



Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

OUR FIRST NEWSLETTER!

Rat's Tales Vol 1 Edition 1

Editors: Sue Trewartha
Chris Kelly

June 2023



This group, DOTROTA, started at the request of living Rats who wanted to have an Association for descendants and friends to honour the mighty Rats of Tobruk.

As veterans' numbers decline it is up to us to come together *as one family* and keep their memories alive.

Gordon Wallace was one of the instigators of DOTROTA and the last President of the Queensland Rats of Tobruk, passing away in 2020. Gordon was keen to see a place where descendants could gather, reminisce about the Rats and share stories. A place where people could form a group and just BE A FAMILY.

Betty Murphy and daughter Sarah started a Facebook group, "Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Queensland" but it soon needed to be changed as other Australian states were keen to be involved.



Gordon Wallace, DOTROTA's first Patron

"Gordon Wallace and other living Rats at the time, 2018, kept asking us to form an Association, not just a Facebook page, as they wanted to see a place for descendants and friends to get together to keep the name of the Rats of Tobruk alive."

"And, along the way a committee was formed and an Association started with the name changed to the "Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association". As we met other people with the same vision as us, ideas and projects were developed, started, completed or are in the melting pot."

So this is the result. *DOTROTA is that.* An Association, a place to make sure our Rats are never forgotten; *an Association for the Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk.*

This Association is a non profit group, and strongly encourages everyone to become paid financial members. It is the memberships, generous donations and sales of merchandise that keeps this Association running.

The Siege of Tobruk dates are 10 April to 7 December 1941. To be classified as a Rat of Tobruk your Veteran needs to have been in Tobruk during those dates. It is important to have opened service records to positively identify them as a Rat.

The NAA are increasingly adding Service Records online for all WW2 soldiers, we need access to them to confirm Rats status and find where else they served, medals awarded, WIA and further information to add to the DOTROTA database.

Just request to join, answer a couple of questions and join in. We would love to see what memorabilia you may like to share.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/340823176648909/>

FACEBOOK

DOTROTA has a closed Facebook page. Thank you to everyone who has shared photos, diaries, information and memorabilia there. We are all learning so much about the Siege of Tobruk from the amazing information that is being shared by descendants.

Contact:

Box 3389

Victoria Point West

Qld 4165 Australia

Email:

dotrota41@gmail.com





Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

LIFE MEMBERS



Owen CARLTON and Maurveen CARLTON

In February 2023, DOTROTA were delighted to announce awards of Life Membership of the Association to Owen and Maurveen CARLTON.

Owen and his partner in life Maurveen have spent many, many years in various veteran and remembrance organisations involved in honouring and researching those soldiers who have fought in past conflicts to ensure the future of this country of which they are both very proud citizens.

Owen CARLTON, Ex Service, Nasho of 3/1953 at Wacol, Qld and "A" Company, 51st Battalion, Far Nth Qld Regiment was based at Atherton, Nth Qld, till December 1955 and moved to Melbourne after leaving the Army. He became involved with the Rats of Tobruk, Melbourne, not being aware at that time, that he was a nephew of a Rat of Tobruk, Eric Noel "Ringer" CARLTON QX1733.



Roger Murphy and Owen Carlton at Brisbane Reunion 2022



Lincoln Whitehead greeting Owen and Maurveen at the Reunion



Around 2009, Owen commenced what is known as the National ROT Database, which has over 21,000 records for Aust, UK and Polish Rats of Tobruk. Roger Murphy came along and joined Owen with research. Owen commenced his Rats of Tobruk Tribute Website to display the Honour Rolls for all Rats of Tobruk and other ROT related items and in 2011, created a Rats of Tobruk Public Group Facebook page.

Owen became associated with the founders of the "Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association" (DOTROTA) and as time went on, provided access to the National ROT Database.

"I wish now, that I could have started my ROT Project much earlier in life and had the opportunity to have met and known many more Rats. We will never see the likes of the Rats of Tobruk and the Men of Kokoda, again – the mould has been broken and lost in time," Owen said.

DOTROTA would like to acknowledge Owen's work in the past and now, with the establishment of the database of the Rats of Tobruk, which still grows today in conjunction with the research project that DOTROTA maintains. Without this work initially, DOTROTA would have had to start from scratch in building the comprehensive tool now used. *Thank you Owen and Maurveen*





Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

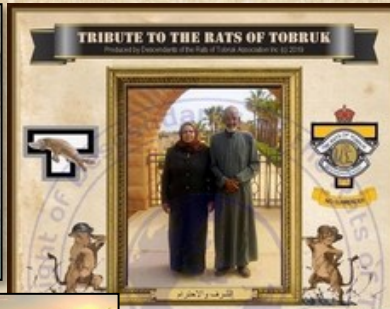
LIFE MEMBERS

Cemetery Caretaker Mohamed ALABEDE

This gentleman was a respected friend and honorary member of the Association who, along with his wife, children, father and grandfather, has given years of service tending the graves of our beloved RATS at Knightsbridge and Tobruk.

