



Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc



CHRISTMAS BACK HOME

Rat's Tales Vol 1 Edition 3

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Chris Kelly

Dec 2023



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While we realise our Rats did not celebrate a Christmas at Tobruk, we thought it appropriate to put together some stories as many of them served for more than one Christmas overseas. Many Australian families were celebrating Christmas while their loved ones were serving overseas. While planning their own Christmas, many people volunteered to make gifts and hampers to send overseas.

One charity, Australian Comforts Fund (ACF), was formed in August 1916 to send parcels to troops during WW I. It was disbanded after the end of the war but reformed during WW II. ACF parcels included donated personal items, such as clothing, cigarettes and tobacco, razor blades, soap, toothbrushes, newspapers and magazines. At Christmas, hampers included plum pudding, cake, a tin of fruit, razor blades and tobacco. Many of the Australian volunteers for the ACF were women who would organise hampers and collect donations. By 1946, some 1.5 million parcels were dispatched to troops.

SA FIGHTING FORCES COMFORTS FUND.

There is no doubt other states had the FFCF or Australian Comforts Fund, here are some things about SA we have in our records. The "Advertiser" in Adelaide, 1940 reported that it was the aim of those associated with the Comforts Fund to provide for men from SA those little extras beyond the scope of military authorities and yet serve to form a tie between the men and their homes, by bringing home comforts to them. "It is everyone's desire to ensure that not only is as much money as is possible raised for this purpose, but this money is spent in the most advantageous form so that the maximum possible benefit will accrue to the men on service."

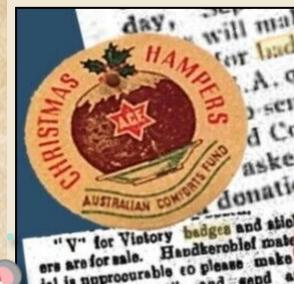
"To ensure uniformity, a central Comforts Fund was formed at the request of the South Aust Government, and there is no doubt that wholehearted support of the central fund is, in the long run, more advantageous to the individual soldier, sailor or airman than is any local or family support for groups or individuals."



F.F.C.F. REQUIREMENTS (from Trove)

"In answer to many enquiries about knitting activities, the secretary of Ceduna branch of the FFCF gives the following list of requirements:—Pullovers (all colors); Balaclavas, Caps (all colors); Long Sox (golf stockings) in khaki, heather, grey; Sox in black, navy, Air Force blue; Glove-top Mittens (all colors); Handkerchiefs (ordinary man's size); and Face Washers (10in to 12in square).

These recommendations were made following the visit to Australia of Major Gorman, MC, Honorary Commissioner in Egypt and Palestine of the Australian Comforts Funds, along with an urge to all units to



assist the fund by increasing and accelerating their money raising activities."



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/>



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CHRISTMAS – SOLDIER'S CAKE



Thank you to Libby from "Cooking With Nana Ling" for this information and the recipe. We are sharing it with her permission. Source: website: cookingwithnanaling.com

"Nana Ling recorded this recipe for Soldiers Cake on 8 October 1942. At that time, the end of the Second World War was still a long 2 years and 10 months away, though the Australian Army was just days away from playing an important role in the Allied victory at El Alamein in Egypt."

"Soldier's Cake is a fruit cake and this recipe contains instructions for sealing the cake in a tin. That, and the name, suggests it was intended to be packaged up and sent to those serving overseas. During World War 11, 575,799 Australians served overseas, this cake recipe is a small reminder of the heartache, hope and helplessness people must have felt at the time. To better understand the history behind this recipe, I spoke with Dianne Rutherford, Curator in Military Heraldry & Technology at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

It seems this cake recipe was something that was intended to be sent to people serving overseas. Can you shed any light on this recipe?

"A lot of people baked items during WW1 and WW11 to be sent overseas. Fruit cakes last particularly well if well-made and well-packed, you could have weeks to months from when you posted it until it was received. They're also sturdy, won't crumble like a biscuit though people did send biscuits too. Fruit cakes also have some nutrition."

Nana Ling often included the source of the recipe, but didn't for this one, do you know where she may have found it?

"I actually did find your great grandmother's recipe. The earliest reference I can find is it being published in the Australian Women's Weekly (AWW) on 13 June 1942, republished on 1 August 1942 and other women sent it into newspapers. In 1943 it's in Queensland and Melbourne newspapers and in 1945 it's in a Tasmanian newspaper. When it's republished in the AWW in August, the article explains why:

"Time and time again come requests for good but not expensive fruit cake. This is the reason why Mrs Jenner's steamed fruit cake has been chosen for the main prize. It is good; inexpensive to make, too. Moreover, she has solved the packing problem in the recipe. This should be of interest to readers who desire to send cakes along to the lads in the services."

When these cakes were sent overseas, were they sent to a particular person or a general address?

"A bit of both. Family members would send items to loved ones, but there were also a number of comfort organisations as well as Red Cross. They would often organise to send things to specific units or to people."

What happened to this tradition? Do people still send cakes or other treats overseas today?

"It still happens. During the Vietnam War, a tin full of ANZAC Biscuits was sent by his mum to an Australian soldier, Terry Hendle. He was mortally wounded the evening after he received the biscuits. The unopened tin went back to her and she kept it for the rest of her life. Then Terry's sister kept it for a number of years before donating it to AWM. See my blog.

