



Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

EXTRA! EXTRA!

Rat's Tales Vol 1 Edition 2

Editors: Sue Trewartha
Chris Kelly

Sept 2023



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Box 3389

Victoria Point West
Qld 4165 Australia

Email:
dotrota41@gmail.com

FACEBOOK

DOTROTA has a closed, private 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. 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/>



As we develop this newspaper and decide what to put in following editions, we realized that already we have put together too many pages for the next edition, planned on being late November, in time for Christmas.

Next year the theme for newsletters is going to be "MEDICAL" and we pretty well have planned what we want for each edition for that. But please, if you have something medical of any sort, contact us as we would love to see your input into these newsletters.

So with an overload of pages, we decided to give a bonus edition for this year. Enjoy the journey of learning more about what it meant to be a Rat of Tobruk.

Soon after his appointment as area commander, Colonel Cook became concerned at the number of harmful rumours circulating through the fortress. The way to counter falsehood and perk up morale, he decided, was to publish the truth. Despite being besieged and shelled by the Germans, Sergeant Williams, Australian Army Service Corps, was commissioned to publish a daily news sheet called the "Tobruk Truth" soon dubbed "The Dinkum Oil". Though very simple, it served its purpose, publishing news culled from BBC broadcasts together with items of local interest. It was printed, in fact, "roneoed" on a captured Italian duplicator, a Roneograph, a rotary duplicator that used a stencil through which ink was pressed. This was done in early morning hours and sent to the depots for issue with daily rations. It was a going concern when the siege began, continuing through the siege. When later the duplicator was wrecked by bomb-blast, other means of publication were quickly found and it increased circulation to 800 copies a day, every unit and detachment received a copy. Sergeant Williams did almost all the work by himself. TROVE. Argus Thursday 28 Aug 1941.

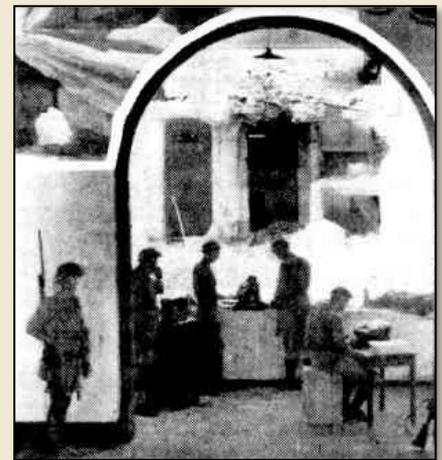
Right: In the office l to r. LSgt WILLIAMS and Drv G RUDD. (photo F HURLEY). AWM 4 May 1941

Tobruk Truth. During the week, we came into possession of a paper printed in Tobruk, sent by Corporal Ed Withers, who is in that outpost, to his parents in St George. "Bull" is in good health and wishes to be remembered to all his friends who read the Beacon. The paper is printed on a Duplicator and a Foolscap sheet, printed both sides "TOBRUK TRUTH The Dinkum Oil Always Appears Vol 2; No 69. Notes from BBC Broadcast at 1990 Hours." The paper was dated 2 August 1941 and contained news broadcast over the BBC. It was also pointed out that between April 9 and 30, 667 air raids took place at Tobruk."

Balonne Beacon St George, Qld, Thursday 28 August 1941

(I just need to say that until I found this clipping, we did not have Cpl Withers name in our database, so now he is a new edition to our Rats list!

QX1488 Signalmán Edmund John "Bull" WITHERS 9th Division - Signals. Sue)



TROVE 31 May 1941 The Mail. Office of Tobruk Truth



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

007581



Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

EXTRA! EXTRA!

Produced Under Shot and Shell, "The Tobruk Truth." This week I received a very interesting little newspaper. It was produced by the former editor of a Melbourne suburban paper, Bill Williams and is titled the "Tobruk Truth," but has been re-christened by the troops, "The Dinkum Oil." It is said to be the first newspaper published on the battlefield. Its motto is "Always appears".

To produce the journal Bill sits for an hour or two each night endeavoring to pick up overseas broadcasts, of which he takes shorthand notes then off to his typewriter where he cuts a stencil then on to a duplicator where a limited number of copies are run off. Hours of painstaking effort are obviously necessary to produce the job under such conditions.

TROVE Albury Wodonga Express, Frid 20 June 1941.

TOBRUK FROM THE INSIDE

From Our Own Correspondent LONDON, Wednesday. Intimate glimpses of life as lived by the gallant garrison at Tobruk provided by Mr Richard Capell, Daily Telegraph, written after a visit to this historic scene of war.

