



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

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GENERAL MEETINGS 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
August 27 & 28	Tobruk House Open Weekend
August 28	Polish commemoration at the Shrine (11am - 11.30am)
October 2	Tobruk House Open Day
October 28	General Meeting
November 20	Tobruk House Open Day
December 4	General Meeting / Xmas Luncheon (Details in the October THN)

Patron: Bill Gibbins

Committee of Management:

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: OCTOBER 2022

DEADLINE: SEPTEMBER 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will not be published.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
Mike Kiernan

Editor: Stuart Tolliday

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CONTACT US: ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com



VALE

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

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

FLEMING, John Hector, NX32106, 9th Division Signals, 21 May 2022, 102 yrs
KINSMAN, Sydney George (Syd), SX8953, 2nd / 48th Battalion, 15 June 2022, 100 yrs

RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION INC.

President's Message – August 2022

Dear ROTA members and friends,

At the General Meeting of the Association held on Friday, 26th June, 2022, our President Heather Macfarlane, tendered her resignation from the presidency and the committee. As a consequence, I was appointed President for the remainder of the year.

The Association thanks Heather for her contribution over the years and we wish her all the best for the future.

My appointment will be ratified at the next Committee meeting (20th July, 2022).

An Open Day was held on Sunday, 26th June and was well attended in the morning. The rain after lunch deterred many people but overall the day was quite successful, as we received nearly \$1000.00 in donations, merchandise and membership.

My thanks to Lachlan and the committee members for setting up a fantastic display of our memorabilia.

On Friday 8th July, six members of the Committee attended the Dining-In Night at the Tobruk Barracks Sergeants Mess at Puckapunyal. Hautrie Crick, one of our veterans, (104 years old at the time) was Guest of Honour and entertained everybody with his exploits (see the article in this edition of T.H News).

At the last General Meeting, we were honoured to have Bill Gibbons attend. Bill is our Patron and the owner of our building.

Bill clarified that he wants us to continue to occupy Tobruk House, but with his approval we are going to correspond with Council and State Government to determine whether we can obtain a waiving of, or reduction in the rates and land tax. In addition, we are now looking at the possibility of obtaining outside financial support so that we can refurbish the building.

Thank you for supporting your committee.

Good health & regards to all.

Sincerely,

Bruce Bingham.
President

LOOKING FOR ASSISTANCE

ROTA is looking for a new editor for the Tobruk House News.



The Tobruk House News can perhaps claim to trace its origins back to the Tobruk Truth Newsletter which was originally set up as a means of communicating to the troops during the siege of Tobruk. The story is best told by the Exhibition panel below.



THE TOBRUK TRUTH

The Tobruk Truth was an unofficial organ of the AIF in Tobruk, giving an accurate summary of the latest B.B.C. news, occasional local news and humorous tales from the field. It was a very important publication for it helped to counteract the many rumours that circled around (including propaganda from 'Lord Haw Haw') and as such it was greatly valued by the Rats of Tobruk, especially those out on the forward lines.

The editor and publisher of the Tobruk Truth was Sgt Bill Williams, who prior to enlistment worked as a journalist for the 'Oakleigh Times' in Victoria. He published his newspaper on a daily basis, without fail, even after a 1500lb bomb landed on their office! The Tobruk Truth had a by-line - 'The Dinkum Oil', and 'Always Appears' was the accurate boast on the top of every issue. From February 16, 1941 to October 20, 1941 Bill managed to produce 243 issues of the Tobruk Truth.

Initially, Williams used an Italian radio, typewriter and duplicator, but when they were worn out, new items were sent from Cairo. The two-page print run was limited to 600 copies as paper was hard to come by, and, on one occasion, the Tobruk Truth was printed on the back of Italian army forms.



Page from "The Dinkum Oil"



Sergeant W. H. Williams, editor, reporter and publisher of "Dinkum Oil", a Tobruk publication. The duplicating machine, which was his "printing press" is on the table in front of him. AWM020656

On returning to Australia and with the creation of the Rats of Tobruk Association, it was clear that a way was required to keep all the members informed of the activities of the association, and a newsletter was established.

There have been many changes (including name changes) since those early days, to accommodate the changing needs of the members.

Similarly, there have been quite a few different editors, responsible for pulling the information together and producing the finished product.

The Tobruk House News is currently a bi-monthly publication and fills a very important role in the Rats of Tobruk Association as it is distributed to members all over Australia.

The committee would like to have a smooth changeover and so expressions of interest in the role are invited now. The current editor intends to finish his tenure with the December 2022 issue.

The new editor will ideally be someone with

an understanding of the organisation and a strong grasp of language including grammar and spelling, and an eye for detail. That person also needs a reasonable level of competence with software. (The THN is currently created in Word, but the software will be the choice of the new editor.) It is not necessary to live in Melbourne.

If you are interested, or for more information please contact the Secretary on 0426 242 754

FROM THE ARCHIVES

These pages from a WW2 scrapbook belonging to a Rat of Tobruk relative tell the story of the first VC of WW2. While most of us are aware of this event it is of interest to see how the story was told at the time.

