



# TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION



THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION  
NEUROSCIENCE FELLOWSHIP FUND

# RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC.

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[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  
CALL 0432 232 502

Month / Date	Event Description
June 24 2022	General Meeting
October 28 2022	General Meeting
December TBA	General Meeting / Xmas Luncheon

Please note: The committee is currently working on some additional dates for activities for the balance of the year and will provide these in the next issue of the THN.

**Patron: Bill Gibbins**

**Committee of Management:**

**President – Heather Macfarlane**

**Vice President – Bruce Bingham**

**Secretary – Lachlan Gaylard**

**Treasurer – Graeme Clifford**

Other Committee Members –

Tony Smith, Ian Marr,  
Karolina Sevcikova, Tony Codd,  
Marlene Bingham, Kelly-Ann McKinnis,  
Stuart Tolliday

TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS

Deadlines

Editorial and Advertising

NEXT ISSUE: AUGUST 2022

DEADLINE: JULY 4

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will not be published.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, Lachlan Gaylard

Editor: Stuart Tolliday

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## VALE

THEY SHALL GROW NOT OLD, AS WE THAT ARE LEFT GROW OLD;  
AGE SHALL NOT WEARY THEM, NOR THE YEARS CONDEMN.  
AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN AND IN THE MORNING,  
WE WILL REMEMBER THEM.  
**LEST WE FORGET**

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

**FOSTER, Charles Lawrence (Affiliate member, nephew of Thomas Trenkner NX9080) Nov. 2021 Aged 77**

## RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC.

### President's Message – June 2022

Dear ROTA members and friends,

The Rats of Tobruk Association has had a very successful start to 2022. The new ROTA committee have worked tirelessly to produce two wonderful days at Tobruk House.

Approximately 250 people attended the Commemorative Service held on Tobruk Sunday. We were extremely fortunate to have veterans, Honourable dignitaries, Polish representatives, the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums, families, members, and friends in attendance, to commemorate and remember those who fell during the Siege of Tobruk. A wonderful afternoon tea was served in the Tobruk House.

ANZAC Day saw the "Rats Hall" open for watching the march on the "big screen" and for a BBQ lunch. This was well attended by veterans, families, friends, and new associations who were happy to be sharing their day with ROTA.

We were privileged once again to have the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums performing. The wonderful John Turner led us in his now familiar 'Rats of Tobruk' song. The highlight was the inaugural playing of 'On the road to Passchendaele' combining John Turner singing & on guitar, with the Rats Pipes and Drums. Truly a memorable and stirring rendition that I hope will become a regular on their play list.

During the day I revealed in my president's address the news from our Patron and owner of Tobruk House, Bill Gibbins, that during the coming three years we (ROTA) need to find ways to meet the ongoing costs of maintaining the property. Further details & discussions of our plans to achieve this will follow.

I was very thankful for the support shown on the day from many who took out memberships, made suggestions of contacts and ways to optimise the use of our very special home>.

Thanks to all those who have supported me with my early days as President of ROTA.

Good health, best wishes & regards to all.  
Sincerely,

Heather Macfarlane.  
President

## LOOKING FOR INFORMATION

Strictly speaking, this message received via our website is more about providing information. We hope that the owner of the hat can be reunited with it. - Ed

Hello,

My wife and I visited the Plas Newydd National Trust (UK) property at Anglesey today and while there we found a black woollen hat on a bench. On the hat is a metal badge of the Rats of Tobruk Association. We handed it in to the staff at the property. Hope this will help to find its owner.