In recognition of their years of service as members of the Caretaking Staff, DOTROTA made Mohamed ALabede and his wife, Ghania, Life Members of the Association. Mohamed, Ghania and their sons, along with Mohamed's father and grandfather, have maintained a long family tradition of involvement, caring for these memorials. They have our undying gratitude and respect for this!

A newspaper clipping around the 60th Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk states "Sixty years on, the Rats of Tobruk are celebrated every Anzac Day but very few people get the chance to honour the men at Tobruk itself. One person there almost every day is the cemetery's keeper, Mouhammed Henash Mouhmmmed. Mouhmmmed has looked after both the Tobruk and Knight's Bridge cemeteries for the past 18 years – his father cared for the graves for the preceding 30 years and it is likely that his young son will take over when he too, passes on. Every time a visitor passes by, Mouhmmmed thinks about the personal reasons driving them to visit such a remote place. "A lot of the time families come here and you can see the tears in their faces" he said. I've been here all of my life looking after these graves and I feel a very special bond to those men. A sad place but a very beautiful place."



During the 60th Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk, Trade Minister Mark Vaile visited Tobruk War Cemetery. Mouhammed Henash Mouhmmmed on left, explains to Mark Vaile, the elements of the war cemetery in which almost 1000 Australians are buried.

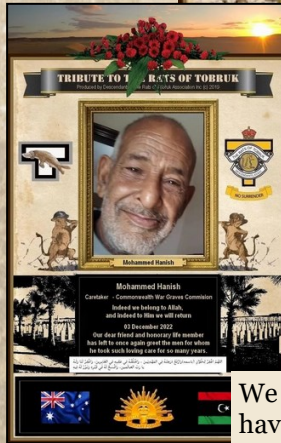


Photo top, Mohamed at Post R7 in 2020

Photo below, from John Maclean of his friend Dennis Staley with Mohamed in Tobruk battlefields



We know of two of our Descendants members who have visited Tobruk War Cemetery in the past and had met Mohamed. At the sad news of his passing, Deb Goodwin described him as a kind and gentle man whom she was fortunate to meet a couple of times, noting the care and dedication he and his family had. John Maclean, when visiting Tobruk in 2009, met Mohamed. "He invited us to his home where we met and had lunch with the whole family. We then sat on the floor and talked and talked. A very memorable day for me. He was so proud of the work he was doing. I was lucky enough to visit Libya and Egypt, a trip of a life time. We were a group of 8 and spent 2 days with him. One day we spent visiting graves, the other the battle fields. It was a wonderful experience."

Ray Windlow, chief researcher, in 2020, said "I am certain everyone has been enjoying the photos on Facebook, from our dear friend Mohamed ALABEDE. Scenes of Tobruk today realtime! We have added these and other photos into a webpage, Tobruk Battlefields Today, on our website with full credit to him and his family as keepers of our soldiers' memorials so far from home at Tobruk and Knightsbridge War Cemeteries."

Mohamed sadly passed away after a battle with cancer on 3 December 2022.





Rat's Tales

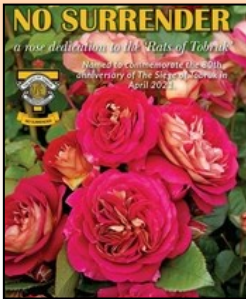


Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

KEEPING THE NAME OF THE RATS OF TOBRUK ALIVE



"NO SURRENDER"
Rats of Tobruk motto.
"No Surrender Roses were planted in each State to mark 80th Anniversary Siege of Tobruk"



RESEARCHERS

Over the past fifteen years, two dedicated men, Owen Carlton and Roger Murphy have added Rats of Tobruk names to a Database. This database is now being used by DOTROTA to research each Rat.

We found some generous people happy to voluntarily help with research as each soldier needs his service records checked to confirm they are Rats. The last resting place of the Rat of Tobruk is also researched and recorded where possible, with the help of many photographers across Australia who take memorial photos when requested.

We have a dedicated group of volunteer workers doing many hours of research, out of respect for not only their veterans, but yours as well, to update this huge database.

No one gets paid for this work and when needed, we join history groups, use research aids, purchase war history books, unit history books, and the volunteers pay for this themselves for the satisfaction of keeping the memory of our Rats alive and making research a little easier.

Research involves verifying if they are a Rat from opened service records, recording WIA, KIA, dates of death and where died, where buried and looking for photos of headstones and memorial plaques. We also research websites such as Ancestry to try to locate descendants, sending messages to let them know about this Assoc. Many descendants have been found with the work done by our volunteers. Once this is all verified, often checking with other researchers if something isn't clear, there is a digital tribute done for each soldier, putting a face to a name.