"The garrison's daily news sheet, "Tobruk Truth: Dinkum Oil" summarizes world events. "Always Appears" is its motto. Australians receive an abundance of newspapers and magazines from home. These often are passed on to the British troops but how starved four men are for reading matter is exemplified by what an English engineer corporal told me "All I've had all along is an old copy of "Illustrated London News". I have rationed myself with it so as not to get through too soon. All I've got left unread is an article on Egyptology, which I'm saving for a rainy day."

TROVE The Barrier Miner, 28 Aug 1941

Tobruk "Paper Bombing"

Pte Neil BARRIE, of Brunswick, back from the ME, included a copy of "The Palestine Daily Telegraph" telling how the Germans "paper bombed" him and others at Tobruk, telling them escape was impossible, warning that their bombers were waiting to sink transports and urging the Aussies to put up the white flag and surrender. The Aussies put up a huge white flag on the highest building in the town. It's plain inscription was "Come and Get It!"

TROVE Sporting Globe (Melbourne, Vic), Sat 9 May 1942, page 4



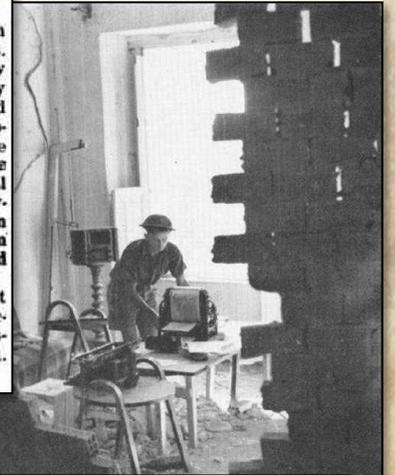
THE "TOBRUK TRUTH"

With the latest copies of the "A.I.F. News," which is published for the Australian troops in the Middle East, and forwarded to this office by Sig. Morrie Forster, a copy of "Tobruk Truth" was included.

The "Tobruk Truth," or "Dinkum Oil," states that it always appears. It does not say whether it is a daily or weekly publication, but the copy is marked Vol. 1, No. 89, and is dated May 14, 1941. It is edited and produced by L/Sgt. W. H. Williams. The issue comprises four foolscap pages of closely typed matter. The local news describes patrol and air activities, and the bulk of the publication comprises news of the world from British B.B.C. Page 4 is illustrated by an artist with a vigorous pencil.

The copy is a very worthy effort considering the conditions of production. The paper is apparently discolored by the sands of the desert. The copy will be treasured.

Port Lincoln Times 28 Aug 1941



ic : 1864 - 1946) / Sat 7 Jun 1941 / Page 8 / HEROIC DEFENDERS



910 - 1954) / Sun 5 Oct 1941 / Page 5 / Tobruk (in spite of

Now and again he stops to put fresh piles of pink, foolscap sheets in position or to remove the sheets that have been printed.

The young man is Lance-Sergeant W. H. Williams (VX27459) editor and publisher of "Tobruk Truth" (with which appears to be incorporated "The Dinkum Oil").

A copy of the Tobruk garrison's newspaper has just been received by Mr. J. H. Tonkin, M.L.C., of Sydney.

It gives a day-to-day account of the garrison's activities, publishes articles by the troops and reprints, cartoons from Australian newspapers.

The August 19 issue discloses that since records were first taken on March 2, 1350 air raid alarms have been sounded.

It also devotes two pages to a commentary on the activities of the troops in Tobruk, written by a war correspondent.

Send the 1 you receive abroad to Sunday S

£1 for week, 5s for oth

The Australasian, Melbourne, June 1941. Sgt Duggan, Pte Grace and Driver Cowan reading the Truth



Sydney Sun, 5 Oct 1941



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Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

NEWS FROM DOTROTA



TRADEMARK

We have added an extra layer of protection to honour these brave men and their legacy by securing our trademark for the beloved Rats of Tobruk logo.

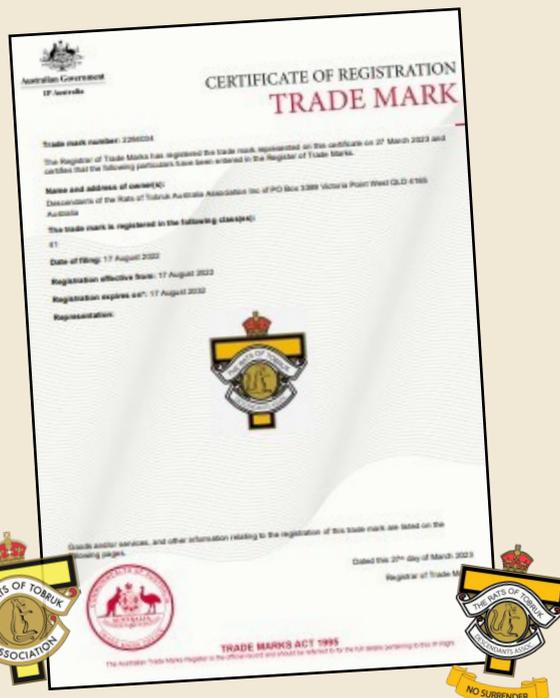
This came about after concerns were raised that the logo was being used by foreign identities.