Best wishes,

Alan and Jenny Smith



## Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums

Learner positions available  
Playing positions available



Pipers  
Playing members  
Learners

Drummers  
Playing Members  
Learner snare drum  
Learner tenor/bass drum

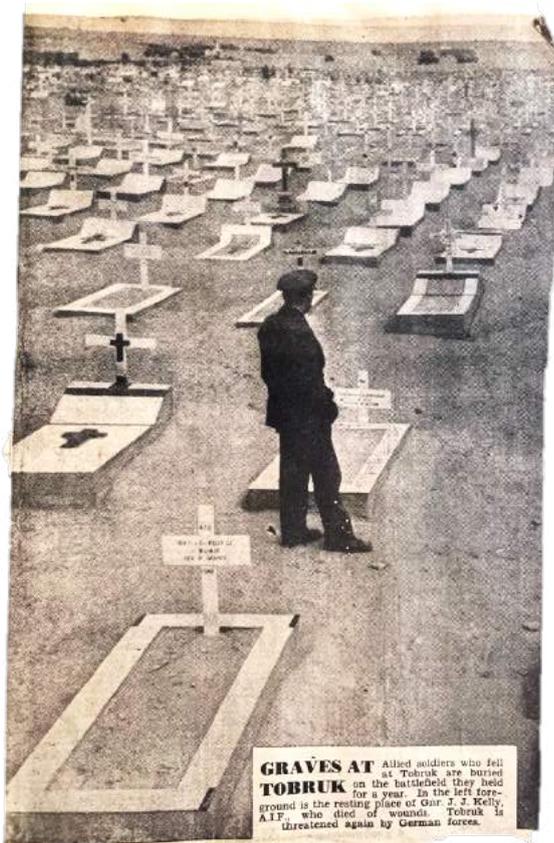
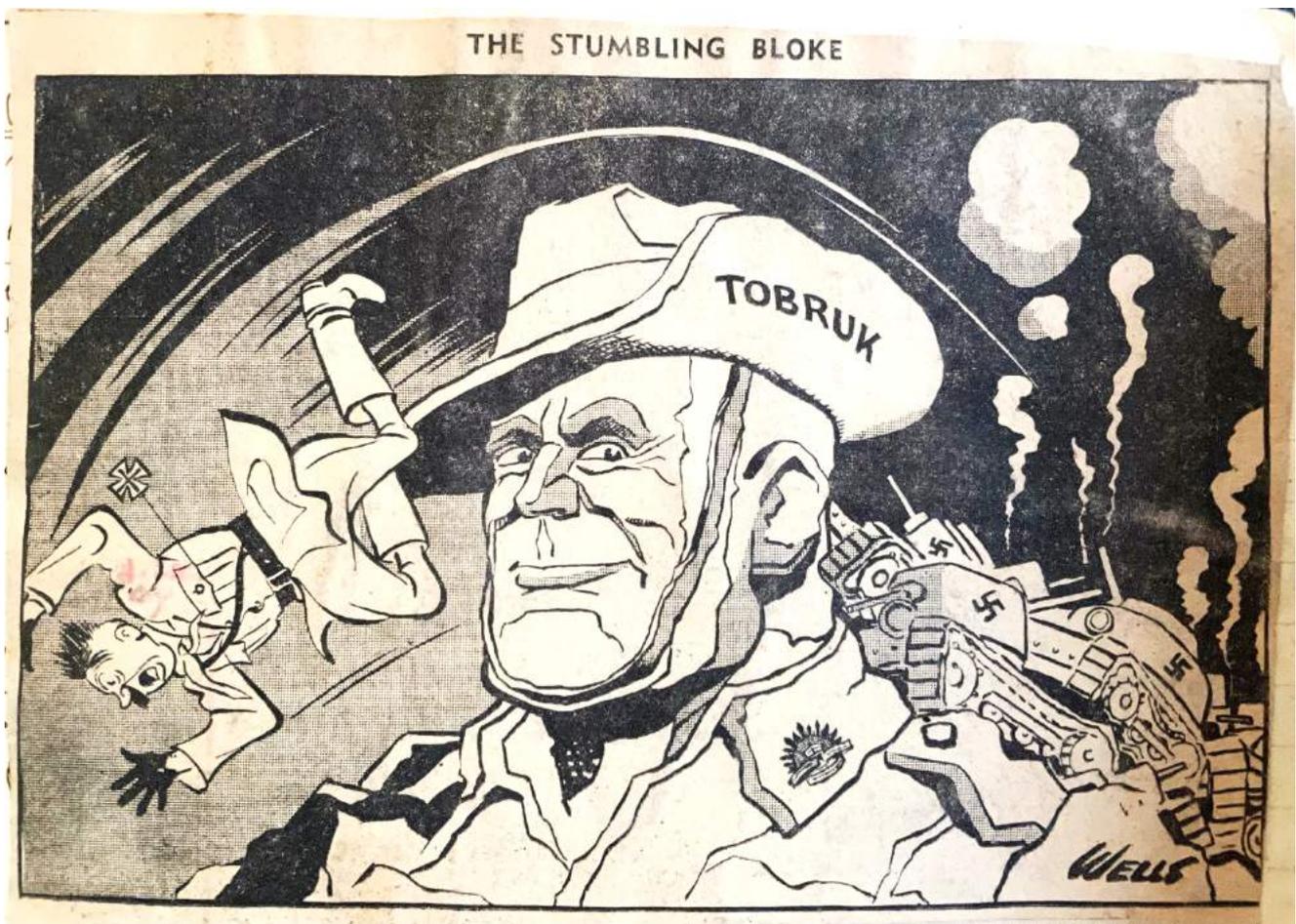
Play and perform in a friendly, layback atmosphere  
Tuition in a fully supportive environment  
Opportunity to perform internationally  
Opportunity for competition

Practice venue – MacLeod College, Carwarp St MacLeod, Vic 3085  
Contact the band 0411 598 738 [rotmpd@gmail.com](mailto:rotmpd@gmail.com)

Never regret wondering

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

As we commemorate the Siege of Tobruk and recognise its importance to the Allied war effort, this cartoon by Samuel Wells, the principle political cartoonist from the Melbourne Herald, sums it up rather well.



*"In desert plain they softly sleep.  
Across the foam their loved ones weep."*

This undated newspaper cutting from a wartime scrap-book is a stark reminder of the terrible cost of capturing and defending Tobruk. The caption suggests it could have been around May 1942, just prior to Rommel's second and ultimately successful attempt to recapture the port.

According to historian David Mitchellhill-Green, "the rapid capitulation of the British forces in just 24 hours in June 1942 was one of Britain's worst military disasters that decided the fate of Malta and Egypt, rocked the very foundation of Churchill's leadership and laid bare the inadequacy of British command and combined armed tactics."