ARE YOU AWARE OF WHAT DOTROTA DOES?

SERVICE RECORDS. DOTROTA lobbied NAA to ask them to open all WWII service records free of charge, so that Rats of Tobruk status can be determined. This is now happening with these records being opened over the next few years. Service records reveal a lot about a Rats service and is our only way to definitively determine a Rat of Tobruk.

ANZAC. The Association attends, with wreaths, some services, funerals and functions. Lunch has been purchased for living RATS at these events.

CAMPAIGNED to make the unofficial T medal official. Not successful!

NO SURRENDER. Treloar Roses named a beautiful red and yellow rose, NO SURRENDER. The bare rooted roses, available in many states sell out each year.

SCHOOL PROJECT. DOTROTA is creating an information pack about the Rats of Tobruk to distribute nationally.

FACEBOOK. WEBSITE. We are completely reliant on membership fees and donations to maintain storage costs for Tributes, storage for database and cost of website.

HMAS TOBRUK. Requested naming of another naval vessel as HMAS Tobruk.



ORGANISED 80th Anniversary Siege of Tobruk World Reunion in Brisbane 10 April 2022, an event bringing together many descendants

DIGITAL TRIBUTES.

These individual digital tributes are available to financial members to print off. As each 500 tributes are completed, they are printed into books for sale to descendants on the website, see the "Bookstore" under Q Store, to order.

WE ARE ON THE WEB!

<https://www.ratsoftobruk.com.au>





Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

WHEN IS TOBRUK NOT TOBRUK?

Some of our investigations into RATS unfortunately leads to what is a somewhat common misconception, that mentioning the name Tobruk means they fought there during the Siege and therefore were a RAT. Regrettably that is not always the case.

We need to be clear here.

TOBRUK is a LOCATION not an EVENT.
The SIEGE OF TOBRUK is an EVENT not a LOCATION.

Confused? Don't be.

Tobruk, the location, is a coastal city in Libya. It is a deep water port that made it very desirable for war efforts on both sides. In January 1941, Australians fought their first major land battle in World War II when men of the 6th Division AIF and other Allied troops, engaged Italian forces at the town of Bardia on the coast of Libya. On 3-5 January 1941, the Italian positions were attacked and Bardia was captured. Over 40,000 Italian prisoners were taken. Advancing west along the Libyan coast, the 6th Australian Division captured Tobruk from the Italians on 21-22 January 1941 and the town became a garrison for the Australian and British forces.

In early March, one of Hitler's best generals, Erwin Rommel with his Afrika Korps, came to the aid of their Italian allies in Libya.

Although initially planned to leave the 6th Division in Cyrenaica (eastern area of Libya) for defence, the 7th Division, who were pencilled in for the defence of Greece/Crete, were still insufficiently trained and equipped. As such, in late March/early April 1941, the 6th Division was withdrawn from North Africa to defend Greece and replaced by the 9th Division.

Tobruk, the Siege event, began in April when German forces had cut off and surrounded **Tobruk, the location**.

For eight months, from April to December 1941, Tobruk was besieged and Australian forces, notably the men of the 9th Division including the 18th Brigade of the 7th Division and RAN ships of the famous "scrap iron flotilla" played a prominent role in the town's defence.

The defiance of the defenders of Tobruk raised morale in the countries of the British Empire and Commonwealth. Those who served there became known as the "Rats of Tobruk", so-called because the German radio propaganda broadcaster "Lord Haw Haw" described them as rats living in the ground. There were many men who were in Tobruk during 1941 and who took part in securing it from the Italian garrison in early that year. But with few exceptions these men left Tobruk long before the Siege commenced. "Lord Haw Haw" was not referring to these men when he spoke his now historic words. He was talking about the 9th Division and others trapped there from April through to December.

There are many Division and Unit memorials with the word "TOBRUK" inscribed on the battle honours.

BUT only a portion of them were involved with the Siege of Tobruk.

So in the event that your soldier is deemed not a RAT it casts no light on his bravery, fortitude and the debt we owe him. It is simply a statement of fact, one we cannot change. It is not something we do lightly or without considerable investigation and discussion.

Ray Windlow and the research team



"Those who served there became known as the "Rats of Tobruk."

"Lord Haw Haw" described them as rats living in the ground."



In a post on our Facebook page in 2020, Mohamed ALabede wrote "In this place and on the heights of Tobruk, the Rats of Tobruk stood with all their courage in facing the enemy, so that the local people in Tobruk and every city in Libya talk about them and through my visits to their sites that testify to them, and my previous careers on their graves, it is a beautiful coincidence that my family take care of the cemetery."

