



TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION



THE RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION
NEUROSCIENCE FELLOWSHIP FUND

RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION Inc.

ABN 23 136 193 517

44 Victoria Avenue, Albert Park, VIC 3206

www.ratsoftobrukassociation.org.au

PHONE No 0432 232 502

General/Social Meetings start at 10.30am

Month / Date	Event Description
October 15	Open Day – volunteers required
October 27	General/Social Meeting – all members welcome (Lunch \$15)
November 11/12	Remembrance Day/Open Day 10am – 3pm
November 24	General/Social Meeting – all members welcome (Lunch \$15)
December 03	Christmas Luncheon
February 23	Annual General Meeting
April 14	Tobruk Sunday
April 25	ANZAC Day

Further dates for 2024 to follow in the December edition of the Tobruk House News

Patron: Bill Gibbins AM

Committee of Management:

President – Bruce Bingham

Vice-President – Kelly-Ann McKinnis

Secretary – Lachlan Gaylard

Treasurer – Graeme Clifford

Other Committee Members –

Tony Smith, Karolina Sevcikova, Tony Codd,
Marlene Bingham, Paul Dipnall

TOBRUK HOUSE NEWS

Editorial Deadline

NEXT ISSUE: DECEMBER 2023

DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 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will not be published.

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this Association.

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.

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

James (Jim) Arkell – 19th September 2023 Aged 101 WX28380 -2/23rd Battalion.

Rats of Tobruk Association Inc.

President's Message – October 2023

Dear members and friends,

Following on from my last report, we are continuing with our monthly General/Social meetings with speakers and committee members' profiles. The Committee is still pursuing our DGR status. and have arranged a meeting with our Federal Member, Josh Burns. seeking his assistance and advice.

Despite numerous emails, phone calls etc., we have still not obtained a satisfactory request to waive our Land Tax and General Council rates.

Our Treasurer, Graeme, is pursuing Federal and State funding grants for the refurbishing of Tobruk House. You will all have received our new brochure, which has been widely accepted.

Marlene is propagating fig tree cuttings from our Tobruk Tree which was planted in Tobruk Park by the Governor General commemorating our 80 years Memorial Service. However, we are seeking a copy of the A4 brochure that accompanied previous fig trees. Can any member assist?

On the 14th of August, I conducted a Remembrance Service for the Polish and Czech descendants commemorating the 82nd anniversary of their forebears' arrival in Tobruk. Approximately 30 members attended. Our thanks to the Shrine of Remembrance Trustees for their assistance.

Tobruk House is continuing to be utilized by kindred Service Associations. Recently, past members of the Antarctic Division held their Annual General Meeting. This was a zoom meeting to members across Australia and the Antarctic base at Casey This was possible due to our recently installed modem in the Hall. One of our members celebrated his 70th birthday in the Hall.

A new sign is being prepared for the entrance to Tobruk House and a brass plaque is being prepared to be installed at our Tobruk Fig Tree opposite Tobruk House in the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Reserve.

Preparations are underway for Tobruk Sunday and Anzac Day next year.

Sincerely

Bruce Bingham
President

FROM THE ARCHIVES

In previous editions of the Tobruk House News we have been privileged to bring our members the poems of Donald 'Doc' Wells of the 2/4th Australian General Hospital, we now bring you a letter written by 'Doc' to the mother of a friend (Ewen 'Mick' Fyfe) who was killed in Tobruk. This letter is a heartwarming example of the thousands of letters that would have been sent from abroad to grieving families at home.

'Dear Mrs. Fyfe

Perhaps you will be surprised to hear from me, but yet on the other hand you may not be, because it is only natural that I should write to you in the view of Mick's recent death. There are some things that I find very difficult to write and say as you no doubt know and I feel just now I cannot express myself. I know how you must be feeling and your grief must be greater than mine; all the same Mick and I were coppers which means a lot. And I want to let you know somehow that I was very sorry to learn of his death and that the sincerest sympathy I know goes out to you who are his mother, I remember now the wonderful pal he always was to me and how true a son to you. And I can never think of him but with the profoundest respect and without feeling that I am a better man for having known his friendship. As I am on the same battle front as he was, I heard of his death long before you did and think that perhaps you would like to know something of the circumstances under which he died.