July 1941

Ball of
Ad

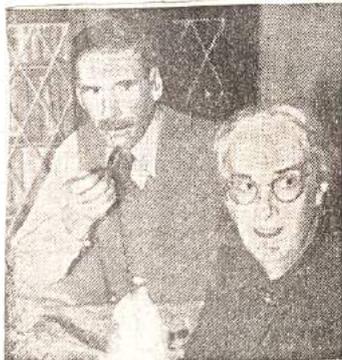
Liverpool lad lived up to finest traditions of race



73



The Soldier: His mother's favorite portrait—Corporal J. H. Edmondson, V.C., first Australian to win the highest award for valor in this war. It was awarded posthumously for gallantry at Tobruk.



His Parents: and Mrs. J. W. Edmondson, of Forest Home, Liverpool, of the V.C. hero.



His Home: White house with the lovely name of Forest Home was the boyhood home of Corporal Edmondson, V.C. It is the homestead of a 600-acre property.



TOBRUK V.C.

Corporal Edmondson's parents tell of home life of their hero son

By MARJORIE BECKINGSALE

"Corporal John Hurst Edmondson has been posthumously awarded the first Australian Victoria Cross of this war. . ."

I read those words a dozen times on the day that the news was made public.

The gallantry and sacrifice of a young Australian will help us to be safe . . . and here . . . and here . . . I thought as the car taking me to interview his parents ran through the crowded city streets, busy suburban areas, and winding country roads. The first simple words of his mother were the perfect tribute and explanation.

"I'd never be afraid of anything if Jack were beside me," she said.

CORPORAL EDMONDSON, only child of Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Edmondson, of Forest Home, near Liverpool, N.S.W., died of wounds near Tobruk on Easter Monday.

He had taken part in an encounter with German machine-gunners and, though severely wounded, he saved the life of his platoon commander, Lieutenant A. Mackell, M.C.

It is a coincidence that Lieutenant Mackell lives at Merrylands, only a few miles away from the Edmondsons.

Scarlet poinsettias flame high around the verandah of Forest Home, and the garden is full of flowers.

A welcoming figure, Mrs. Edmondson with a warm handclasp and a smile took me into her home.

An historian in search of a typical Australian family need go no further than the Edmondsons, descendants of pioneers, country born and bred, with little taste for city life.

Mr. Edmondson, tall, lean, weather tanned, with iron-grey hair and clear blue eyes, is as Australian as a gum tree.

White-haired Mrs. Edmondson, sturdily built, speaks more quickly than her husband, though her voice falters now and again as she speaks of her son.

Not even the award of the V.C. can increase the pride which Mr. and Mrs. Edmondson have in their only child.

"We've always been proud of him, for the whole 26 years of his life," said his mother.

"He had a natural way of taking care of people and sort of tucking them under his wing to look after them," she added.

"We accepted his decision to enlist as a call to duty, and we didn't try to stop him going, though it left his father to manage our property alone.

"Jack was born in Wagga, but when he was two years old we moved to this house, and he grew up here in the surroundings which he loved so well."

Forest Home is a comfortable white house which looks over the sloping paddocks to the Blue Mountains.

About fifty yards from the main road is a little white gate which leads into the garden.

"It was through that gate that he first rode to school at Austral, five miles away, on his fat, white pony, Bessie," said his mother.

"Through the same gate he left after his final leave.

"He said good-bye quietly to us, then sat down at the piano and played his favorite tune, 'Maori's Farewell.' Without another word he walked from the house, through the garden, and out that little gate."

At present these are the things which his people are remembering.

They think of a sturdy, earnest little schoolboy, a busy Agricultural College student, and then a young man with a deep love of his country life.

Indelibly printed on their memories are the quiet enthusiasm with which he used to discuss rural matters, his expert knowledge of cattle-judging, and his loving appreciation of his home.

"He liked his books best of all," continued his mother.

Lost cat

JUST then a tiny kitten scampered across my feet.

As she picked it up to fondle it, Mrs. Edmondson a little shyly told me of a remarkable incident.

"Jack liked cats, and for fifteen years he had a huge tabby cat he called Stiffy," she said.

"The day before he left he asked me to take great care of his pet.

"The old cat seemed to cling to me after Jack had gone.

"On Easter Monday he wouldn't stop crying, and worried me so much that eventually I couldn't stand it, and put him outside on the verandah.

"We never saw him again. We searched the paddocks all next day.

"It was on Easter Monday that Jack died," said Mrs. Edmondson quietly.

She went to get some letters sent by some of her son's friends in the A.I.F., and Mr. Edmondson came in.

He told me of Jack's keen interest in sheep and cattle, and how before his teens he was a proud messenger at the local Agricultural Show, where later he became a steward.

His favorite sport was rifle shooting.

"Jack always had a couple of his own horses to ride, though he drove our car, and his last gift to his mother was a new sedan," said his father.

He joined the militia in 1939 and became a corporal.