The investigation by our IP lawyer found that the Rats of Tobruk logo had never been Trademarked to protect it. We found ourselves in a position to protect the name and logo from misuse.

This move isn't just a formality it's a big deal. First, having that trademark in place means total legal protection and exclusive rights so no can one use the logo without permission. This covers all forms of the Rats of Tobruk logo, including all existing colours and design style including whether the rats tail is up or down, as well as all wording connected, is now covered by our Trademark.

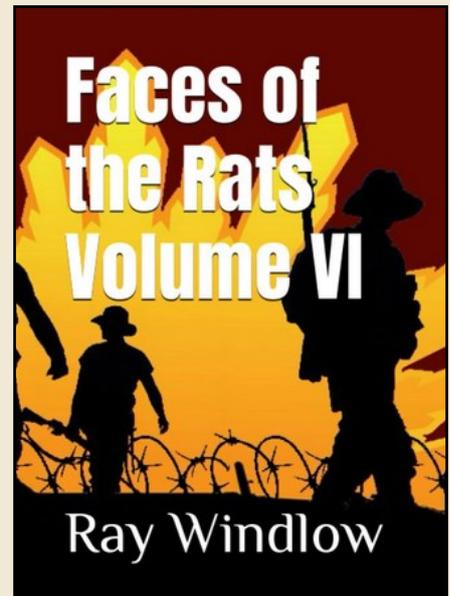
So, with the Rats of Tobruk logo officially locked down it's now fully protected for future generations.

We have added an extra layer of protection to honour these brave men and their legacy by securing our trademark for the beloved Rats of Tobruk logo.



FACES OF THE RATS VOLUME VI RELEASED!

We are extremely proud to announce that the proof reading of Volume VI of the "Faces of the Rats" book series is completed and the book is now available on our website.



Like the other volumes, it contains 500 tribute images to the Rats of Tobruk making our collection now 3,000 completed tributes.

Visit the Q Store for further details.

<https://www.ratsoftobrukdescendants.org.au/online-store>

If you wish to find out which volume your Rat is in, please go to this website page.

<https://www.ratsoftobrukdescendants.org.au/fotr-index-page>

These books are put together as our research team confirms each Rat of Tobruk from service records and digital tributes are done to each of them.

Ray Windlow

and the Research Team





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Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

THE TOBRUK FIG TREE

In Sid Loder Park, opposite Gaythorne RSL, in Brisbane, Qld, there is a very special fig tree – this tree is the *Wadi Ficus Carica*, known as the common fig tree – we know that one as the *Tobruk Fig Tree*.

During the Second World War, Australian soldiers were at the Siege of Tobruk in North Africa, from 10 April to 7 December 1941.

Located inside the Tobruk perimeter trenches and defensive posts, the Fig Tree was the only feature in a barren desert, an ideal location for a field hospital, a RAP, Regimental Aid Post. Situated just a few kilometres from the front line, just inside the Red Line, north of Derna Road, the Fig Tree could be seen from both Hill 209 in the Salient and Carrier Hill behind that.

This became known as the Fig Tree Hospital and marked the entrance to a series of deep natural underground caves used by the Australians to treat the wounded. Dr John David Rice, SX10147 recorded that “his RAP worked in various conditions, from artillery shell bunkers to a hole underneath the infamous Fig Tree.” It was here that John’s skills were put to the test trying to save the lives of badly injured soldiers with limited medical supplies, whilst artillery rained around him. The caves were used to stabilise the wounded before transferring them to 2/4th Australian General Hospital in Tobruk.