It was during a bombing raid and strangely enough he was practically unscathed, yet death was instantaneous, so he did not suffer at all. Now he lies enjoying a piece for which we all hope and pray in a quiet little soldier's cemetery at Tobruk among fellow Australians. You can be sure I shall visit his grave and if possible, get a photograph of it for you. You would like to know too that he was one of the most popular men in his unit, never had a row with anyone and all his mates thought the very highest of him. I am not the only one who sympathizes with you.

Please tell Dolly from me that even though she is a sad girl and grieves very much for her brother whom she loved so much, yet she must keep her chin up because she has every right to lift her head and look anybody straight in the eye and proudly say that her brother lived as a man and died as a man. He was not afraid to face his country's foes for those he loved. He was always thinking of others and I for one believe sincerely that when the time comes God will do the right thing by all such brave good men. Please remember me to Ted Neil Bill his wife and I hope they are all well. See you some more when the job is done.
Don Wells '

Ewen Prideaux Fyfe was born in 1913 as the third son to Lousia and William Fyfe, a sister would follow before a final brother completed the family in 1922.

He worked a labourer and lived in Ringwood at the time of his enlistment in 1940, allotted to the 2/23rd Battalion when he was killed the day after his 28th Birthday.

Doc Wells kept his promise and visited Ewen's grave and sent home a picture.

William Fyfe died in 1957 and Louisa in 1972 aged 85.

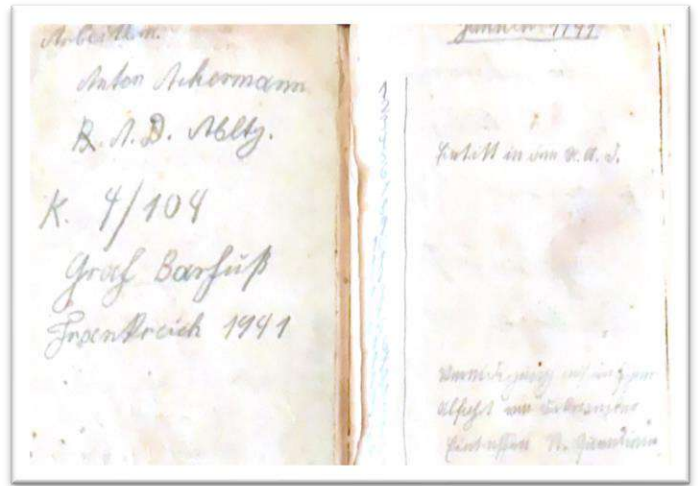


LOOKING FOR INFORMATION

The association was recently contacted by member Mike Baker whose father Albert Edward Baker served with the 2/13th Battalion in Tobruk and its post siege campaigns.

Upon recently going through some of his father's war mementos he came across a German soldier's diary that his father had picked up somewhere during the siege.

It does show its age but a lot of what is written in the diary could be translated. There is also some personal information maybe as to the exact name of the German soldier. As such we are looking for a volunteer who is fluent in German to assist with some translation of the diary with a view of returning it to the soldier's family. If you can help, please contact our secretary, Lachlan Gaylard - 0432 232 502 or email ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com



NOTICE OF SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING

When: 10-30 am on Friday, 27th October 2023
Where: Tobruk House – 44 Victoria Avenue, Albert Park

Purpose: to resolve the following Motion:-

“Delete Rule 51(2) -only a member who has been an ordinary member of the committee for the 12-month period prior to the annual general meeting is eligible for nomination for the positions Specified in Rule 54 (i.e. President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer)”

RATIONALE:- This Motion is requested to clarify the filling of positions at the next AGM.

The President will not be seeking re-election, and the Vice President has accepted an overseas appointment in her profession.

Members of the current committee have Indicated that they do not desire to fill the positions.

The Motion, if passed, will permit other members of the association to consider nominating for the positions.

TOMMY HITS THE STRIDE WITH 102

In August our very own Tommy Pritchard celebrated his 102nd birthday. For Tommy the celebrations were spread across two days.

The first whilst in respite with a dancing band and big fuss from all the staff and fellow residents who were very impressed to have the last Rat of Tobruk amongst their ranks.

The second day was spent at Tommy's home with an abundance of Tommy's family. He met his great-great grandson Elton for the first time and received the news that he would be a great grandfather again with another impending birth.