When war broke out he was called to duty and served in the city and at Narrabeen, till he decided to enlist in the A.I.F. and went into camp

Honors For Two Tobruk Defenders

Australian Associated Press

LONDON, Friday.—Lieutenant Frederick Austen Mackell, of Australia, has been awarded the Military Cross, and Warrant Officer John Henry Deane, also of Australia, the Military Medal.

Mackell commanded a patrol of one corporal and five men which attacked a post at Tobruk on April 13, and showed brilliant leadership in enabling his small force to rout the enemy, who were armed with machine-guns, mortars and field pieces. Mackell killed one of the enemy with the bayonet, and then clubbed his rifle and smashed it on the head of another. He inspired his small force to overcome the heavy odds, and distinguished himself with brilliant leadership and care of his men.

Deane saved his commander's life during a raid on Tobruk on April 22. The commander, who was reconnoitring, was surprised by an anti-tank gun concealed in a wadi. Deane, who had followed up without orders to do so, moved to the top of the wadi and so opened rapid fire, forcing eight or nine of the enemy to retire and the rest to take cover. Then he dashed down the wadi single-handed and rounded up the other three. The action enabled the British to secure the valuable sights of an enemy gun, which are now used on the defenders' guns.

V.C. FOR MOTHER OF DEAD SOLDIER

CANBERRA, Friday.—Insignia of the Victoria Cross, the first, and only decoration of this class to be given an Australian soldier in this war, has been forwarded to the Governor-General for presentation to the mother of the late Corp. J. H. Edmondson, of Liverpool (NSW).

Mr. Spender, Army Minister, said today that it was proposed that the award should be given to Mrs. Edmondson on September 27 by the Governor-General at an investiture at Admiralty House, Sydney.

a mile and a half from his home on May 20, 1940.

With her hands full of letters Mrs. Edmondson returned, and handed me the letter from Private Athol Dalziel, Jack's best friend.

"This is the one I love best of them all," she said.

" . . . I have only known Jack for a year, but he was my best pal," wrote Pte. Dalziel.

"He died a hero, Mrs. Edmondson, acclaimed by everyone. Words cannot be found to express our praise and gratitude. I have all of his things, which I will send on to you. His last words to me were: 'Give my love to the folks, and good luck, old boy' . . ."

From Lieutenant Mackell came this letter:

"Jack saved my life during the engagement and there is nothing I can do to repay him. All I can do is to offer you the deepest sympathy of his 40 friends in the platoon."

See Dame Mary Gilmore's poem, page 15.

VALE SYDNEY KINSMAN

Story from ABC news By Alicia Perera and Mitchell Abram



Photo: Virtual War Memorial Australia



Photo: ABC News: Mitchell Abram

Sydney Kinsman's death in Alice Springs came about a month before what would have been his 101st birthday, and has sent the tight-knit community – where he was a beloved figure – into mourning.

Born in Adelaide in 1921, Mr Kinsman enlisted in the army in 1940, just two weeks after his 19th birthday, and entered the 2/48th Infantry Battalion. He served with the unit in North Africa, fighting in both the Siege of Tobruk in Libya and the First Battle of El Alamein in Egypt.

Captured by the Germans in 1942 during the First Battle of El Alamein, Mr Kinsman spent time in three different prisoner of war camps in Italy before he managed to escape with several other soldiers about a year later.

"Over several months he climbed the Alps and made his way over to Switzerland," The president of the Alice Springs RSL, Mr Clarke, said. *"He was there for just on 12 months before the Allies caught up to where they were, close to the border, so they were able to cross back over and re-join with the Allied forces, and go back to his old unit."*

Mr Kinsman was repatriated to Australia in 1944 and discharged from the army the following year. He remained an active member of RSL Australia for many years, and was recently made a life member of the organisation.

Mr Kinsman moved from Adelaide to the Red Centre in the late 1940s, initially to work as a kangaroo shooter, but quickly moved into the construction industry – in which, along with a few friends, he built many of the town's residential and commercial buildings. He was also a strong advocate for the Alice Springs RSL and was involved in a number of the town's sporting and social organisations.

Mr Kinsman was well known in Alice Springs, where he was the town's last living World War II veteran. On Anzac Day 2020, after COVID-19 restrictions cancelled ceremonies across the country, hundreds of residents held a car procession outside his home to pay tribute to his service; and later that year, he and his wife were overwhelmed with donations from the community after their annual Christmas lights display was vandalised. Last year the local council erected a monument in his honour, to coincide with his 100th birthday.

Sydney Kinsman was "just about in tears" after a local car procession in honour of him on Anzac Day 2020. Mr Clarke said Mr Kinsman would be sorely missed by the Alice Springs community, which had been shocked by his death.

"Everybody wanted to be like Syd. He was an absolute legend in this town. The respect that that man had [here] – it covers multiple generations and all sorts of industries and social groups, and the outpouring of emotion has just been amazing to watch. People just thought this day would not happen, that Syd would always be here."

VALE JOHN FLEMMING

Story by Kathryn Vukovljak from the Canberra City News



VIVID memories of the siege of Tobruk stayed with World War II veteran and ACT Rat of Tobruk John Fleming.