To learn more about the complete story of Tobruk, see page 16 in this issue of the THN regarding David's new book *'Tobruk Fiercely Stand, or Fighting Fall'*.

**GRAVES AT TOBRUK** Allied soldiers who fell at Tobruk are buried on the battlefield they held for a year. In the left foreground is the resting place of Gair J. J. Kelly, A.I.F. who died of wounds. Tobruk is threatened again by German forces.

## TOBRUK SUNDAY 2022 - 81<sup>st</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK

Unlike last year, the weather gods were shining on Albert Park when Tobruk Sunday was held this year in the grounds of Albert Park Primary School. It was the first time that the commemorative service was conducted in Moubray St, and it proved to be a great success. The day has become so popular and well attended that we have outgrown Rats of Tobruk Reserve in Victoria Ave. and the 120 people in attendance were instead seated in a comfortable marquee in the schoolgrounds.



It was wonderful to see so many neighbours and passers-by drop by, and of course, the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums are always a splendid drawcard.



Dignitaries who attended included the Honorary Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Victoria, Andrzej Soszyński. Victorian Senator, Greg Mirabella and the Victorian Minister for Health and MLA for Albert Park, Martin Foley, Mayor of Port Phillip

Sadly, for the first time since Tobruk Sunday has been held, there were no siege veterans present as there were none who were well enough to attend. It should be remembered that all of our veterans are now aged over 100.



Secretary of 2/24 Bn. Alastair Davison was our MC for the day, and guest speaker and curator at the Shrine of Remembrance Neil Sharkey gave a brief history of the siege in his address. Wreaths were laid and ROTA President Heather Macfarlane gave the closing address which included the following moving sentiment –

“.. We are here to acknowledge the sacrifice, to remember the Rats’ fighting spirit of ‘No Surrender’, their mateship, the lives lived and the lives lost, the men who came home and those men who remained at Tobruk.”



After this moving service, everyone was invited back to the hall for a delicious afternoon tea, thanks to Karolina and her catering team. It is always most gratifying to observe our Rats ‘family’ of members old and new catching up, and to hear the hall full of lively chatter.

Of course any special event in Tobruk House is never complete without a performance by the band, who never fail to impress, and as the pipes and drums formed up in their customary circle to play, this really capped off a perfect day for us all.

Thanks to all involved in the planning and preparation, and to all attendees, especially to those who travelled from afar. Your participation really is much appreciated, and if you couldn’t make it this year, please consider attending in 2023. You won’t be disappointed.

## ANZAC DAY AT TOBRUK HOUSE 2022

We were blessed with another perfect autumn day on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> which resulted in large crowds for the first time since the pandemic. Tobruk House was open from 8am and welcomed members and friends throughout the day.

The Melbourne march was shown on the big screen and a casual lunch was served to the more than 80 people in attendance and coffee tea and drinks were available. Perhaps the highlight of the day was the special performance by the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums with special guest John Turner, presenting a new song "On The Road To Paschendaele". The lyrics told the story of the famous battle in WW1, set to pipe music by the band. John Turner, the writer and regular performer of our favourite sing-a-long The Rats of Tobruk, sang and played guitar. It is possibly the first guitar and bagpipe band combination ever and it was wonderfully performed and received.



ROTA President Heather Macfarlane welcomed everyone and spoke of the importance of Tobruk House in hosting these opportunities to get together, and some of the challenges we face in ensuring that we are able to continue the legacy of the Rats in this special place.



Many friendships were renewed and it was great to see the hall alive again on this special day.



## THE SPIRIT OF ANZAC – A SPEECH BY ROTA VICE PRESIDENT BRUCE BINGHAM

This speech was given at the 2022 ANZAC Day Dawn Service at the Community memorial monument at Bonnie Doon situated on the Maroondah Highway. The audience consisted of the local residents plus many school holiday visitors to the shores of Lake Eildon. (Est. 350+)

Today I would like to address the younger generation here today to bring home to them the Spirit of Anzac. We should know that the Spirit of Anzac was not created by mythical figure from the pages of history. The Anzac spirit was created by the flesh and blood of Australian men and women.

106 years ago, the Anzacs stormed ashore at Anzac Cove and in the next eight months, the Spirit of Anzac was created. After the withdrawal from Gallipoli, some of the men rejoined their horses in Egypt and went on to defeat the Turks or Ottoman Empire – we all know the Charge of the Light horse at Beersheba was instrumental in their defeat.

The majority of Anzacs were transferred to France and Belgium to what is now known as the Western Front. One of the first battles was Pozieres which was captured by the Australians. The three Divisions had 23,000 casualties in the six weeks, nearly as many as the eight months on Gallipoli This battle was instrumental in the Australians becoming legendary in the eyes of the Allied and German Forces. It has been said that if the Spirit of Anzac was borne at Gallipoli, that it grew up at Pozieres.

In the next two years, the Australians fought, and won many battles, the names are now synonymous in our history-Bullecourt, Menin Road, Polygon Wood, Passchendaele Le Hamil, Mont St Quentin and many other village battles. Many of you younger members will visit the Australian battlefields and the exploits of the Australians are well documented. Unfortunately, in creating this Spirit of Anzac, we left behind 45,000 of our soldiers killed, one third have no known grave. What is this Spirit of Anzac that made the Australians so highly respected? It was the leadership at all levels, the courage, the endurance, the mateship and the self-sacrifice.

