVE A BIRTHDAY

Members will be pleased to know that much-loved veteran member Tom Pritchard celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in style on August 24. When we checked in with Tommy a few days later, he was still recovering and Covid didn't seem to have 'gotten in the way' at all.

As well as numerous phone calls from friends and family, Tom also took deliveries from neighbours, Dan Murphy and even a special parcel from Richmond FC, which included a birthday card signed by players.

After an online catch-up with family members, Tom and son David then settled down to a hearty steak and a 'nice drop of red' (or perhaps two?) for dinner. Tom usually avoids the limelight but seemed to enjoy the fuss this time. Well, it's not every day that you crack the ton!

Interestingly, a mention of his birthday on our Facebook page resulted in numerous 'likes' and comments; more than anything else that has ever been posted by us. Happy 100<sup>th</sup> Tommy and here's to the next one mate.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

AWM2017.520.1.1975

### OUR FACEBOOK ARTICLE ABOUT TOMMY PRITCHARD FROM AUGUST 24:

#### HAPPY 100th BIRTHDAY

The president, committee and members of ROTA send their sincere birthday wishes to Association stalwart and icon Tommy Pritchard who reaches a century today!

Below is Tommy's story from our living legends series

Tom Pritchard was born in Portland, Victoria in 1921, but grew up and attended school in Box Hill. Tom's father, who had been a miner in England, served in France in WW1 with the 1st Australian Tunnelling Coy and was involved in the famous battle of Hill 60 on the Western Front. After leaving school at 14, Tom started work in Melbourne with a wholesale tobacco and 'fancy goods' importing business, and he worked there until he joined the army in 1940.

With France having fallen, the war appeared to be going badly at the time, and so Tom enlisted with two friends, despite being underage. Like many other young men at that time, he had put his age up and although Tom's mother wasn't too pleased, his father didn't stand in his way. Tom was assigned to the 2/5th Field Ambulance, a unit that was eventually attached to the 18th Infantry Brigade.

Training at Puckapunyal from June to October involved first aid and stretcher bearing procedures, and whilst admitting that before this time he could barely 'stick a band aid on', this training held Tom in good stead for what was to follow. Most of their officers, who were all well respected, were doctors. Embarking from Princes Pier on the Mauritania in October 1940, the 2/5th eventually found themselves in Tobruk, via Bombay, Palestine and Egypt.

Tom was assigned to an ambulance and his duties involved collecting the wounded and taking them to the dressing stations and to the hospital at the harbour. This was no mean feat, as it meant having to balance and hold onto 4 or 5 stretchers in the ambulance, in an effort to steady them, while travelling on terrible roads; a journey which would sometimes take an hour or two.

The 'ambulance', unlike the ambulances of today, consisted merely of a driver, a stretcher bearer, blankets and a basic first aid kit. Sadly, many wounded soldiers did not survive this arduous trip.

At the beginning of the siege, the shelling and the air raids were relentless, day in and day out, and the living conditions were extremely trying. Water was rationed and Tom has vivid memories of eating 'goldfish', better known as herrings in tomato sauce! He was not exactly sorry to leave, when, as ordered by General Blamey, the 18th Brigade left Tobruk and rejoined the rest of the 7th Division in Syria in August 1941. The 2/5th then spent a number of months engaged in garrison duties at Aleppo in Syria before returning to Australia to prepare for the war against Japan.

Under depressing and very different conditions to those encountered in the desert of Tobruk, in August 1942, Tom and the 2/5th found themselves in Milne Bay, New Guinea. As the roads were impassable, the wounded were often evacuated by water instead. Supplies for the troops were taken up the coast and any wounded were brought back on schooners to Milne Bay.

After contracting malaria for a second time, Tom was evacuated back to Australia. He was reunited with the unit for more training in Queensland before taking part in the Markham and Ramu Valley campaigns, which also involved the battle for Shaggy Ridge, a particularly treacherous place, consisting of dense jungle and precipitous slopes.

At one stage in this campaign, Tom and his unit were meant to parachute in (for which they had received only rudimentary training), an 'interesting' thought for someone who had never been in a plane before, but luckily it didn't come to pass!



*Tom's passion for the Richmond Tigers is well known by all familiar with him. This picture was clearly not taken in 2021 when Richmond found themselves out of the finals having won three of the last four.*

After these campaigns, the 2/5th Field Ambulance spent time back in Australia before embarking for the last time, in early 1945, for Balikpapan in Borneo and it was here that Tom found himself when the war finally ended.

Twelve months after the war, Tom married his sweetheart Gwen and settled into family life raising 4 children. He had gone back to work for his previous employer, but eventually left there to work for an electricity supplier in Box Hill. After about 6 years the Pritchard family moved to Creswick and Tom found work in Ballarat with the SEC. He also worked in Hamilton before returning to Melbourne, where he continued to work for the SEC until he retired.