The 101-year-old recalled living in a hole he dug out with two others, deep enough that they could crawl about inside, but with ledges on the sides where they could lie, knowing they could get buried alive at any time.

Commemorative roses have been planted in Eddison Park, Woden by the Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Association. Vicki Munday, representative of the Association, said the "No Surrender" roses, developed by Treloar Roses, Victoria, are "blood-red and sandy gold", and the intention had been to plant them across all states at the same time, exactly a year before the anniversary on April 10.

"COVID-19 put a stop to that idea, and now each state is doing its own thing, but we've got ours planted at the Eddison Park war memorial obelisk and we'll put a plaque there on the anniversary," she says.

John was born in Scotland in 1919, emigrated to Australia with his parents four years later, and grew up on a dairy farm in Rocky Hall, NSW. A dispatch rider with 9th Division Signals, John says his country upbringing seemed to have given him a decent sense of direction, and in Tobruk, which he describes as "pretty busy" he'd often be sent out to find people who had lost their way.

"What I used to say to them was don't do anything, just stay where you are, if you start running about I'll never find you. It could be difficult to remember where to go, it was flat desert, so they'd wait 'til I'd catch up with them."

John says he wasn't injured in Tobruk, but was shot "about 11 days in" to the New Guinea campaign, when his army career ended and he became a postmaster.

"My wife Mary was glad when I was back in the hospital in Australia, we'd only just got married when I got home from the Middle East. I didn't want to marry her before that in case I got knocked off," he says.

The couple went on to have three children and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. John said Mary passed away at 92.

HOW TOBRUK CAME TO VISIT A RAT Story by Joy Jorgenson, daughter of Rat of Tobruk Ernie Walker

Following are two photographs that were taken when the NSW Mounted Police brought Tobruk (stable name Louie) to Penrose to meet Dad.



It was during a COVID related demonstration in Sydney (back in Feb 2022) that the Mounted Police were assigned the task of controlling the protesters, when one of the protestors 'lashed out' at the police horse named Tobruk. This action resulted in him making contact with Tobruk's head. Sen. Sgt. Patrick Condon was riding Tobruk (his mount) at the time.

Patrick has since gotten a new mount & Sgt. S Maxwell has 'inherited' Tobruk aka Louie. He is still called Louie at the Police Horse stables, but is known as Tobruk when on 'official' duties.

Dad made the suggestion that, while we were partaking of hot beverages, cakes & biscuits, there was a small paddock just behind the house where the horses could 'stretch their legs' & have a pick of grass if they would like. It was lovely to see the horses 'kick their heels in the air' & have a roll in the grass.

The Story of Tobruk aka Louie:

He started out his career as a racehorse, but failed to achieve the required ability. It was at this stage of his life that he entered the domain of the D'Arcy family. Will & Rachel purchased him for their daughter Aislinn as her next mount in equestrian events, especially Eventing.

After an unsteady start (as to be expected from a young 4-year-old thoroughbred), Aislinn & Louie went on to achieve success. Unfortunately for Louie, Aislinn's equestrian aspirations were beyond his capabilities, making him redundant to her requirements.

Bearing in mind his next 'residence', Rachel considered that Louie's temperament would suit that required for a Mounted Police mount. Thus he was offered to them for a trial. He was found to meet the requirements for a new career & has proved his worth in his latest role.

Often Mounted Police horses are allocated 'parade' names. With this in mind, Rachel asked if Louie could be named Tobruk for such occasions, in acknowledgement of her paternal grandfather Ernie Walker, a Rat of Tobruk.

Around three years later the Mounted Police became aware that Ernie was 'still with us'. And, as such, they suggested that they make the journey from Redfern to Penrose for the two to meet. Thursday 19th May was chosen for the get-together and a superb Autumn sunny ensured an idyllic occasion.



Members of the Mounted Police with Tobruk/Louie and Ernie's family members - Rachel (the daughter of Dad's late son, thus a grand daughter), Ailsinn, Niamh & Liam (Rachel's' children, thus some of Dad's great grandchildren) & myself (Joy).

Readers may be interested in Ernie's very sophisticated 'mount'.

Living on a farm, a standard motorised wheelchair would be of limited value so Ernie has a customised "All-terrain" wheelchair, which allows him access to much of the property.

He is pictured here on his way to the 2022 Anzac Day march at Moss Vale (NSW).



NAIDOC WEEK *by Glenda Garde*



Last month, the nation celebrated NAIDOC Week, an annual event which explores the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is worth remembering that many Indigenous Australians served in WW2, including at the Siege of Tobruk.