To you Tommy we all say congratulations and a very happy birthday.



VALE RONALD DALE BARASSI AM

Barassi is a name synonymous with football prestige and with the passing of Ronald Dale Barassi last month his achievements and tales of his personality have been sprawled across the pages of our newspapers and on our television screens. But little known is his connection with Tobruk or his passion for our service personnel and their dependants.

Ronald James Barassi (father of the aforementioned) was born in 1913 in Castlemaine Victoria, in the area where his family had originally immigrated to from Italy. He worked with his father in a mine as a bracedman before marrying Eliza Ray in 1935 and moving to Melbourne where he took a job as a labourer with the Melbourne City Council.



Barassi Sr. upon enlistment

Barassi Sr. debuted with the Melbourne Football Club in 1936 and played until 1940, having decided to put his football career on hold to the army on the 15th of July 1940. Initially sent to the 15th infantry training battalion at Puckapunyal Barassi Sr. was swiftly transferred to the Army service corps supply column in Shepparton, given special dispensation to play out the remainder of the VFL season where possible. He played his final game in the September premierships against Richmond.

Less than three weeks later he was to embark the Queen Mary in Sydney bound for the Middle East with the 7th Division AASC. Arriving at El Kantara in November, he was transported on a converted cattle train to Palestine. Just before Christmas 1940 Barassi Sr. was appointed Lance Corporal. In March 1941 he was admitted to the 1st AGH with a papilloma on his foot, whilst he was in hospital he was promoted to Corporal before being discharged on the 1st of April where he was then sent to Tobruk.

In early August 1941 Eliza Barassi received a telegram at the door informing her that her husband had been killed in action days prior. It was this scene described by Ron Barassi Jr. as one of "Complete crying, etched in my memory for life". Little was known then about the circumstances of his father's death, but this painful memory was the catalyst for Barassi Jr. to serve our ex-service personnel.



Barassi Jr. and his mother before his VFL debut

In 1949 the Melbourne Football Club lobbied the VFL for the creation of the Father-Son rule to enable Barassi Jr. to follow in his father's footsteps. He joined Melbourne in 1953 until 1964 when he transferred to Carlton. His coaching career would begin in 1965 and end finally in 1995. His career can be summed by the numbers added to his famous signature 17 Grand finals for 10 Premierships across 4 clubs.

Barassi Jr. would lament later in life that he "Missed not having a father more now than as a child" but it wasn't until 2009 when Ron was invited to take part in television series 'Who Do You Think You Are?' that he would learn what happened to his father. Flown to Canberra Barassi Jr. was met with Ron Williamson and Bert Beverley, both of whom served with Barassi Sr. in Tobruk and explained the circumstances around his death.

Barassi Sr. was taking shelter against the wheel of his vehicle during an air raid when a sea mine destined for the ocean was dropped nearby propelling shrapnel into him. Ron Williamson would recount that he "wasn't killed outright but was shockingly wounded, but his mind and voice whilst weak was there and he was talking to the boys and obviously knew that he was going to die but his main concern was 'Young Ron' and he died shortly after.

Barassi Jr., Ron Williamson and Bert Beverly forged a close relationship after this and in fact he even marched alongside them in his first ever ANZAC day march in 2010. For Barassi Jr. himself a Junior Legatee, the care and remembrance of our war dead and their dependants became a strong passion. He visited Tobruk House on several occasions and volunteered at Melbourne Legacy regularly.

Barassi Jr. passed away peacefully after a fall, surrounded by his family on the 16th of September. His legacy in the world of football will live, but perhaps it is his work with veterans which will leave the most indelible impression for the future.

Father and son both forwent the benefits of their fame and success to give to those in need. Finally reunited.



Barassi Jr. and Ronald Williamson at Tobruk House holding a plaque in honour of the members of the 7th Division AASC who were killed in Tobruk.



L-R Bert Beverly, Barassi Jr. and Ronald Williamson marching past the Shrine of Remembrance in 2010.