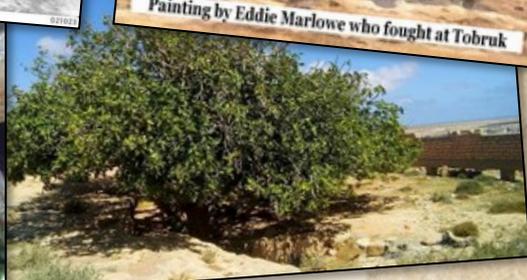
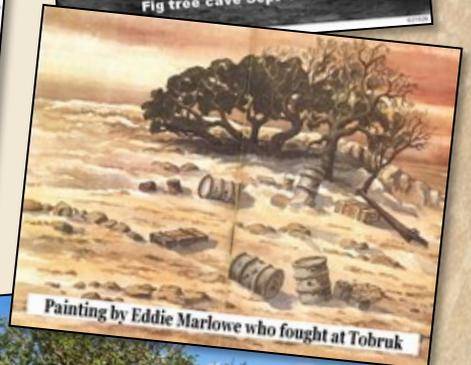
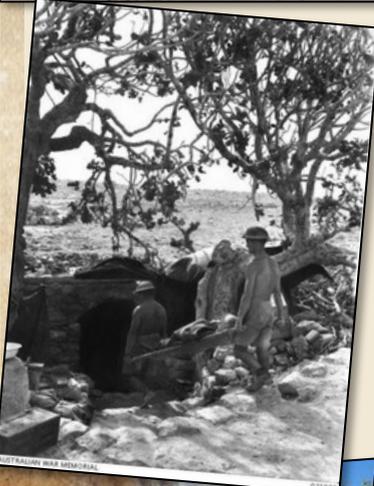
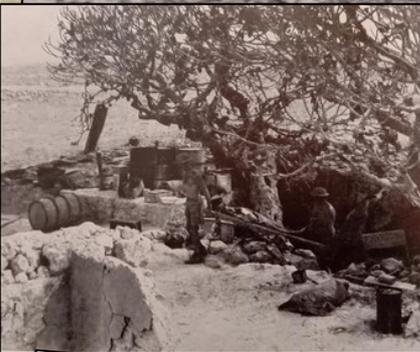
The original Tobruk Fig Tree still stands today in that barren land in Tobruk, Libya, an everlasting reminder of the role it played over 80 years ago.

From information we have, it seems that cuttings from the Tobruk Fig Tree were brought back to Australia and planted at Rocky Creek, North Queensland. From this tree, cuttings have been grown and dispersed around Queensland and to the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance from where more cuttings have been distributed around Australia.

Could you let us know if you are aware of other Fig Tree memorials near you please!



“In Sid Loder Park, opposite Gaythorne RSL, there is a very special fig tree”





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Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

THE TOBRUK FIG TREE



"TOBRUK FIG TREES" AROUND AUSTRALIA.

The tree you see at Sid Loder Park is a descendant from the Rocky Creek Fig Tree cutting, a living memorial to the many who served at Tobruk.

This tree was donated to the people of Brisbane from the Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc and the family of the late Rat of Tobruk Veteran, Gordon Wallace, QX7646, 2/15th, to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk, 21 Oct 2021. That cutting grew for many years in the backyard of Trish and late Gordon Wallace in Keperra, losing a limb, but surviving an axe attack from their five year old grandson George who was trying out Grandpa's tommyhawk! After that battle, the fig tree kept growing if maybe a bit lop sided. The tree was evacuated to 4AGH for medical treatment! After planting in Sid Loder Park, battle worn and now wounded due to the constant rain but with reinforcement on the ready, cuttings off the same tree were planted and now survive happily there.

We hope people of Brisbane and beyond will look at this tree and remember what an important part the Tobruk Fig Tree played 80 years ago and how many wounded men it protected.

A cutting from the original tree was also taken to Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance where further cuttings were taken for locations around Australia. A cutting for the Townsville Memorial Pool was taken from the Marian Catholic School at Townsville.

A Memorial Garden of Roses was established in 2021, outside the Tobruk Memorial Pool on The Strand, which was the first memorial to the Rats in all of Australia, built from 1941 to 1950. The new garden joins ANZAC Park and features No Surrender roses gifted by DOTROTA.

Bruce Muller, son of Rat, Arthur George Muller, was the driving force behind this memorial. "I have been dealing with the Townsville City Council over the past couple of years with fellow Descendant Dennis McCloskey to get the support of my local Councillor and his Team to propagate cuttings from the Tobruk Fig Tree at Marian Catholic School in Townsville.



That Tobruk Fig Tree had been acquired and planted by Dennis's late father, Rat of Tobruk, Stewart McCloskey.

The new Tobruk Fig Tree was successfully propagated, planted and installed in a large planter outside the Memorial Baths in Townsville, Queensland.

The Fig Tree, Tobruk.

Digging up fig tree from Gordon's home.

Trish Wallace and Sarah Maas unveiling plaque



2008. Marian Catholic School. "The tree is in a very healthy state and is currently bearing figs. The Marian School staff are caring for it very well and students told of its significance. We hope to use cuttings to propagate more Tobruk fig trees for planting at sites around Townsville including Tobruk Memorial Pool."