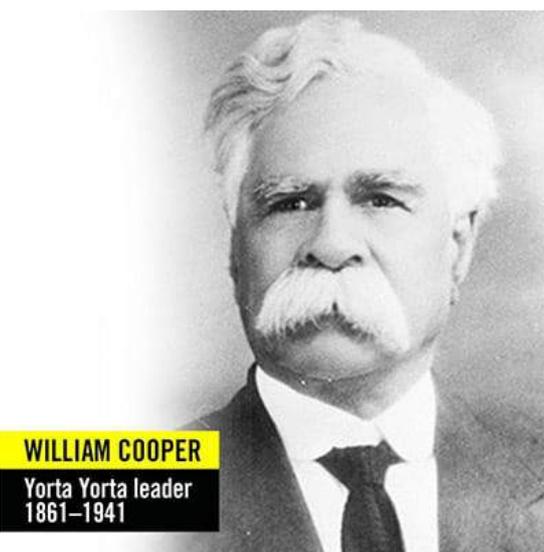
Australia in 1939 followed the practice of the First World War and raised a Second AIF in which many Indigenous men enlisted despite the continuance of a requirement that they be, 'substantially of European origin'. It is estimated that the number of Indigenous men and women who served in WW2 was between 6,500 and 7,000.

This is a studio portrait of Indigenous Rat of Tobruk SX7890 Private (Pte) Maxwell James Trengove, 2/48 Battalion.

As we have mentioned in previous editions, Michael Bell, the Australian War Memorial's Indigenous Liaison Officer, is working to identify and research the contribution of people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who have served in the military. He has played a key role in encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to come forward with their stories relating to Australian military history.

ROTA, as well as other veteran groups, have supplied Michael with names for his 'Black Rats' project. ROTA's exhibition currently on display at Tobruk House telling the story of the siege has a panel devoted to this.

(Michael is still eager for any further details of the military history of these men and their families and can be contacted via Michael.Bell@awm.gov.au)



NAIDOC week has also prompted us to remember a man whose name most Australians may not even recognise. If you have ever visited the Holocaust Museum, located in Elsternwick here in Melbourne, you may notice a small photographic portrait, displayed on a wall just inside the museum entrance. The photograph is of Yorta Yorta man, William Cooper, and it hangs there for a very good reason.

'In December 1938, a fierce-gazed Indigenous man from the Murray River began a march from Southampton Street Footscray to make a simple demand for justice at government offices at 419-425 Collins Street, Melbourne. But this wasn't a protest to defend Aborigines. It was a protest to defend Jews. And it wasn't against a state government or Federal government. It was the German Government.'

The protest was led by William Cooper and it's now clear that it was the only one of its kind. It's something that didn't happen in London, or in Paris or even in New York. It happened in Melbourne, organised by people who weren't even citizens in their own country.'

www.theaboriginalwhostooduptohitler.com

Born on the banks of the Murray River in 1860, William Cooper was a devout Christian who possessed a strong sense of social justice. He had worked as a shearer, a writer, a public speaker and he had founded the Australian Aborigines League, but on that day in 1938 he also challenged the Third Reich.

The march he organised had followed the night of 'broken glass' on 9–10 November 1938, when Adolf Hitler's brown shirts, rampaged through the streets of Germany looting, burning and smashing Jewish stores, buildings and synagogues. In just a few hours, nearly 100 Jews were killed and approximately 30,000 incarcerated in concentration camps.

'Across the country, Australians were stunned as they read the stories in their newspapers. But Cooper stood up, gathered his Indigenous friends and family from Fitzroy and Footscray, and they walked. Mind you, one of the reasons they walked was they had no money. In fact, Cooper was raising several grandkids in his home, and they didn't even have electricity or gas. He'd rather spend it on ink, paper and stamps for his work for the Australian Aborigines' League.

They arrived at the imposing stone building and climbed the stairs. He demanded a meeting with Doctor Drechsler, the General Consul of the Reichs Consulat – to speak against the Nazi mistreatment of Jews that had begun on Kristallnacht a few weeks before. But when they got to the door of the Reichs Consulate, the Nazi administration wouldn't let them in.'

They had also wanted to deliver a petition condemning the 'cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi Government of Germany'. The German Consulate did not accept the petition, but interestingly, 79 years later, Alf Turner, Cooper's grandson, presented today's consulate with a replica letter.

It is generally recognised that this was one of the first protests in the world against the actions of the Nazis and in 2010 this was formally acknowledged with an education memorial, established in Cooper's honour at a Jerusalem Museum. Also, in 2018, members of the Victorian Jewish community organised a walk on 6 December "in remembrance and appreciation of William Cooper and to reciprocate the march that he led on the German Consulate in Melbourne on the 6 December 1938."

Another of Cooper's famous campaigns was a petition to King George V demanding the right to propose a Member of Parliament who would directly represent Aboriginal people. Between 1934 and 1937, Cooper obtained 1,814 signatures from around the country. Unfortunately, on a constitutional technicality, the Commonwealth Government refused to pass the petition to the King.

William Cooper died in 1941 and although he didn't see change in his lifetime, many of the breakthroughs that have happened for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in the last 50 years, including NAIDOC Week, can be traced back to the work of William Cooper. His is a name well worth remembering.



More on Indigenous servicemen WW2

The only entirely Aboriginal platoon in the AMF was briefly formed in 1940-1941, before Tobruk, and was used for recruitment drives and publicity.