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members:

Maria Foster Jodie Liddell Christine MacDonald David Mahon Karen Burrows
Rhys Kulibab Richard Murrow Helene Hansen-Riedl Rhonda Hancock Tracey
Hancock Hayden Middleton Oscar Pannaccio Rob Bennett
Peter Luby Malcom French Kerrie Cross Brad Weisse Murray Collins
Katrina Jeremiah Tobi Gritthis Ian Angus Bryin Dilworth Carol Anderson
Ros Delahunty Tige Ridley Ray Hall



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

EDITORS NOTE

Dear Members,

It is a pleasure to take on the job of editor of the Tobruk House News, in putting together this edition gained a new appreciation of the weight borne by my predecessor Stuart Tolliday. I wish to take this opportunity to thank Stuart for his unstinting commitment to the Association through this newsletter which so many of our members have enjoyed.

I also wish to invite any members to submit a story that they feel would be interesting to other members. I have a particular goal for this newsletter to tell the tales of our 'Rats' who may have been passed for several decades and forgotten by time, so please do not hesitate to contact me with an idea at – Ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com

Yours
Lachlan Gaylard

A NOTE FROM YOUR TREASURER

Hi All,

There is little news to report other than the fundraising efforts from our brochure. All members have been sent a copy and this has been followed up with emails and Facebook posts. We will reinforce this further by reaching out again over the next few weeks. Our philanthropy drive has now started, and this will be stepped up over the next month.

We are very grateful to be moving forward to upgrading Tobruk House to make it safe and comfortable for all those who visit and enjoy the great history and memories we have to offer. Also, we welcome the chance to invite military and kindred groups to share this special place and our history. We look forward to our upcoming open days and the special commemorations in November as well as the Christmas luncheon in early December.

UPDATE ON BANK ACCOUNTS AND PAYMENTS TO ROTA IN 2024.

We are now using accounts with Bendigo bank.

Our new membership account details are:

BSB: 633-000
ACC: 197610603

The account details for the Tobruk House restoration fund are:

BSB: 633-000
ACC: 203243779

Please be sure to quote your membership number or surname as your reference.

Finally, the association will no longer be accepting cheques in 2024. This is following advice from our Bank who have advised us that they are moving away from cheques and are making it increasingly difficult to deposit them.

Please if you would like to have a discussion further or make a payment over the phone, please contact me on 0418882323.

Cheers Graeme

THE RATS OF TOBRUK NEUROSCIENCE FELLOWSHIP

Each year in Australia, over 250,000 people are diagnosed with epilepsy. Yet, for around half of those, including around 35 per cent of children, the cause of the epilepsy is unknown. Thanks to the Rats of Tobruk Neuroscience Fellowship, supported by the Rats of Tobruk Association, teams across the RCH are hoping to change that.



**The Rats of Tobruk Association
Neuroscience Fellowship Fund**

This fellowship was established by the Rats themselves to be their legacy and has provided opportunities for twelve young doctors to advance their studies and knowledge of child epilepsy since it began in 2010. With rising costs our continued support is needed to maintain this legacy.

To learn more about how you can contribute to this most worthy cause by adding a gift in your will, and, most importantly, to let the Foundation know of your intention, please contact
Kathryn Sell, Planned Giving, RCH Foundation
(03 9345 6389 or email: kathryn.sell@rch.org.au)

2023 CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

You are cordially invited to the annual Tobruk House Christmas luncheon held on Sunday December 3rd, 2023, a fantastic opportunity to celebrate the achievements of the association in 2023 at historic Tobruk House accompanied by a performance from members of the Rats of Tobruk Memorial pipes and drums band.



Cost: \$35 Per Person

Bookings are essential, RSVP by November 20th to Graeme Clifford on 0418 882 323 or to Ratsoftobruk41@gmail.com

2024 ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION – EARLY PAYMENT

Affiliate members can pay next year's subscription from October 1st, 2023. The 2024 subscription is due for payment by 1st January. The subscription remains at \$30.

Please note that there are several streams of membership available to the association which aligns with the recently published ROTA brochure which all members should have received.

If you are paying by EFT, ensure you include a unique reference such as your surname and membership number.

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

This is important for correct matching of payments. Payment can also be made using a credit or debit card by calling Treasurer Graeme Clifford on 0418 882 323

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

BOX HILL RSL - TOBRUK EXHIBITION

The Rats of Tobruk exhibition is proudly presented by the Memorabilia Department of Box Hill RSL. This exhibition is comprised of 9 of Peter Wegner's portraits from his Rats of Tobruk series.