Twenty years after WW1, the sons of the original Anzacs were again involved in WW2.They took the Spirit of Anzac with them. Our Australian airmen excelled in the Battle of Britain, in Bomber Command over Germany and the Southwest Pacific. Our sailors who served with distinction in our navy on the seven seas. On land we saw the Siege of Tobruk – longest siege in British Military history where the Australians defied the might of the German and Italian Army for eight months. The following year saw the 9<sup>th</sup> Division back in North Africa and spearheaded the Eighth army attack at El Alamein which led to the defeat of the German and Italian Armies in North Africa.

Meanwhile nearer home we saw the Australians halt the Japanese army at Kokoda, Milne Bay, Gone, Buna, Lae Finschaven, Morotai and Borneo-names that will become more familiar as we approach the centenary of these battles The Spirit of Anzac prevailed in all these conflicts. The Spirit of Anzac was again very evident in subsequent conflicts, Korea, Malaya, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan and many of the other peace keeping missions.

But let us now look at the positives that came from the two World Wars. The returning Anzacs brought the Sprit of Anzac back into civvy street. Many went on to become leaders in the Australian communities-Governors, Prime Ministers, Premiers parliamentary Ministers, leaders in the Legal profession, industry, commerce and agriculture. At the local level, they became Mayors and Shire Presidents, Presidents of sporting Clubs. If ever the Spirit of Anzac was evident, it is our unique voluntary organizations, the Country Fire Authority, the State Emergency Service and our many Service Clubs There is no doubt that the Spirit of Anzac changed our way of life. Of necessity, it brought the women out of the kitchen into the work force that was previously considered the role of the menfolk. They have continued on to become leaders in their communities and the work force, and have held many high positions of leadership in Australia.

We must thank the Service men and women who, created the Spirit of Anzac and brought it back to our communities those qualities now dearly cherished- of leadership, courage, endurance and mateship. To the younger generation here today, I urge you to follow your dreams- you can achieve your ambition because you have inherited the Spirit of Anzac. But let us never forget the 102,000 Service men and women who paid the supreme sacrifice in helping to create the unique Sprit of Anzac.

## HAPPY 106<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY ERNIE WALKER *Story by Briannah Devlin – Goulburn Post*



*Ernie Walker OAM will celebrate his 106th birthday on April 22. Picture: Briannah Devlin*

Ernie Walker OAM has learned many lessons in 106 years, but said one of the most important was sticking to decisions once they were made. This lesson comes from fighting in Tobruk alongside Australian troops, who persisted against German and Italian efforts in Libya for eight months, in 1941.

"We were not surrendering, period," he said. "There was no hesitation, it was a straight-forward decision....the other decision was fatal."

The veteran sometimes reminisced about Tobruk, and his time in New Guinea and Kokoda, and said the refusal to surrender helped him get through it. According to the Rats of Tobruk Association, there are nine surviving veterans across the country.

"I wouldn't say it's an aim to be the last one, but it could be an achievement," he said.

Ernie admitted that he has been "slowing up" and does not get out much, and that he recovered from COVID-19 earlier this year. He lives independently at home with his wife Bev, but has not seen her often, because she has been in hospital for the last four months.

"Bev is a big part of my life," he said fondly. "It's important for Bev to come out of hospital and come home."



Above: Ernie said there was "no posing" in a moment with Bev that he keeps close to his heart. Picture on the right taken in 2021 on his 105<sup>th</sup> birthday  
Pictures: Briannah Devlin

The pair have shared many happy memories together, but one that sticks out for Ernie was at a country show, when someone photographed them staring lovingly at one another. The picture was taken without their knowledge, and is displayed proudly in the dining room.

"We didn't have anything to distract us, it was just Bev and I, and the rest of the world just didn't exist," he beamed. "I don't think you can pose for photographs like that, that's the true life. I'm very fortunate to experience a moment like that."

The centenarian said "even the whiskey glass" in the photo was true to form, and when asked if he would have a drink for his upcoming birthday, he simply replied "several", without hesitation.

When asked what he was thankful for in the lead-up to the milestone, he pondered and talked about the simple things.

"I suppose I am not a burden to myself even though I don't get around a hell of a lot," he said. Sitting with Bev on the deck of their 27 acre property, where they see and feed birds, and listen "to the old tapes", were other things he is grateful for.

He received congratulatory letters from Prime Minister Scott Morrison and MP Wendy Tuckerman, among others. The veteran hopes to attend a local ANZAC Day march this year, after revelling in the experience of leading the Moss Vale march in his wheelchair in 2021.

"The years just fell away," he smiled. "[There was] a little exuberance in the air, the weather was right, the movement and the people."

## NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members to ROTA:

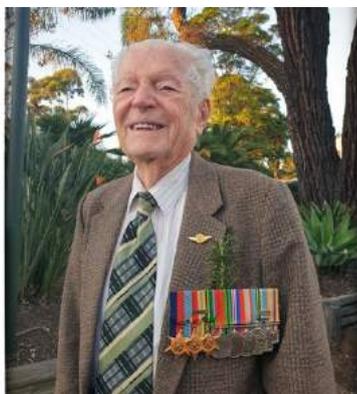
<b>Faye Dargie</b>	<b>Dianne O'Connor</b>	<b>Mary Keller</b>	<b>Will Anderson</b>	
<b>Judith Wynd</b>	<b>Jody Corrigan</b>	<b>Rebecca Bunkhill</b>	<b>Ketty Keralis</b>	
<b>Olivia Gleeson</b>	<b>Caitlin Murphy</b>	<b>Bob Anderson</b>	<b>Paul Nixon</b>	
<b>Sharon Hall</b>	<b>Daniel Keller</b>	<b>Maria Addamo</b>	<b>Ron Fraser</b>	<b>Leigh</b>
<b>Fraser</b>	<b>Barry Fraser</b>	<b>Rea Fraser</b>	<b>Suzana Phillips</b>	



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

## AGE HAS NOT STOPPED THESE VETERANS Report by Lachlan Gaylard

It is said age isn't for the faint of heart, and our remaining Rats of Tobruk have proved that of late. Both Harry Crick and Ernie Walker have recently Battled COVID-19, Ernie (whose 106<sup>th</sup> birthday is acknowledged in this issue) described the experience as "...the worst pain I've experienced."



Dennis Davis

Another tough cookie is soon-to-be 102-year-old Dennis Davis. After giving an impressive address to a packed crowd at his local Lions club and arriving home, he decided he didn't feel too crash hot and decided to phone the ambulance. It turned out it was pneumonia!

But with ANZAC day only 4 days away this wasn't going to stop him. Dennis checked himself out of the hospital so he could attend a tribute concert hosted by channel 7 Sydney. He stoically recited the Ode and then checked himself back into Hospital. Well done Dennis!

We send our best wishes to all our Rats across the country and hope they continue to keep well.

## THE RATS OF TOBRUK: AN ENDURING AUSTRALIAN & POLISH FRIENDSHIP



The Shrine of Remembrance, in partnership with the Institute of National Remembrance, Poland, last year presented a digital broadcast honouring the enduring legacy of the Australian and Polish Rats of Tobruk. Dr Mark Johnston, Professor Marek Wierzbicki and Lucyna Artymiuk discussed the shared experiences of the Australians and Poles in Tobruk.

Hear how the friendships forged in a small, coastal town in northern Africa influenced Australia's post-war migration policies.

Between April and November 1941, 14,000 Australians were besieged within the Libyan fortress of Tobruk by a powerful Italo-German army. Ordered to deny Tobruk to the enemy for eight weeks, the men held out for five months. Pro-Nazi propagandist and broadcaster Lord Haw Haw (William Joyce) described the defenders as 'rats' – an insult which they adopted as a badge of honour.

Exhausted, the Australian troops were progressively withdrawn from Tobruk between August and November 1941. Other troops including the Carpathian Brigade, comprising soldiers who had escaped Poland after its conquest by the Nazis and Soviets in 1939, relieved them.

It was the Poles who finally ended the siege when they captured Acroma and linked up with the British 8th Army. In recognition of this feat, the Australians shared with the Poles their most venerated title. Henceforth, the Poles too would be 'Rats of Tobruk'.

Between 1947 and 1948, Australian veterans of Tobruk helped sponsor the migration of 1,500 Polish soldiers to Australia when it became impossible for these men to return to their homeland, due to Soviet occupation.

You can watch the broadcast here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbdHCu9KEtM>

## PRISONERS OF WAR IN TOBRUK... A DIFFERENT ACCOUNT Story by Glenda Garde

Whilst recently reading an account of 2/32<sup>nd</sup> Bill Tolliday's experiences in the Middle East, I happened upon this gem of a story regarding Bill's encounter with German POWs at El Alamein.

*'While I was travelling with them along the road, I tried to communicate to see if any of them could speak English. None of them had been able to speak English so we couldn't do much, but I started to whistle the Blue Danube waltz and they perked up immediately, and they were all smiles then. When I did leave them out at the POW camp, I tapped a couple of them on the shoulder and said, "Good luck sport", and afterwards I thought I was the one who needed luck because the war was over for them, but it wasn't for me, .....*

This led me to explore the story of the POWs of Tobruk. In previous issues we have heard stories of Australian POWs, but what of those from 'the other side'? For this we actually need to think back to January 1941, before the siege began in April.

Early in 1941, the 6th Division, together with British units, pushed the Italian army back across Libya and, on 22 January 1941, Tobruk fell to the AIF. For the Italians, the North African Campaign had begun in June 1940. The Italian soldiers were mainly conscripts who had undergone the most basic of training. Not only were food and water in short supply, but their weaponry was inferior to that of the Allies, tactical attacks were not supported by air, and navy divisions and provision of armaments was slow to appear. By 23 January 1941, Tobruk was in allied hands, resulted in the capture of thousands of Italian prisoners.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

23<sup>rd</sup> January 1941 TOBRUK – Italian prisoners leaving the town on foot to surrender to Australian forces . (AWM collection)

005604

The following account was published in May 1941 in an Australian newspaper. An Australian army driver from Western Australia, Charles Parsons sent home written details describing the scenes of destruction and the lines of Italian prisoners of war.