However, in March 1941, the Defence Committee decided that their service was 'neither necessary or desirable' and the men of this platoon were discharged from service.

Their records state: "Services no longer required: not due to misconduct or discreditable service."

Left: Recruits from Lake Tyers line up for morning parade at Caulfield. July 1940

THEY WEAR THEM WITH PRIDE *by Mike Kiernan*



A typical set of medals worn by a Tobruk siege veteran.

Etched into my memory is the sight of my father and his mates of the 2nd / 23rd Battalion, marching down St Kilda Road on Anzac Day. They all had their hard-earned medals securely pinned to left side of their chest. As a young lad, I wondered what the medals represented and how were they earned. I have since taken the time to research dad's and other medals.

A typical set of medals worn by a Tobruk siege veteran is illustrated above. These are campaign or service medals, except for what is known as the 'Tobruk Siege Medal', at the end. With thanks to the internet and google, the following is a summary of what I discovered about military medals in general and more specifically about those typically worn by a 'Rat'.

The third from the left campaign star is the Pacific Star. It was awarded to the many Tobruk siege veterans who went on to fight in the Pacific campaign. My father did not receive this as he was wounded in Tobruk and became a Prisoner of War (POW). Many siege veterans did not go on to fight in the Pacific.

Historically, the Australian military followed the imperial tradition of awarding soldiers, medals to honour their service, gallantry and bravery. From 1901 until 1975, Australia issued imperial honours and awards. These can be divided into two groups, 'campaign and service medals' and 'honours and awards'. Campaign and service medals recognised service rendered by members of the Australian Defence Force in prescribed warlike operations.

The colour design of the ribbon attached to the medal, uniquely identifies that medal. In addition, 'clasps' (or bars), were issued for some medals. These are inscribed thin metal strips which are attached to the ribbon of some medals. They indicate something more specific regarding the recipient's service during the particular campaign or battle. The ruling monarch at the time was King George VI, therefore the medals have either his Royal Cypher (monogram) or profile on the front.

Following, is a brief explanation of each of the medals in the set displayed above. More information can be found by going to the Department of Defence website.

<https://defence.gov.au/Medals/Imperial/WWII/>



1939-45 STAR

One of the first campaign medals instituted to reward campaign service during the second world war. It was awarded for operational service between 3 September 1939 and the 2 September 1945 and was the only campaign star that covered the full duration of the war.

The ribbon has three vertical stripes of dark blue, red and light blue. The dark blue stripe represents the Naval Forces and the Merchant Navy, the red stripe the Armies and the light blue stripe the Air Forces. The cypher is surrounded by a circlet containing the words 'The 1939-45 Star'.

AFRICA STAR

The Africa Star was awarded for service in an operational area of North Africa (e.g. Tobruk) between 10 June 1940 and 12 May 1943.

The ribbon colours represent the desert and the service of the Armies, Naval Forces, Merchant Navy and the Air Forces. The cypher is surrounded by a circlet containing the words 'The Africa Star'.



PACIFIC STAR

The Pacific Star was awarded for service in an operational area of the Pacific (e.g. Papua New Guinea), between 8 December 1941 and 2 September 1945.

The ribbon has central yellow and green stripes that represent the forests and the beaches of the Pacific, flanked dark blue, light blue and red stripes that represent the service of the Naval Forces and Merchant Navy, the Air Forces and the Armies. The cypher is surrounded by a circlet containing the words 'The Pacific Star'.



DEFENCE MEDAL

The Defence Medal was awarded for service in non-operational areas in Australia and overseas.

The ribbon is orange with green outer stripes, each green stripe having a black pin-stripe running down the centre. The green represents the Islands of the United Kingdom, the orange represents enemy attacks, and the black represents the black outs.



WAR MEDAL 1939-45

The War Medal 1939-45 was awarded for full-time operational and non-operational service in the Armed Forces between 3 September 1939 and 2 September 1945.

The ribbon colours of red, white and blue represent the colours of the Union Flag.



AUSTRALIA SERVICE MEDAL 1939-45

King George VI created the Australia Service Medal 1939-1945 in November 1949. The medal was for service by Australians during World War II, at home and overseas. Australians also qualified for British medals and campaign stars, as shown above.

The ribbon has a wide khaki central stripe, flanked by two narrow red stripes, which are in turn flanked by two outer stripes, one of dark blue and the other of light blue. The khaki represents the Australian Army, and the red, dark blue and light blue represent the Merchant Navy, Royal Australian Navy and the Royal Australian Air Force respectively.



TOBRUK SIEGE MEDAL

Commissioned and issued by the Rats of Tobruk Association in 1977, this 'unofficial' medal was awarded to Australian, New Zealand, British, Indian and Polish troops who saw action during the Siege of Tobruk, Libya between April and December 1941. It is often referred to as the 'T' medal.

This action was probably taken by the association, as the surviving siege veterans were frustrated by the lack of official recognition of the siege by the government at the time. Being a so called 'unofficial medal' the convention was that it was not to be mounted with official medals. This was not complied with by most siege veterans, demonstrating the respect they gave to this medal.