Memorial 80 years in the making

MEMORIAL
A GARDEN of roses will grow outside the Tobruk Memorial Pool on The Strand to mark the 80th anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk.
The garden will commemorate the lives of the thousands of Australian soldiers who fought during the siege that began on 24 June 1941, when over 82 soldiers killed, 277 wounded and 541 taken prisoner.
Bruce Muller, son of Arthur George Muller who was a

Rat of Tobruk, is the driving force behind the memorial since writing to the mayor over two years ago.
He said with only 17 Rats of Tobruk remaining, it was important to install a memorial in Townsville to recognise the lives lost during the 242 day siege.
The Tobruk Memorial Pool was the first memorial to the Rats of Tobruk in all of Australia so here on the 80th anniversary it's very fitting that Townsville City Council are stepping to the fore," Mr Muller said. "This is a history I'm hearing in my old age who came home, they're our heroes, I support.
I know that I'm very proud of them not just for them but for those who served."
The new garden joins ANZAC Park and features No Surrender roses gifted by the Descendants of Tobruk.



Left: Bruce Muller at the Memorial.

Plaque and Fig Tree.

Above: Look how much it's grown!



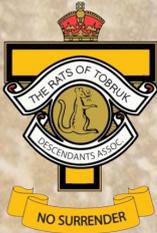
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Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

MY ENCOUNTERS WITH THE FIGTREE IN TOBRUK

by Deb Goodwin DOTROTA Researcher



Storm Daniel

"Our thoughts go out at this time to those in Libya affected by Storm Daniel, which caused torrential rainfall and extreme flooding in Derna. In memory of those who fought in Libya during World War 11, we acknowledge the Rats history of all that went on in that area."

MY ENCOUNTERS WITH THE FIGTREE IN TOBRUK

I have been fortunate enough to have visited Tobruk 3 times. **The first encounter** was in October 2002 with a group of 9th Division veterans, most of them Rats of Tobruk.

We landed in Cairo and travelled by coach along the Egyptian coast, west towards Tobruk, as it was an all day trip, we stopped at Mersa Matruh overnight before continuing west towards Tobruk the next morning. We awoke to a tremendous storm travelling east from Tobruk which affected our visit to the Figtree because the rain had flooded the cave under the Figtree so we weren't able to see the cave as it was.



There were lots of little memories shared by some of the Rats, most being that the Figtree was

like a beacon to them as it stood in that desolate ground, in defiance of what was going on around it and being a shell target. The thing that amazed me was that it was so old and now, today, I can add 20 years to that – amazing for a fruit tree.



Standing L to R - Maj Gen (Ret) John Broadbent 2/17th Bn; Ray Widdows 2/12 Fld Rgt; Eric Watts 2/12th Fld Rgt; Arthur Beale, 9th Div AASC; Alan Sanders 2/13th Bn; Dr John Pocock 9th Div Signals; Reyn Keats 2/48th Bn; Maj Stan Morton ROTA NSW Padre. Seated Joe Madeley 2/13th Bn. Missing from the photo but present at the Figtree were Dan Bowden HMAS *Stuart*; Peter Jones 9th Div AASC and Jack Bertram 2/1st Pioneers.

The following photo is the view north from the Figtree looking back towards the coast and Mediterranean – Tobruk Harbour is out of shot and is east-north-east of the Figtree (or to the right of the photo scene). You can see why it was important in terms of observation.

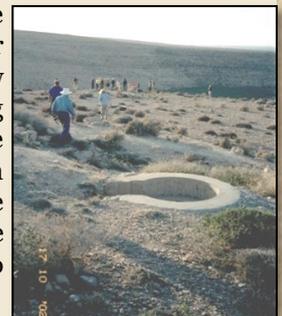


The photo below is the tour group having a good look around the Figtree and you can see there is nothing around it, just open ground. On the right side of the photo you can see a sliver of the Med and on the left you can see the far side of the nearby wadi.



The following photo is of a wadi, I'm not sure of the name of the wadi but it was close by the Figtree and Tobruk maps tell me it is the Wadi Es Sehel, but I'm

not sure, and the S posts ran along the eastern side of it. Our tour group is walking towards the eastern side of the wadi with the western side looming over us. I tried to imagine how those young men felt, sitting out there waiting for the Germans to arrive, although the wadi was quite deep here so they would have had some difficulty if they tried to attack along there.



My second encounter with the Figtree was in October 2004, this tour was on board a small cruise ship, the MV *Discovery*, from Alexandria along the North African coast.

We entered Libyan waters and were supposed to go into Tobruk Harbour, but we weren't able to because of the wrecks that still litter the harbour (so we were told), so the ship continued on to Benghazi.