*'Everywhere are signs of absolute confusion. They left burnt bridges, as well as thousands of pounds worth of most valuable equipment in the way of big diesel trucks, guns, clothing and stores.*

*...Along the route were hundreds of empty wine casks. They (Italians) like their wine, like our chaps like their tea or beer. Not all the barrels and bottles were empty, as our chaps found plenty of them full and had quite a merry time!*

*At one spot we came across about 24,000 prisoners straggling along the road. They were unattended and presented a sorry picture; they stretched for miles and naturally were most dejected, as they would be wondering, of course, just what treatment was ahead of them... '*

The following is an extract from AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR OF 1939-1945 Series One Army, Volume 1 To Benghazi by Gavin Long. (Chapter 9 Capture of Tobruk)

"One of the incoming force's greatest embarrassments was the number of prisoners. More than 20,000 of them were soon herded into a fenced enclosure measuring about 800 yards by 400 yards which the Italians had erected near the junction of the El Adem and Bardia roads to house their own prisoners. Here, during more than six weeks, never fewer than 7,000 and sometimes 20,000 prisoners were crowded like sheep in a dusty pen. Many of the men lacked blankets, and the nights were bitterly cold. To give them adequate medical care was far beyond the resources of their captors.

There was no sanitation; and, at first, it took one of the two infantry companies posted at the cage seven hours to distribute the day's rations: one tin of veal, two biscuits and a bottle of water to each man, though few prisoners had even a bottle to receive their water in. From the 23rd to the 26th January the 2/7th Battalion was on guard and strove unceasingly to feed and water the prisoners...



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

005406



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

005405

*23<sup>rd</sup> January 1941 Tobruk: Left - Italian POWs taken after the advance into Tobruk. Right - Most of the Italians carry pocketsful of grenades and it is therefore necessary to search prisoners for these as soon as possible. Not only because of possible treachery but they forget they are carrying them about and sometimes this forgetfulness is dangerous.*

Eventually, the guards from this battalion made sure that every prisoner had at least a greatcoat or blanket and his own water bottle... Gradually the numbers were reduced by sending them eastwards to Egypt in empty trucks that had come forward carrying supplies and, after the harbour was opened, 1,500 to 2,000 were shipped away every second or third day. By the middle of February, the number of prisoners had been reduced to about 10,000 and by the end of the month to 7,000, but on 28th February convoys, each containing 800 to 1,000 prisoners began to arrive from Benghazi and, in a few days the cage contained 11,000. The Tobruk cage was finally emptied in March.

The following is an account of one of the Italian prisoners.....(from *Footprints of Italian Prisoners of War in Australia*)

*"I was a sailor on a small boat that was used to ferry goods between ships on the harbour... I recall as soon as we reached the harbour, one midnight, the bombing began. This bombing was to last nine months... The constant booms of the bombs drove us half crazy.*

*... Our role in Tobruk Harbour was to supply goods to all the Italian soldiers, Navy and Air Force... My worst memory is the night before I was taken P.O.W. by the Australian soldiers. Our commanders ordered us to destroy everything in Tobruk Harbour...*

*The generals took the attitude, 'The enemy must not have any of our goods,' but in doing this, they condemned their own men to death by starvation.*

*Tobruk was captured the next day. We had to destroy even the ships that were half sunk. Even the Italian cruiser, the San Giorgio was destroyed by us.*

*That evening we found the Aussies waiting. They greeted us with 'hands up! Come down to the wharf!'. They took us to an open area and we were surrounded. They put us in a line and made us walk twelve kilometres to the operation field. We had no food or drink...*

*I remember one night they [Germans] bombed us. The Germans our friends, thought we were the enemy. About two hundred and eighty-one Italians died that night.*

*After one week, the Aussie soldiers took about one thousand people and took us to the harbour of Tobruk again. There was an Egyptian ship called Solum, and we went on board. The ship sailed us to Egypt...Alexandria... when we neared Bardia, we saw three planes.. and they threw bombs at us. When the ship was hit by a bomb, the Captain tried to take the ship to shore. Being a fisherman, I knew how to swim. Many men drowned...*

*The trucks came to rescue us and took us to Alexandria in Egypt. My biggest horror from the war is the starvation and lack of water plus the horror of the deaths. Here we were given a loaf of bread for tomorrow.... We had plenty of water. We got given five cigarettes and I sold my cigarettes for more bread. From Alessandria I was taken to Quassassin Camp. We worked carrying light poles and then we were shipped to Suez... I was sent to Zonderwater (near a mining town). I worked as a kitchen hand for two years."*

Around 24,000 prisoners of war were detained in Australia during World War 2. During January 1941 alone, the North African campaign saw the surrender of about 40,000 Italian soldiers at the Battle of Bardia. This had been preceded by 38,000 at Sidi el Barrani in December 1940, and another 25,000 at the Battle of Torbuk in January 1941. Initially the prisoners were held in temporary camps in North Africa and Egypt before being processed and shipped to places around the world, including Australia, for detainment for the duration of the war.