The ribbon colours represent the desert and the Australian Army, Navy and Air Forces. (Similar to those of the Africa Star ribbon).



TANKS FOR THE MEMORIES Story by Glenda Garde

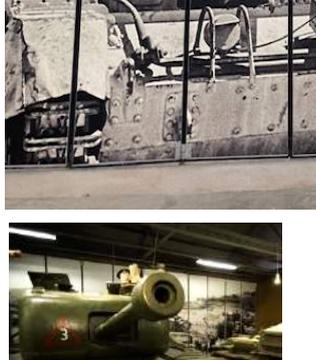
If anyone is contemplating a trip to the UK, in particular to the south of England, I can heartily recommend a visit to the Tank Museum at Bovington in Dorset.

The Tank Museum brings to life the story of tanks and their crews, with an amazing collection of tanks from all over the world which are displayed in a variety of modern exhibitions. These include, of course, a small section devoted to the Middle East and the story of Tobruk featuring the famous Matilda, Sherman and Panzer tanks.

Apparently the writer Rudyard Kipling visited Bovington in 1923 and, after viewing the damaged tanks that had been salvaged at the end of World War 1, recommended a museum should be set up. A shed was established to house the collection but was not opened to the general public until 1947 and has expanded greatly since that time.

It now houses 300 military machines from 26 countries, representing the key battles of every major conflict since the First World War. Some of the tanks are still operational and are driven on the local roads from time to time. There are also regular demonstrations and even the opportunity to ride in a tracked vehicle! There is plenty to keep children (of all ages) entertained so it really is worth a visit.

Scattered around the world there are obviously many smaller museums and exhibitions related to the war in the Middle East and Tobruk that people may not be aware of. If you know of any that you think may be worth a mention, please let us know so that we can share it with members through the THN.



WHILE THE MEN WERE AWAY THE WOMEN DID A LOT MORE THAN PLAY - WOMEN IN WW2 *Story by Glenda Garde*



Image from The Australian Women's Weekly, 13 September 1941

For something a bit closer to home, for those living in, or visiting Melbourne, especially now that the winter weather is well and truly here, if you are looking for something to do on these bleak and miserable days, here is a suggestion! Why not pop along to the Old Treasury Building where there is a small exhibition currently on display which highlights the role of women in WW2.

We should remember that whilst the 'boys' were in Tobruk, there were also 'girls' at home playing their part in assisting the war effort. The following information comes from the 'Women Work for Victory in WW2' exhibition.

'When war was declared, Australia's charitable network swung into action and organisations such as the Australian Red Cross and the Australian Comforts Fund expanded greatly. Women were the mainstay of these networks. They joined in their hundreds of thousands, providing essential care to the wounded and 'comforts' to the able bodied. Descendants who are fortunate enough to be in possession of their father's or grandfather's letters, may find that they are headed with either 'Red Cross' or 'ACF'.



Australian Comforts Fund members packing Christmas hampers, August 1944

Many of these groups raised funds to supply and pack regular hampers to the troops, especially at Christmas. (My own father mentions these in his letters home.) Men were sent parcels containing items of additional clothing like singlets and pyjamas, as well as cigarettes, sweets, razor blades, soap, toothbrushes, stationery, pencils and postcards. Christmas hampers included a plum pudding, a fruit cake, a small tin of fruit and a can of Nestlé cream.

In 1940 alone, the Australian Comforts Fund had about 22,000 members in Victoria, with many branches in regional areas.

The Red Cross ran very successful annual recruitment drives across Australia throughout the war and increased its membership from about 260,000 in 1941 to 450,000 in 1944.

In a total population of only some seven million, this was an extraordinary volunteer force. Older men and those considered unfit for active service, also joined voluntary organisations, especially those involved in civil defence, but women made up the bulk of the membership.



*The Grand Ballroom of Victoria's Government House was turned into a Red Cross sewing room, c.1940
Photo reproduced courtesy University of Melbourne Archives*

Throughout the war, thousands of women also joined the workforce, many working in jobs previously reserved for men. Although barred from active service, women flocked to 'do their bit' in other ways.

From the fields to the factories, the armed services to the home, women produced the food, clothing and munitions that supplied both the Allied troops and the civilian population. Many of these jobs were difficult and dangerous, but thousands of women responded to the call. Almost all workplaces established Patriotic Funds that collected donations or organised fund-raising events for the war effort. It is estimated that funds like these raised the extraordinary sum of £28M during the war – or the equivalent of about \$1.6 billion.



In addition to their fundraising activities, many women knitted or wrote letters to soldiers during their lunch hours or stayed back after work to do voluntary work for organisations. Some companies 'donated' their employees' time in this way, providing a token amount for 'tea money'.

Many organisations, largely made up of women, took on the boring and repetitive task of making camouflage nets. Women estimated that they required eight hours to complete one net.