Alongside the paintings is the story of how Peter came to paint 20 Rats of Tobruk and two Rats of Tobruk Association flags on loan from Tobruk House paired with other memorabilia from Box Hill RSL veterans.



The exhibition will be on display until the end of 2024.

STOLEN PLAQUE RETURNS — Taken from the Wyndham Star Weekly



John Campbell- The last Rat of Tobruk from the 2/3rd LAA Regiment

A bronze plaque dedicated to the 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, who trained at Werribee Racecourse before being deployed to the Middle East in WWII, was stolen from the racecourse earlier this year.

The remains of the plaque were found by police in the car of a man they had pulled over in relation to another matter. It's believed the man had stolen and destroyed the plaque in order to sell its bronze content.

Less than six months after its removal and on the 20th anniversary of the original plaque being unveiled, an exact replica will be re-installed at the racecourse.

"It's very important" said Ian Campbell, treasurer of the 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment Association which organised the replacement.

"The plaque is commemorating the fact they, the regiment, served and this was the site of their initial training."

Among the 900 soldiers that undertook that training was Mr Campbell's father.

For five months in 1940 he and the other mostly Victorian soldiers trained in anti-aircraft defence which they would provide in the Tobruk the following year.

Not that it was great preparation. "When they were here at Werribee, they never laid hands on an anti-aircraft gun, there were none to train on, I think they all felt inadequately prepared when they got over there." said Mr Campbell

Nevertheless, for him and other family members who now make up the ALAA Regiment Association, it's important it be remembered.

"The Werribee Racecourse is an important site. Its where young men met for the first time and became life-long friends and relying on each other during the under some pretty difficult circumstances."

And among the difficult circumstances was the legendary siege of Tobruk in Libya and the Greek Island of Crete which was captured by the Nazis and where many of the men became prisoners of war.

Overall, 73 killed members of the regiment were killed and 137 became POWs.

Mr Campbell's father was not among them.

"He was one of the lucky ones" said Ian Campbell of his dad who was the last surviving member of the regiment when he died in 2021 aged 100.



ROTA MERCHANDISE



See Order Form on page 13 for postage costs and other details.



LADIES SUMMER POPPY SCARF
Light Blue, Dark Blue, White,
Grey, Black

\$15



SIEGE OF TOBRUK BAR MAT

\$40



SIEGE OF TOBRUK 'ROLL-UP'
STUBBIE COOLER

\$10



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

\$50



ROTA 'BASEBALL' CAP
One size fits all

\$20



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

\$60



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

\$20



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		Special offer 2 for \$20
Rats of Tobruk, 1941, Lapel Badge – stick pin fitting	\$15				Inc postage		Special offer 2 for \$20
80 th Anniversary Medal	\$50				\$6		Postage for up to 2 medals to same address.
ROTA Rugby Top	\$60				\$12		
ROTA Polo Shirt (New look navy blue with yellow stripes)	\$50				\$12		
Two-Up Set	\$20				Inc postage		
ROTA “baseball” style cap	\$20				\$12		
ROTA Bar Mat (New design)	\$40				\$12		
ROTA ‘roll-up’ Stubbie cooler	\$10				\$6		
Badge Car Window Sticker (Sticks to inside of window)	\$10				Inc postage		20% discount for more than one sticker.
ROTA Face Mask	\$7				nil		\$6 Postage for 2 – 5 masks
‘THE RATS OF TOBRUK’ CD	\$15				\$4		
			Colour				
Ladies Poppy Scarf (light weight)	\$15				\$6		
\$12 postage* for orders of multiple items to the same address *Postage amounts only for Australian addresses				Total amount to be paid:		\$	

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

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

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

Payment can also be made by Credit or Debit Card.

To arrange this please 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 including o/s postage costs 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.

TOURS DE FORCE



Since the Vietnam War, Australian entertainers have performed for troops on the front line in war and peacekeeping operations. This exhibition tells their stories and that of the special military unit that was created to recruit, prepare and protect them in war zones.

DEFENDING WITH PRIDE



This special exhibition is the first of its kind for an Australian war memorial. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people have been proudly defending Australia through their military service since the formation of the armed forces. Today, anyone identifying as LGBTQ+ can serve openly in the Australian Defence Force: diversity and inclusion are values that our contemporary military actively champions and supports. It has not always been this way.

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.