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MY ENCOUNTERS WITH THE FIGTREE IN TOBRUK

by Deb Goodwin DOTROTA Researcher



Storm Daniel

Deb Goodwin remembers that "Derna, west of Tobruk, where a steep pass with hairpin bends led from the high desert down to the lovely coastal town and there in 2007, I have a lovely memory of Ray Widdows and Joe Madeley going into a milkbar across the road from the beach. We all got beautiful lemon juice, mint and crushed ice drinks. It was great watching Ray and Joe communicate with hand gestures. I have no doubt that that milkbar got washed away."

Colonel Gaddafi, apparently, had heard about the WW2 veterans visiting and provided 3 brand new Mercedes Benz mini buses to take us, by road, on our own Benghazi Handicap, travelling from Benghazi to Tobruk AND back in one day including stops for lunch, The Figtree and Tobruk War Cemetery – we were supposed to return to the ship by 8:30pm!

Before going to the Figtree, we went to the Commonwealth War Cemetery, which had to be opened up for us especially, by our good friend Mohamed, here with our guide.



Unfortunately, we interrupted a family gathering and lunch, he was so kind to leave his family to come and unlock the cemetery gates for us, he then waited while we went in, had a service at the memorial and paid our respects at some of the headstones, we were so grateful, with many thanks, Mohamed, RIP.

Then we moved on to The Figtree. Since our last visit to Tobruk, Colonel Gaddafi's government built a wall right around the Figtree to protect it, however there was evidence of people being in it - rubbish and fire ash. Lucky for us this time there had been no rain and we were able to get down inside the cave.



It's deceptively big as the photos show.

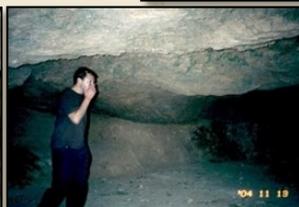
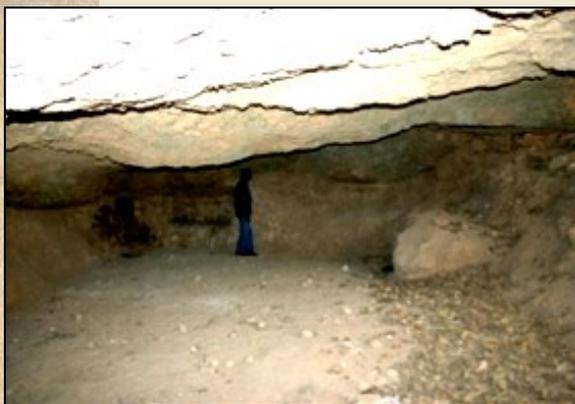
The weather was changing very rapidly and, as you can see in the photos below, the sky was dull, but this wasn't clouds, it was a khamsin (sandstorm) which had covered a large part of Libya that day, the wind speed was unbelievable.

In fact, some of our Rats stayed in Benghazi to visit the war cemetery there and a dam, the visibility was so bad that the shore excursion was cancelled.

Meanwhile, we were in Tobruk and had to return to our ship at Benghazi by 8.30pm. Travelling in the high desert of Libya, in a khamsin, at over 200kph for hours doesn't really agree with a brand new Mercedes Benz and one of them broke down about an hour away from the port. Over a matter of hours, the electricals went first, then the air conditioner blew up, then finally the motor blew up. The driver was going down a pass from the high desert to the coast when this happened and managed to coast the bus into a tiny petrol station in the middle of nowhere. Everyone in that bus piled into the other 2 buses, except for one of our Aussie travel guides and our Libyan guide, there was just no room for them. A car was going to be sent for them, but, we later found out, it never turned up. Our buses raced as fast as they could back to the port and our ship, which was waiting for us. We got back to ship at about 9:30pm, bedraggled, covered in dust and



bone weary from a 15 hour day, most of it on the road. We were concerned for our missing guides but by the time the ship's crew got us sorted out and checked in,



we turned around to see them arriving, standing up in the back of a tip truck, hanging on for dear life – having hitchhiked back to the ship!





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MY ENCOUNTERS WITH THE FIGTREE IN TOBRUK

by Deb Goodwin DOTROTA Researcher



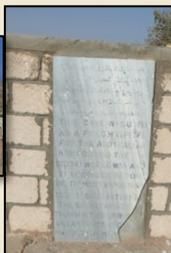
Storm Daniel

“Jan 1941 Italians in Tobruk surrendered to British and Australian troops, five days later fighting at Derna began as Italians withdrew towards Benghazi. 7 Apr British and Australian troops evacuated Derna and 2/1st Pioneers between Derna and Tobruk, to bide time, destroyed Derna Pass after the last Allied unit passed and they were in Tobruk next day. Big losses and POW captures happened at Mechili and Gazala. Derna was important during the Benghazi Handicap and the road and airfield of utmost importance to all troops. Later there were training battalions at Derna and many of our Rats would have spent time in and around that town.”