Australia's contribution to the imprisonment of Italian POWs began in May 1941 and finished with the last transport arriving in Australia in February 1945. During 1941, some 4957 Italian POWs had landed after being shipped directly from the Middle East.

By March 1945, the breakdown of the nationalities of POWs in Australia were:

- 18,000 Italians
- 1,500 Germans
- 4,000 Japanese

It would appear that Bill Tolliday was correct in hinting that luck had a lot to do with war.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

007475

*Tobruk. German prisoners captured by the Australians in Tobruk during one of the enemy attacks on our positions in the Tobruk area. May 2 1941*

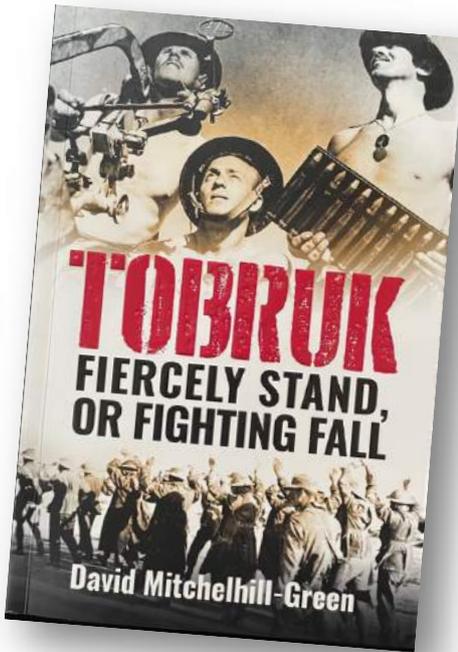


AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

080579

*Tobruk, Libya. 1941. an Australian intelligence officer chatting with German prisoners of war, members of the Afrika kores, in the POW cage near El Adem airfield.*

## NEW BOOK AND A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON TOBRUK



David Mitchelhill-Green from the Australian War Memorial has released a new and deeply researched book about Tobruk.

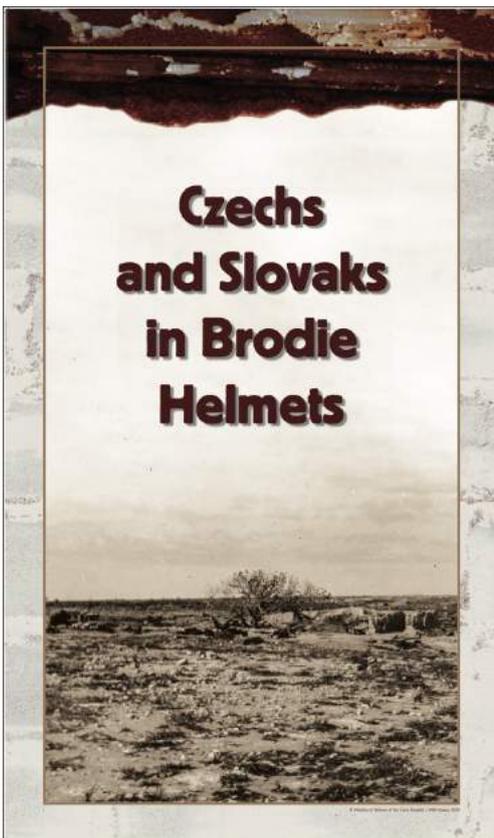
**Tobruk Fiercely Stand, or Fighting Fall** evolved from his Masters thesis on the sieges of Tobruk.

In addition to many interviews with veterans and their families and other experts on the subject, he has scoured the archives in Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, India, New Zealand and Singapore, obtaining an extremely thorough examination of the story of the remote Libyan fortress and harbour town of Tobruk.

David says "In reading this book, I hope you will gain a better understanding of events that triggered the fighting across the Western Desert in 1940-1942, the myriad factors that influenced the course of fighting and how, for a time, captured the world's attention."

There have been many books written about Tobruk and the siege and this certainly warrants a careful reading.

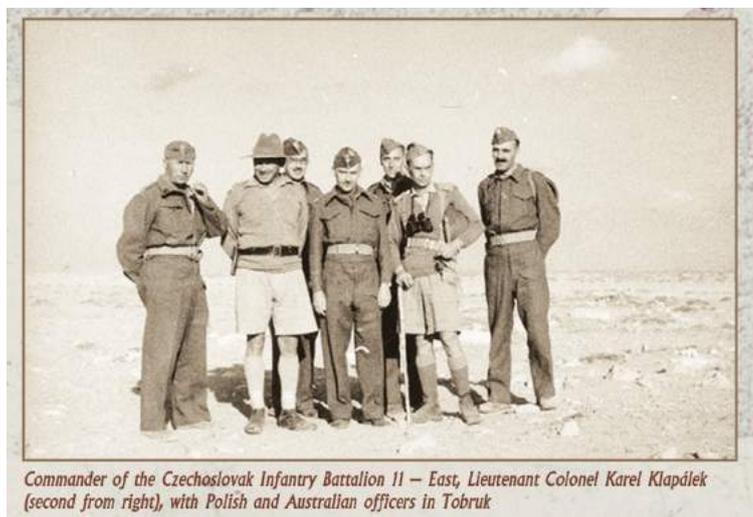
## ANOTHER STORY ABOUT OUR ALLIES IN TOBRUK



Recently the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Canberra hosted a special new exhibition at the ANU Centre for European studies which details the long history of the Czechoslovak volunteer troops/resistance fighters, specifically focussed on the two world wars.