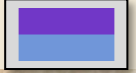
Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

John Collins
The Face of Tobruk

THE "FACE OF TOBRUK"



With his larrikin looks and unshaven face, Private John Leonard COLLINS SX1793 2/10th Infantry Battalion, was known as the "Face of Tobruk". He enlisted, or tried to, four times, before being accepted. He enlisted at Keswick into the 2/10th, was discharged Medically Unfit. He walked out, joined a different queue and went into 2/27th, again was discharged Medically Unfit. He then went across the border into Victoria and enlisted under an alias but discharged Medically Unfit. Not one to give up John travelled up to Port Germain, his home town, near Port Pirie and was accepted on 1 March 1940 into the 2/10th. He had put his age back from 38 to 36.

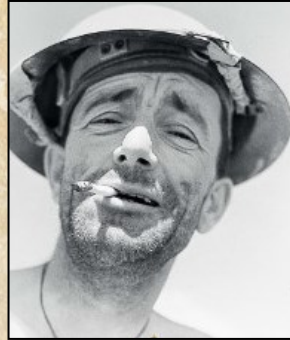
During the war, many people were encouraged to knit socks and other clothing to be sent overseas to the soldiers. Coralie Bilney, while in the Royal Adelaide Hospital during the war, did her bit and knitted some socks, enclosing her name and address in the parcel sent overseas. John received that parcel and that was the start of their romance and they married in 1944.



John fought at Tobruk till Aug and went to Syria and Lebanon then in March 1942 back to Australian and on to fight in Milne Bay, New Guinea.

After he left the Army in 1946, John started up a Poultry Farm in Clarendon, with about 2000 chickens. As John was affected by the war and suffering "anxiety neurosis" as PTSD was called then, he spent some time in hospital and their farm became too much work for his wife and they gave that up. John spent five years in the South East of SA, working for a seed cleaning and pickling company, Hannaford Graders. His next job was working for Dept of Agriculture as a Herd Recorder, testing butterfat content of cows milk in the Mount Gambier and Mt Schank area. He was very well respected in the agricultural community in the Upper South East and was involved in a group of interested farmers responsible for getting the first vet to work and live there and also in getting the first cheese factory started in the district. He was at the time living in Mundulla and was secretary for a local show society for a number of years. He was also involved in the local Freemasons. John didn't have much to do with the RSL but always attended ANZAC services.

John died on 17 March 1976, aged 74 yrs, in Bordertown, SA and was buried in the Mundulla cemetery.



John was another of our Rats who rarely spoke of their war time experiences and his son Peter, who had heard quite a lot of stories about his father, totally disbelieved most of them. Peter had been told that he was called "Stuka Collins", because he had shot down a Stuka aircraft. Then some 2/10th men told him that his father had flown a plane in

North Africa, something Peter also dismissed as he knew someone had to have at least some knowledge about flying a plane to have done that! He did know that his father, once they caught up with his records of being Medically Unfit, assigned him to HQ Postal Section of 2/10th in New Guinea. That accounted for some of the amazing things that he had sent home! Peter and Val had seen and collected quite a few photos of John, the "Face of Tobruk", over time. Peter thinks he must have followed the photographer around!

It was a trip to the 80th Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk in 2022, in Brisbane that we think the hands of the Rats above guided them.

Peter and his wife Val, were at the "Meet and Greet" on Friday night, Val seated with several other wives whom she had just met. She was looking at photos that one of them was sharing, listening to her telling a story to them all, about Stuka Collins, a mate of her fathers, saying that he got that nickname because he had stood up in a trench with a rifle and shot down a German Stuka which had actually crashed in a trench near to her father. No one had exchanged surnames as they sat chatting, so there was no knowledge of who was who. Imagine their surprise when Val told them, "my father in law was Stuka Collins!" and they went on to exchange information and stories.



You can imagine how astounded Peter was when he was told all of this! It was only then that Peter finally admitted that perhaps some of the stories he had been told, were actually true.

Some months after that, Peter had a lady do some research for him about his father, whose Service Records are not available, and another piece of news to Peter, was that John had been in the Port Pirie area before the war and had taken flying lessons at nearby Mallalla!





Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

REMEMBERING PRISONERS OF WAR



"THE PEN" - EDITION 1

CHRIS KELLY

"Aussie! Vas du das Krueger est uber...for you the war is over!" Words only others would hear. The Oxford dictionary states the meaning of "prisoner of war" is "a person who has been captured and imprisoned by the enemy in war." There it is, all summed up into a tidy paragraph, but he or she is so much more when they are tossed in *the Pen*.

He hangs his head in shame - while his cobber's continue to battle the enemy - barely able to come to grips with an outcome he knew would happen, but not to him. If he's to come out the other side, to live, he has one choice, pick himself up and brave many things, unknown to him yet. Starvation, beatings, humiliation, deprivation, illness, constant surveillance, loss - so much loss - and the list goes on.