The ship ended up leaving port 2 hours late, but I believe they weren't penalised because they were waiting for us and our delay was caused by a faulty Libyan vehicle.

My third encounter was in October 2007, this tour was to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the second Battle of El Alamein. This time we went to Athens, then flew to Cairo, then flew to Tripoli, Libya, overnights and flew to Benghazi, next morning. From Benghazi we began an epic and once in a life time road trip from Benghazi to Tobruk, by coach – that will be another story.

The photo below is from the coach arriving at the Fig Tree and clearly shows the fence surrounding the site. The dedication by the Libyan government has been through the wars itself. The cave below the Figtree was semi filled with water and, unfortunately, a lot more rubbish than last time.



The photo below shows some of our tour members, centre of the photo is Peter Burge and Ray Widdows OAM,

Peter's dad and Ray served together in the 2/12th Field Regiment and were best mates, being each other's best man at their respective weddings.

To the right of the photo is Harry "Curly" Morcomb (2/13th Bn) and Gerry Hare (daughter-in-law of Capt A Hare MC 2/43rd Bn). While there, we ran into a couple of English Rats but I didn't get their names.

The caretaker had told us that they'd been doing some work and had uncovered a map of Australia, made by Australian soldiers in 1941, out of stones and they didn't forget Tasmania.

The photo below shows our tour members having a history lesson from Ray Widdows – they are L to R Bob Hare (son of Capt A Hare MC 2/43rd Bn), John (our Aussie tour guide) Geoff Lavarack (great nephew of Lt Gen Sir John Lavarack KCMG, KCVO, KBE, CB, DSO), Ray Widdows, Daniel Lavarack (Geoff's son, partly obscured), Geraldine Hare and Jean Williams (partly obscured).

Shortly after this we had a wander around out side the fence, which yielded some finds of bullet casings and shrapnel, the spooky thing was Peter Burge found a piece and Ray found a piece, the pieces were found about 20 metres apart and yet fit perfectly together – I think *Pete's dad was with us that day.*



Left:
Joe Madeley
two unnamed
English Rats
Curly Morcomb
and
Ray Widdows



The photo below is of our three Rats of Tobruk on the tour, Joe Madeley OAM (2/13th Bn and ROTA NSW President 1985-2015), Ray Widdows OAM (2/12th Field Rgt, President 9th Div Council and National President of the Rats of Tobruk Associations) and Harry "Curly" Morcomb (2/13th Bn, active committee member of ROTA NSW and 2/13th Battalion Association).

We were in the finest of company, but, sadly, that was not to last as we lost our mate, Ray Widdows, two days after this photo was taken.



Ray passed away at Mersa Matruh on 23 October 2007.





Rat's Tales

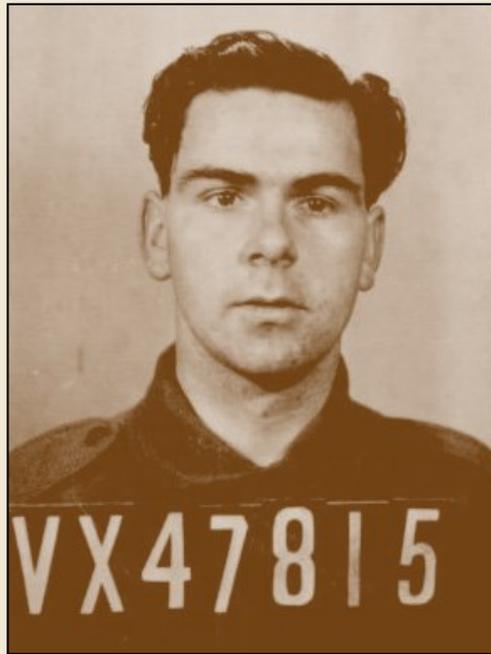
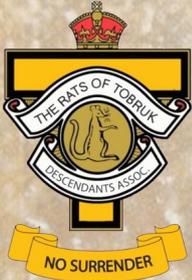


Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

REMEMBERING PRISONERS OF WAR

"THE PEN" - EDITION 2

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY *Chris Kelly*



WILLIAM HENRY EDWARD COUSINS

William "Bill" Cousins, twenty years old, single and a salesman, enlisted in July of 1940. A proud member of the 2/24th VX47815 left his homeland to arrive at the Middle East eight days before Christmas. If only the wart on his toe and his evacuation to treat same were the worst of it – no such luck!

On May the third Bill was MIA, and by June, officially reported as a POW. For he and the permanent scar on his body - a gunshot wound sustained just prior to capture - the war was over.