The Country Women's Association in Victoria organised net-making groups all over the state: men, women and children, old and young, in country and town, gave up their time to help. All sorts of camouflage nets were made: large ones to cover gun emplacements, smaller machine gun nets, nets to cover aeroplanes, as well as 12,000 aerial supply nets for the dropping of medical supplies, food and equipment for front-line troops. Over 150,000 camouflage nets were made by the CWA.

Before the war, nursing was the only available service role for women, but during 1941 thousands of women joined the new women's auxiliary services; the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF), the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) and the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS). By the end of the war, more than 66,000 women had served.



World War II recruitment poster to attract women to the armed services. (AWM) Initially they served as cooks, clerks and kitchen orderlies, but with demonstrated competence and a shortage of men, their roles changed. AWAS personnel manned anti-aircraft and coastal artillery gun sites.

Whilst the jobs became more equal however, the pay did not, with service women being paid about half of a man's salary.

A uniformed female soldier challenged clearly defined gender roles in 1940s Australia. Contradictory

rumours circulated. Some felt the army would 'masculinise' women; others warned of the potential for 'licentious behaviour'. Moralists cautioned: 'a girl may be a nice girl when she goes in, but she doesn't stay nice long'.

All three auxiliaries were demobbed immediately after the war, with the exceptional work of these servicewomen largely forgotten.'

Whilst we will always remember the mighty Rats of Tobruk, we should also spare a thought for their mothers, sisters, wives and girlfriends at home who, in their own way, also 'did their bit'.

Wise men have never doubted feminine courage, but never until this war have women of the Commonwealth been able to show that they can be as brave as men when the country needs their services. The courage and loyalty of our women are impressive and complete. There is among them a quiet, firm, steadfast resolution to play a part in bringing victory to us.

Sybil Irving, Controller of the Australian Women's Army Service

This exhibition, funded through the same state government grant commemorating the end of WW2 as our own exhibition at Tobruk House, will be on display until the end of 2022. It is also available online.

[Introduction: Women Work for Victory in WWII exhibition – Old Treasury Building](#)

SOME INSPIRATION FROM TWO OF OUR RATS

Tom Pritchard was recently featured on a special SBS television report about centenarian returned soldiers. Tom's 100th birthday was earlier this year. As is so common when the press interviews older residents, the question was asked "What is your advice for living a long life?"



Tom immediately responded, "Drink plenty of water." And then, as almost an afterthought, he added, "Beer is 95% water." So we can happily report that Tom is still in very good form.



Meanwhile Dennis Davis is home again and fighting fit following several weeks of hospitalisation, after coming down with pneumonia.

However, Dennis checked himself out of hospital on ANZAC Day to recite the Ode at the Sydney town hall's Anzac tribute concert, returning to hospital that night!

It was later revealed Dennis had suffered a suspected heart attack whilst out.

Nonetheless on his second day back home Dennis went to Mass at his local Parish, celebrated his impending 102nd birthday at the men's group and still managed to fit in his daily walk!



NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members to ROTA:

**Trevor Brown Peter Wegner Andrew Gilmour Catherine Falcke
Andrew Balcerzac Shae Fogarty Nathan Miles Alison Campbell-Rate
Joyce Curnow Trevor Brown Jan Powell Dennis Barnes Sam Jeanes
Stephen Walpole Alex Campbell Hugh Campbell**



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

PUCKAPUNYAL'S TOBRUK BARRACKS DINING IN NIGHT



Guest of honour Rat Hautrie Crick with recent recruits at the Sergeants Mess dining in night.

Recently members of the ROTA committee attended the Annual dining in night at Puckapunyal army base. The night offers the opportunity for members of ROTA to share stories and memories with current serving defence personal.

In attendance as the special guest was soon-to-be 104-year-old Rat Hautrie Crick, who insisted on standing to his feet to give a stirring address to the candlelit crowd.

Hautrie finished with the fervent plea "I hope you all never have to fight another war."

The tables were adorned in signature ROTA yellow and featured photographs of our surviving Rats to give a personal element to the siege.

The formalities included an insightful reading of Chester Wilmot's analysis of Tobruk, and a special tune played by the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums in Hautrie's honour.



Sergeant Tobi Griffiths, Hautrie Crick and members of the ROTA Memorial Pipes & Drums

The tradition of this dinner, specifically to remember and honour the Rats of Tobruk, began many years ago and it is considered a highlight of the Mess calendar.

We give special thanks to all involved in the wonderful evening, and particularly to Sergeant Tobi Griffiths for his sterling efforts in co-ordinating the evening.



Right: ROTA representatives Karolina Sevcikova, President Bruce Bingham, Marlene Bingham, Secretary Lachlan Gaylard and Ian Marr



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



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

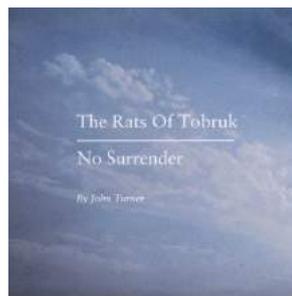


NEW

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



80TH 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 th 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		
\$10 postage for orders of multiple items to the same address			Total amount to be paid:			\$	

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

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

Bank Account Name: Rats of Tobruk Association BSB: 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.