Tom was a member of the Rats Committee for many years and is still a most valued member of our Rats of Tobruk Association family, with a wicked sense of humour!



# ROTA MERCHANDISE

See Order Form on page 27 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



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



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



ROTA 'BASEBALL' CAP  
\$20



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



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



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



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

## RATS OF TOBRUK 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 veterans, 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. Thank you to all those who have contributed. Nevertheless, we are not there yet. 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 friends, 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 Ally Pekin, Planned Giving, RCH Foundation (03 9345 6389 or email: [Ally.Pekin@rch.org.au](mailto:Ally.Pekin@rch.org.au))

## NOTICE: ROTA SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE FOR PAYMENT ON 1<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2022

Affiliate members are reminded that this year's subscription is due for payment on 1st January. The subscription remains at \$30 for 2022.

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

For payment information please refer to the 2022 Annual Subscription Payment Form on the next page.

If you are paying by EFT, ensure you include a unique reference such as your surname and membership no.

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

This is important for correct matching of payments, as bank deposits do not have adequate referencing. Payment can now be made using a credit or debit card. Please note that Tobruk Veterans and their wives or widows, are exempt from paying the annual subscription. Life and Honorary members are also exempt.







**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		
80 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Bar Mat	\$40				\$10		
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: \_\_\_\_\_

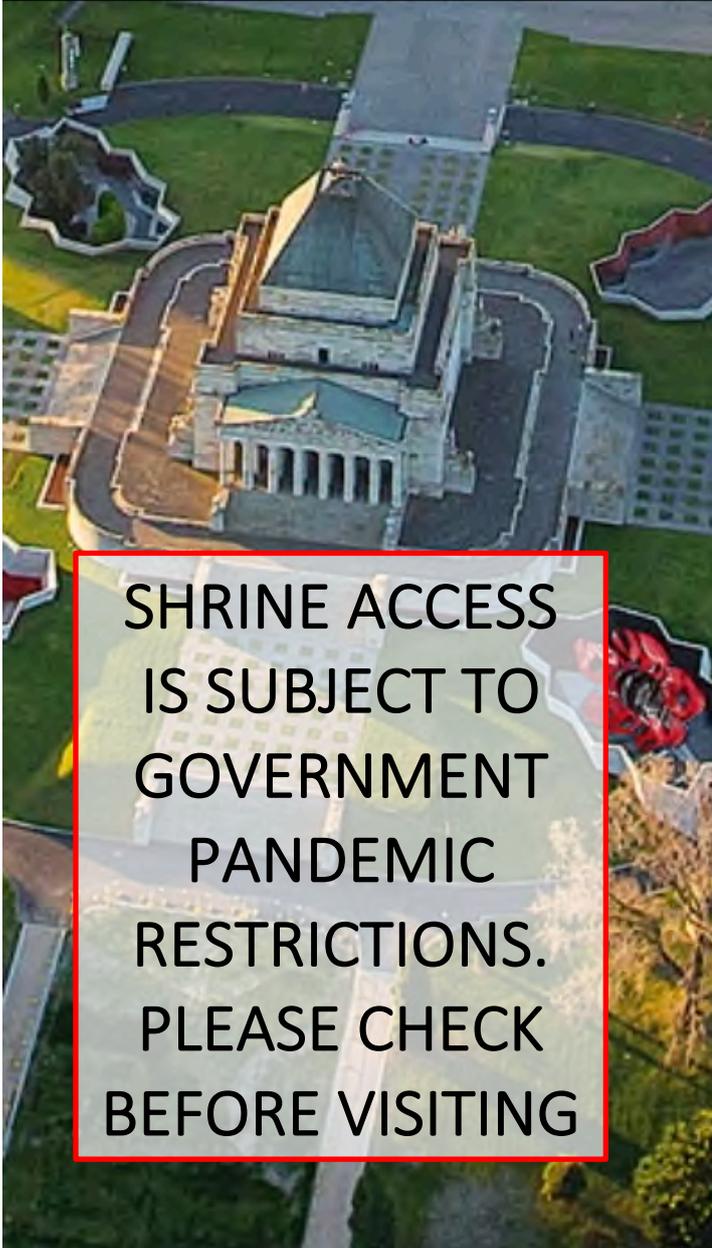
Suburb: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

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



SHRINE ACCESS IS SUBJECT TO GOVERNMENT PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS. PLEASE CHECK BEFORE VISITING

## 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.

## THE HISTORY OF THE SHRINE



Learn why the Shrine was built. Who built it and what inspired its design? Follow a timeline of the Shrine's history and view a gallery of historical photos.

## 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.

LAST POST – Every Sunday at 4.45PM



The Last Post Service is another reason to make a family visit to the Shrine on Sunday afternoons. This new moving ceremony features a piper, bugler and Shrine Guard in historic uniform.