He endures it all hoping one day to return to a life previously lived, there are times he lacks strength, he knows he's on the brink, on these days he leans on his mates, who are only too happy to prop him up, they know their turn will come. He sees also kindness and experiences mate-ship more profound than one could imagine, for only they know.

Staring through the barb, he wonders. Why are some so kind and other's so cruel? How will he return to live in a normal world? Will he have the courage to look his cobber's in the eye? How will they ever forgive him? Yes, he wonders. He tries not to let it eat too far into his breaking heart, but it's hard and he has no answers.

He knows he's no longer a soldier - the sole purpose for his voyage to this Godforsaken place - he doesn't know who he is anymore. What's his purpose? A man needs purpose, without it the will to live is so easily lost.

When everything is taken from you, what do you become?

There are times you feel no better than a caged animal, you are wholly at the whim of your captor. A POW learns all too quickly the single thread deciding his quality of life will hold on or be broken, depending on the hatred or - if you are lucky - empathy, of those running the camp, more specifically, those in charge.

In this inaugural edition of the DOTROTA newsletter I hope to have encapsulated - as best I can - what it was like for those taken prisoner.

During the course of the war, there were more than 30,000 Aussies "bagged", some of whom were Rats. Approximately 8000 from across the Middle East, Mediterranean and European theatres of war, 265 would die and of the 22,000 taken across the Pacific (some civilian), approximately one third died.

Thousands of stories and episodes left the camps with the prisoners, some have gone to the grave, some are as horrific as others are humorous. In future newsletters I will share the good, bad and ugly, and a few pics, in hopes of giving you an understanding (though none of us can truly know) of what life was like as a Prisoner of War.

I'm dedicating the first column of "The Pen" to them all, past and sadly present, but I thank my father for the letters he left us and the cassette tape we didn't know he had, there is no greater gift he could have given us.

We will remember them.

Chris Kelly

"The Pen" researched and put together by
Christine Kelly,
Descendant of POW

NX17078

Private William Robert James

"Bill" LAMBOURN

2/17th Infantry Battalion

Born 15 Dec 1913

Enlisted 24 May 1940

Taken Prisoner

14 Apr 1941-1945

P.G. 66 Capua Italy

P.G. 57 Gruppignano Italy

Stalag XVIII-A Germany

Deceased 08 Jun 2002





Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

NEW RATS OF TOBRUK UNIT ADDED page 1



2/1st Australian Railway Construction Coy

Researchers use an OOB, Order of Battle, which lists the known military units located within the field of operations for a battle or campaign, in this case, units that were at Tobruk during the siege, an Australian War Memorial File dated 20 Jan 1958.

This sort of thing is very rare indeed. Thanks to the stalwart follow up by Matt McHugh we are delighted to add a new unit as having been present during the siege. To be precise, a small detachment of men (11 ?) from this unit have been confirmed as having been there during the Siege.

This new unit is 2/1st Australian Railway Construction Coy.

Now I can hear you saying "What?", "How can it have taken so long to confirm them?" So bear with me and I will explain.

The Australian units known to be in Tobruk during the Siege were part of or attached to the 9th Division constituting a combined force to hold the port city against Rommel and their Italian Axis allies. As you would well know there were units or companies from 7th Division and also parts of 1 Australia Corps as well as a variety of other nationalities.

As a reference to who was there, we have traditionally been reliant on the AWM File of Research No 577 dated 20 Jan 1958. In addition, a scholarly work by Colonel Ward A Miller, US Army, of the Combat Studies Institute, titled "The 9th Division Versus the Africa Corps" was published in August 1986. This second document enhanced the listing of known troops to also include the UK and foreign troops also present in Tobruk.

There is NO OFFICIAL LIST of all the allied participants during the Siege of Tobruk. That's important!

So fast forward to a few months back and member Rebecca Scarborough approached us about her grandfather, who often regaled the family with stories of his time in Tobruk, wondering if we had done a tribute for him. Logically we did some homework and sadly we were unable to find conclusive evidence that his unit, the 1st Australian Railway Construction Company, had ever been in attendance in Tobruk. She was adamant he had always said, "They asked for some strong lads to give them a hand in Tobruk, so off we went."

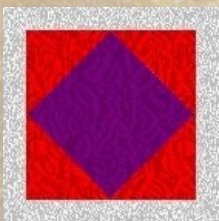
Our first port of call is to determine what unit he was with at that time. And here is where we started to struggle with the info. Sapper Harold "Ike" Gascoigne was with the 2/1st Aust Railway Construction Company pretty much the whole time he was in service. From past research, we knew that the NZ equivalent Railway companies spent some time rebuilding the rail lines in Libya but there was no record of the Australian companies ever being there.