Bill - in a state of denial - was taken from the battlefield to a German run hospital at Benghazi for treatment, there he remained a guest of the Huns for several weeks. He was as unimpressed by the food and Nazi bullying as he was impressed by the treatment received from the medical staff, ALL patients were treated equally.

The doctor discharged him in October '42 and his first stop was Rezzanello, Campo PG 17, south of Milan. What followed was a move much further north and by February '43 Bill had become a resident of Campo 57 where he remained until capitulation in September of the same year.



POW's at Campo 57 taken in 1941

He battled through a chilling northern Italian winter – no mean feat - and a stay in the Udine Military Hospital near 57 for Defective Refraction, an eye problem that can cause blurry vision, among other symptoms.

Luck was not on the cards for those at 57, including Bill who was quickly gathered up by the Nazis. His journey took him to German occupied Poland, the place, Stalag 8a near the town of Gorlitz where his new identity, number 32497, was born.



The Yard at Stalag 8a



"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

POW - 1945 Camp list

P.G. 66 Capua Italy

P.G. 57 Gruppignano Italy

Stalag XVIII-A Germany

Deceased 08 Jun 2002



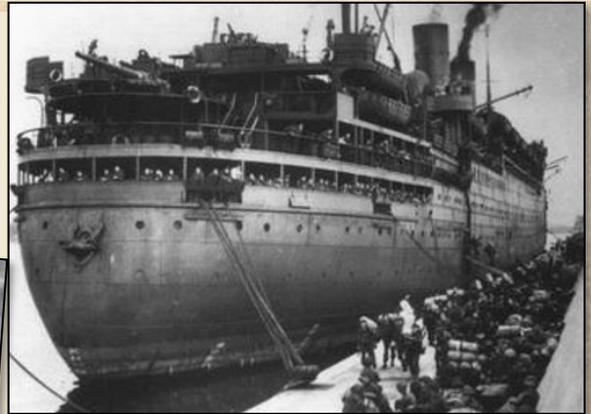
Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

REMEMBERING PRISONERS OF WAR

More than 120,000 prisoners passed through 8a, the lower ranks were sent to work camps in and around the Gorlitz (present day Zgorzelec) area, it's conceivable this was Bill's fate – perhaps working in a field or local industry.



His first stop would be England after boarding the Duchess of Richmond – just as well he wasn't aware of her reputation as one of the four "drunken duchesses", for she, in her previous life as a cabin ship, did not fare well in rough waters.

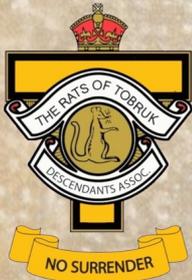
Once aboard, Bill put forward an offer to the Captain - his services as a gunner - during the voyage of almost four thousand nautical miles, one the captain gratefully accepted and they set off for the United Kingdom.

Against the odds they made it and after an excruciating wait of almost 3 months Bill enthusiastically embarked another ship, this time heading for the best harbour in the world, Sydney.

It was July '45, and on a date I doubt he'll ever forgot, the 8th of August 1945, the return to his homeland was complete.

We will remember them.

Chris Kelly



Above: Inside a crowded hut at Stalag 8b

Below: Library at Stalag 8a



His next destination was that of Lamsdorf (present day Lambinowice), this time he was a guest at Stalag 344.

During his time there, he endured another stint in hospital, this time, rheumatism.

He likely worked in one of the many work camps – coal mines, factories, quarries, mills to name but some. A fate evaded by few.

Bill managed to escape, got to Russia and was liberated by the Russians who took him to Odessa (part of the Russian Empire during the war). He readied himself for the first leg of a long journey home, a dream come true.

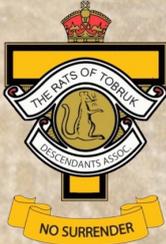




Rat's Tales



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Box 3389
Victoria Point West
Qld 4165 Australia

Email:
dotrota41@gmail.com

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.**



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

Support the work we do!

If you or your company would like make a donation to remember the mighty Rats, please contact us or donate here.

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DOTROTA

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Acct: 22 920 419

*We appreciate
your support.*

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HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT THIS ASSOCIATION?

Welcome! Our first edition done and dusted and the next one all ready for you to read! Now, what has happened is that we have already gathered so much we want to put in the following newsletters, that our editors have decided that to use some of it, we will do an extra copy to come out before Christmas! A bonus issue for you! Hope you enjoy the stories about the famous Fig Tree. Please let us know what you would like to see in future editions. Don't forget to hunt around in your tin trunks and bottom drawers to find something about your Rat you would like to share.

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 relying on you 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