Many readers will be aware of the contribution to the fight to hold Tobruk by the Polish Independent Carpathian Brigade but the close cooperation between Australian troops and those of the Czechoslovak Infantry Battalions is less well known.

The two armies were deeply involved in much of the fighting in the Middle East, beginning in Syria in 1940. In the autumn of 1941 Czechoslovak forces joined with the Polish Carpathian Rifle Brigade and the British 70<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to relieve the Australian 9<sup>th</sup> Division.



*Commander of the Czechoslovak Infantry Battalion 11 – East, Lieutenant Colonel Karel Klapálek (second from right), with Polish and Australian officers in Tobruk*

We hope that the exhibition which tells the story will make its way to Melbourne later in the year and we will advise when the arrangements are confirmed.



# ROTA MERCHANDISE

See Order Form on page 19 for postage costs and other details.



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



**NEW**

SIEGE OF TOBRUK BAR MAT  
**\$40**



**NEW**

SIEGE OF TOBRUK 'ROLL-UP'  
STUBBIE COOLER  
**\$10**



ROTA 'BASEBALL' CAP  
One size fits all  
**\$20**



**NEW**

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



ROTA RUGBY TOP  
Sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL  
XXXL, XXXXL, XXXXXL  
**\$50**



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



TWO-UP SET  
Includes kip and two 1941 pennies  
**\$17**

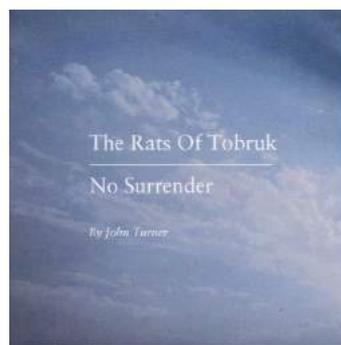


**NEW**

ROTA FACEMASK  
Small or large  
Special offer **\$7**



80<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY SIEGE  
MEDAL  
(Limited Stock remaining)  
**\$50**



'RATS OF TOBRUK' CD  
INCLUDES 'NO SURRENDER'  
Written and sung by  
John Turner  
**\$15**



RATS OF TOBRUK 1941  
LAPEL BADGE  
**\$15**





## RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC MERCHANDISE ORDER FORM

Item	Cost per Item	Quantity	Size (Refer page 17)	Postage Yes/No	Postage (Ordinary Mail)	Total	Comments
Rats of Tobruk, 1941, Lapel Badge – butterfly /clutch fitting	\$15				Inc postage		
Rats of Tobruk, 1941, Lapel Badge – stick pin fitting	\$15				Inc postage		
80 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Medal	\$50				\$10		Postage for up to 2 badges
ROTA Rugby Top	\$50				\$10		
ROTA Polo Shirt (New look navy blue with yellow stripes)	\$45				\$10		
Two-Up Set	\$17				Inc postage		
ROTA “baseball” style cap	\$20				\$10		
ROTA Bar Mat (New design)	\$40				\$10		
ROTA ‘roll-up’ Stubbie cooler	\$10				\$6		
Badge Car Window Sticker <small>(Sticks to inside of window)</small>	\$10				Inc postage		20% discount for more than one sticker.
ROTA Face Mask	\$7				\$6		Postage for up to 5 masks
‘THE RATS OF TOBRUK’ CD	\$15				\$4		
			Colour				
Ladies Poppy Scarf (light weight)	\$15				\$6		
<b>\$10 postage for orders of multiple items to the same address</b>			Total amount to be paid:			\$	

Payment is required before the items are sent. Delivery time can vary depending on stock availability and could be up to 6 weeks. Payment by electronic funds transfer (EFT) is our preferred method of payment. Payment can also be made by card, cheque, or money order.

**EFT Payment:** If you are paying by EFT, it is important that you include a unique reference so that the payment can be matched to the members register. A suggested reference is the abbreviation ‘MERCH’ followed by your surname.

**Bank Account Name: Rats of Tobruk Association BSB: 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**

**All enquiries to the Merchandise Officer (Graeme Clifford)**

**email:** ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com **Phone:** 0418 882 323

# What's on at The Shrine



## FOR KIN AND COUNTRY



This special exhibition explores the extraordinary history of First Peoples' service in the Australian Defence Force. First Peoples service personnel felt a strong sense of continuing ancient traditions of protecting Country, and hoped their example of service would help improve conditions for their families and communities. Veterans, however, returned to the same discrimination they had previously known.

## LUST LOVE LOSS



The complex issues surrounding matters of love and sex profoundly affect people everywhere, every day. Wartime is no exception. Indeed, the disruptive nature of war and the extraordinary situations it brings about magnifies human experience in these areas.

## 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. 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.