We searched the 2/1st Unit Diaries and came up empty on the day-by-day reports. In fact it spoke mainly of mundane matters whilst the surveying and establishment of processes to maintain the rail lines from Palestine to Egypt.

It was only the briefest of mentions on another website that the possibility arose that *some* of the 2/1st ARC men had volunteered (or been seconded) to work alongside the British 1018 Docks Operating Company based at Alexandria whilst their own force and agenda was developing. We knew that British 1018 Docks Operating Coy also were in Tobruk during the Siege. But that's where the limits of knowledge took us using normal channels.

Cont next page

"A small detachment of men from this unit have now been confirmed as having been at Tobruk during the Siege."





Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

NEW RATS OF TOBRUK UNIT ADDED page 2



"Confirming this detachment or loan of men from 1ARCC to a British Docks operating company in Alex and then to Tobruk is very impressive. It's not often that old war stories such as this one can be confirmed by archival evidence."

Dr Karl James
Head of the Military History Section at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

There indeed existed a possibility that some of those "volunteers" went out to Tobruk for whatever reason. But it was NOT within their Unit Diaries that it happened and the equivalent documents from the British side are almost inaccessible to us.

So unfortunately, our reading was, possible but not confirmed, unless subsequent information came to light. An email inquiry to the AWM to our Senior Historian colleague asked about the possibility of Australian troops serving with Allied forces other than Australia during the Tobruk Siege.

This interchange of info with the AWM is extremely valuable and we have on a few occasions been able to point out errors in their public documentation so hopefully this time they could come up with some answers for us.

The reply confirmed there had been a small contingent in Tobruk as part of 1018 Docks Operating Coy for a period in June 1941. Armed with this, Matt was able to locate a letter from the OC of the British Unit to his counterpart at 2/1st ARC congratulating him for the excellent work his men had achieved whilst under his temporary command.

So whilst they number probably only 11-12 men, we can now proudly pay homage to another group of engineers as RATS of TOBRUK.

LEST WE FORGET

Ray Windlow

And the research team

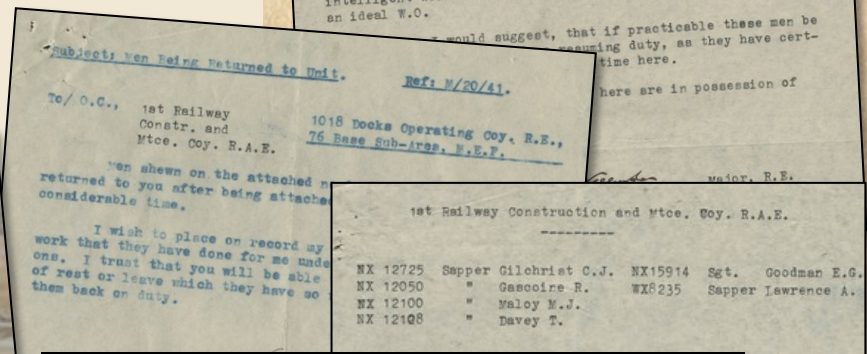
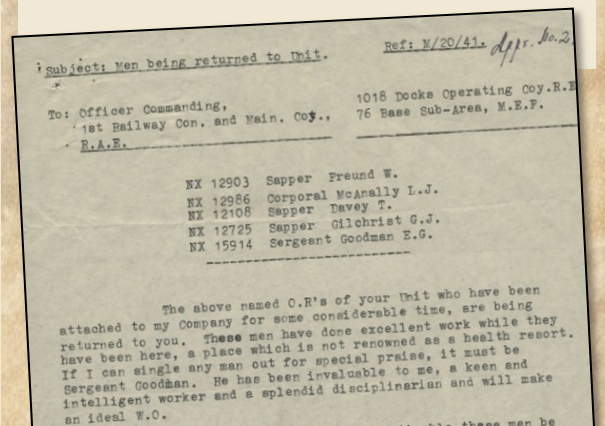
We submitted our findings on this to Dr Karl James, the Head of the Military History Section at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra and his reply is as follows:

"...Thank you for your email. What wonderful pieces of detective work you, Matt McHugh and your research team have uncovered!!

Confirming this detachment or loan of men from 1ARCC to a British Docks operating company in Alex and then to Tobruk is very impressive. It's not often that old war stories such as this one can be confirmed by archival evidence. I hope the family had letters or diaries from Sapper Harold Gascoigne..."

THIS IS WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO !

TO MAKE SURE NO HERO GOES UNSUNG, NO UNIT GOES UNRECOGNISED for its part in the mighty "RATS OF TOBRUK" and to ensure everyone knows about it!



This letter above, was from the Commanding Officer of the 1018 Dock Ops Coy to his counterpart at the 1ARCC and specifically named the men and praised their work. He stated that these men were under his command for a considerable time and said, "I wish to place on record my appreciation of the splendid work that they have done for me under the very worst of conditions. I trust that you will be able to grant them a good spell of rest or leave which they have so richly earned, before putting them back on duty."





Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

REMEMBERING THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK REUNION *part 1*



The Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Association Australia Inc commemorated the 80th Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk at Gaythorne RSL in Mitchelton, Brisbane. This Anniversary was planned for 2021, but because of covid, postponed twice. Finally, members of the Association, joined by VIPs, met on 8, 9, 10th April 2022.

This story cannot be written without acknowledging the amazing dedication of Betty Murphy, descendant of Joseph Oakley, QX4796, 2/13th Field RAE, and her daughter Sarah, and son Travis for their work done behind the scenes.

The families who are the Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk were gathering. Members from around Australia met on Friday at the great facilities at Gaythorne RSL, for a "Meet and Greet" evening. People who had previously only known each other as names on Facebook were able to meet face to face. It was a night abuzz with anticipation of what the weekend would bring.

Saturday morning saw around 20 helpers set up 8000 handmade red poppies in Sid Loder Park, opposite the Gaythorne RSL. A map of Australia was formed around a tree from poppies handmade by a member. Red and purple poppies made by other members were placed in garden beds around the Remembrance Wall where wreaths were laid on Sunday. The formation of "1941" planted with poppies across the sloping hill near the Library, was a fitting backdrop for many photos taken at the service on Sunday.

At the dinner, guests found each table personally set, with a selection of laminated WWII cartoons and sketches, as placemats. A menu which included a 1941 Tobruk themed variation, sat at each placement with a box in the style of Ration Care Boxes sent to the troops during WW2, containing razor blades, cordial, soap, ration chocolates, matches, jam, tea bags, biscuits and other goodies. Lovingly and painstakingly made by Kaye Ross, these were an emotional link to the soldiers.

On top of each Care Box was a hand crafted red and black poppy made by Val Collins for each descendant along with a "painted Rat Rock" made by Sue Trewartha. Gifts for those attending included a DOTROTA Tobruk Hessian carry bag containing an 80th Anniversary Medallion and key ring, a notebook, DOTROTA pens, car stickers, a booklet about the Reunion and the Siege of Tobruk, and a list of who attended and the unit their Rat served in.

Then there was the amazing work by Lucylu and Andy Simmons, who created life sized soldiers made of chicken wire, kneeling and standing amongst swathes of handmade poppies. These "Ghost Soldiers" were used at the Dinner and the Sunday Service in Sid Loder Park.

Also set up and pride of place in this park, was the Tobruk fig tree in a large planter box, a cutting from the original "Fig Tree" at the Regimental Aid Post near Tobruk.

To be continued

Some memories here, of the wonderful Reunion weekend for the 80th anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk held in Brisbane

Cartoon Capers





Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

TOBRUK ECHO

Tobruk



Echo

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF RATS OF TOBRUK ASSOCIATION (VIC. BRANCH)

President:
J. McLAY

Editor:
C. G. PURA

Secretary:
P. KEMP

Vol. 1, No. 1

Price: One Penny

October, 1949

• Out of the Darkness to Light •

BELIEVING that nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm we present this, the First Issue of our Magazine, as the forerunner of many more, bigger and brighter ones.

The idea of having our own paper was conceived by men who fought and existed (living is hardly the word) through the siege of Tobruk, those bitter eight months from Easter onwards in 1941, when the Allied outlook was black.

But our determination was strong. We knew that the surest way not to fail, was to determine to succeed.

We endured the long days and the memorable nights, we existed on meagre, unwholesome, unappetising food.

We lived (the one time we can use the word here) for letters from home, for that ray of warmth which kept us alive from day to day. We got by, somehow. Many of our comrades didn't.

That is war, in all its stark, bitter brutality. War, which Bernard Shaw once said, never proves who's right, but only who's left.

The years have passed. Eight of them, but the events of those weary weeks are still vivid in the memories of most of us.

And perhaps it's right that we do remember, not just that we were there and played our part, but that we knew we had to win, that it was for a better world, one safe for our children and their children to live in.

What did Thomas de Quincey say?:

"The morning was come of a mighty day — a day of crisis and of ultimate hope for human nature, then suffering mysterious eclipse, and laboring in some dread extremity. Some greater instinct was at stake, some mightier cause, than ever yet the sword had pleaded or trumpet had proclaimed."

That, it seems, sums it up in a nutshell. We weren't supermen. We were Australians, irrespective of race and religion, there to toil mightily for our country, because if Tobruk hadn't been held, the Allied cause might well have been lost.

Unconsciously, we followed the dictum of Abraham Lincoln, to "let us have faith that right may be right, and in that faith let us to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."

We did it, and we were proud.

We like to look back in retrospect and think of the khamseens, of the several thousand air raids, of the filthy stinking water, of the rats and the flies and the fleas, of our periods of ennui and exhilaration, of

a myriad thoughts that came to mind merely by closing our eyes.

It was a phase in our lives, at once pleasant and unpleasant. There were times when it all seemed as pointless as a pretzel. We didn't understand why all this should have been, in what we fondly thought was an enlightened 20th century era.

But, it's all history now.

Then let us remember the days which have gone, stride boldly into the future, filling our niche and accomplishing our task and leaving the world better than we found it, be it by an improved poppy, a perfect poem or a rescued soul. Let us earn the respect of intelligent men and little children.

Let us ever be willing to pay a price for freedom, remembering that no price ever asked of it is half the cost of doing without it.

—C. G. PURA, Editor—

To the imperishable memory of those who didn't come back, to those of our Brother "Rats" who lie under a sandy grave at Tobruk, or at Alamain, we respectfully dedicate this production.

At the going down of the sun — and in the morning — we will remember them.

The Tobruk Echo was a magazine produced by the Victorian Rats of Tobruk Association. Their first edition was produced October 1949, cost one penny and was edited by C G PURA. Their first edition started off "Out of the Darkness to Light. "Believing that nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm we present this, the First Issue of our Magazine, as the forerunner of many more, bigger and brighter ones. The idea of having our own paper was conceived by men who fought and existed (living is hardly the word) through the siege of Tobruk, those bitter eight months from Easter onwards in 1941, when the Allied outlook was black. But our determination was strong. We knew the surest way not to fail was to determine to succeed. We endured the long days and the memorable nights, we existed on meagre, unwholesome, unappetising food. We lived (the one time we can use the word here) for letters from home, for that ray of warmth which kept us alive from day to day... We weren't supermen. We were Australians, irrespective of race and religion, there to toil mightily for our country, because if Tobruk hadn't been held, the Allied cause might well have been lost..."





Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc



DOTROTA MEMBERSHIP

We invite and encourage you to join the "Descendants of The Rats of Tobruk Australia Association" (DOTROTA) as a financial member. You will receive an Association metal badge, stickers and certificate of membership as well as discount on merchandise you order from the website.

Cost of membership is \$20 annually. Costs of running the Association are many, membership fees are important if you wish this group to continue with these valuable projects. Easiest way to join is by going to the website and click on **MEMBERSHIP**.

As the veterans' numbers decline it is up to us to come together as one family and keep their memories alive for future generations.

**THINK HOW PROUD YOUR RAT WOULD BE TO SEE YOU ARE A
FINANCIAL MEMBER OF AN ASSOCIATION TO KEEP HIS NAME ALIVE.**

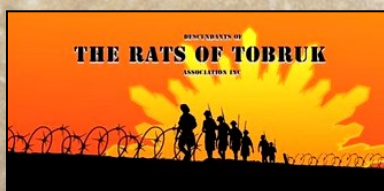


Box 3389
Victoria Point West
Qld 4165 Australia

Email:
dotrota41@gmail.com

WE ARE ON THE WEB! <https://www.ratsoftobruk.com.au>

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT THIS ASSOCIATION?



Welcome! After a recent DOTROTA survey where it was suggested that a newsletter would be a great idea, here we are!

As founder of this Association, I am pleased to see this idea come to fruition and I can see that this newsletter will give us the opportunity to share information, our Rats stories and upcoming events to all those on Facebook and to our members who do not have Facebook.

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT THIS ASSOCIATION?

If you have something you would like to submit to be considered for publication, please contact us via email.

This is a non profit Association and we rely on those on our Facebook page and others who are interested, to become financial members to cover costs. Its easy to do this on the website!

The Association is collecting anything that people want to leave in trust for future generations. The Association is pleased to receive any donation, no matter what it is, please talk to us about this, it is all precious and will be looked after.

Have you seen the merchandise we have for sale? Go look at the website, put in an order, some great Rats items in there. Link to website above.

YOUR RESEARCH

If you are researching information about your Rat and his unit, let us know, we are happy to help out. Lots of knowledgeable people here and there is a lot of information online now.

We encourage you to write up your relative's service records and other information for your descendants.

So please, can you not only dig around in your cupboards, drawers and those tin boxes, to find and share your precious photos, diaries, memorabilia and letters, but write up and record what you have about your Rat, to ensure our future generations know something of what the Rats of Tobruk endured during their war service. Imagine how many stories would be preserved if we all did this! Please encourage other descendants you know to join with this group, it is a great way to make sure our Rats are never forgotten!

Betty Murphy



Copyright Notice

All articles and photographs used in this publication are copyright unless otherwise stated. They should not be sold or used in any other publication without the express written permission from the Committee of this Association.

Disclaimer

The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of DOTROTA. The material used in this publication is checked for accuracy but no liability can be assumed for any losses due to the use of any material published herein.