Is there anything else you found particularly interesting about this recipe?

The fact that it is steamed is interesting. I'm not sure whether it's a preservative measure or just something to make it taste nicer."

"Before cooking the recipe, I contacted Australian fruit processor SPC to find out whether it's still safe to cook in a preserved fruit tin. The answer? No, since a higher gauge steel was used back in the 1940s."

So, to cook this recipe I used a small, deep, round 15 cm cake tin. Steaming a fruit cake is not too difficult, even if you don't have a steamer. Simply invert a small ceramic or pyrex dish at the bottom of a large boiler. Fill with water until the level reaches the top of the dish. Place cake, covered with paper, secured with string, on top of dish, place lid on boiler and boil water. Check, as you may need to top up water level.

Nana Ling's Soldiers Cake recipe

115 grams butter

115 grams sugar

2 eggs

1 dessert spoon treacle

155 grams flour

1/4 teaspoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon ginger

1/4 teaspoon nutmeg

340 grams mixed fruit

Cream butter and sugar. Add eggs, one at a time.

Add treacle and mix well. Sift flour, baking powder and spices into mixture and stir to combine. Add fruit and mix well. Put mixture into a small, deep cake tin which has been lined well with baking paper. A 6 inch round tin with 3 layers of greased baking paper. Cover cake tin with a piece of baking paper and tie to secure. Steam for 2 to 2 1/2 hours. Remove paper cover and put into a slow oven for 20-30 minutes to crust. Remove from oven, cover with aluminium foil and wrap in a clean tea towel to cool.

Source: [cookingwithnanaling](http://cookingwithnanaling.com)





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SOME CHRISTMAS STORIES ABOUT OUR RATS



The following members of the services abroad will speak in the "Voices from Overseas" session at Broadcasting Station 5AN, to begin at 10 p.m. and 4.30 p.m. tomorrow, and on Wednesday, respectively:—Major B. Swift (Medindie), Captain J. M. Binan (North Adelaide), Sergeant J. G. Battams (Glencig) and I. R. Goode (Port Pirie), Corporals W. J. M. Mudge (Ovingham), H. E. Wignall (DaCoeta Park) and Alan Arthur (Dry Creek), Lance-Corporal F. G. Sanders (Wasleys), E. Catkin (Hackney), A. J. Sheridan (Adelaide), W. P. Barwick (Croydon), W. H. Hickman (New Hindmarsh), P. D. MacArthur (Millicent), C. P. Hutchison (Jervois), R. E. Daniels (Prospect), F. P. Jones (Adelaide), S. A. Trewartha (Koonibba), H. D. Wright (Pullarton), R. T. Williams (Port Augusta), Max Day (Nairne), Ken Stanley (Morgan), Dick Dawson (Sandwell), A. J. Hutchinson (Monteth), Henry Lohman (Murray Bridge) and Alan Bourke (Lake View); Sisters, W. D. Klose (North Norwood), E. H. Ellis (Hawthorn), N. C. Langham (Hawthorn), L. Garrett (Waroona), R. Z. Huppertz (Riverton), M. I. Brown (East Marden), M. A. Male (Murray Bridge), M. Dunn (St. Peters), L. Boddome (Mylor), O. Kestel (Rudall), A. Kilsby (Toorak East), M. Riggs (Burra), E. Scruby (Port Lincoln), W. Kelly (Tarlee), McNicol (Mount Gambier), and D. J. Goode (Wandarah East), and Misses M. Coombach (Oinda, Victoria), R. Pengilly (Kingswood), B. Cohn (Tasmore) and H. C. Wilson (Fullarton).

Clipping from TROVE
"The Advertiser"
Adelaide 29 Dec 1941

Voices From Overseas.
In Dec 1941, a radio station, 5AN, in Adelaide broadcast a "Voices from Overseas" session. These were broadcast at 10pm and 4.30pm for at least two days. "The Advertiser" printed lists of names of those who participated. Sydney Arthur TREWARTHA, from Koonibba, near Ceduna was one who sent a message home.

"This Christmas card was sent home by Uncle Jack, Ike Southall 2/13 Bn. The sad thing is he wrote this 5 days before he was killed at El Alamein." Deb Goodwin

NX17914 Corporal
Isaac Phillip SOUTHALL
2/13th Infantry Battalion
Died of Wounds : 24 Oct 1942



Buried El Alamein War Cemetery



While researching one of our Rats VX36705 T P Arthur, researcher Craig Proctor found this youtube video where soldiers sent Christmas greetings from the Middle East c1941, to family back in Australia.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVOT52ozI3A>

25th December 1941. Christmas Day in Aleppo.
A dirty drizzly rain the best part of the day. Several trucks had to go out with meat but most of us had an easy day. Dinner was good. The tables were brought into the hall from the mess tent and covered with clean calico. The dinner consisted of turkey, ham, three kinds of vegetables tinned pudding with fresh cream, nuts and dates. Everyone perfectly satisfied with everything. A buckshee (something unexpected for free) bottle of Aussie beer also issued. At dinner time the Sergeants took over the guard and also did mess orderly job for the troops so they are of some use after all. Some larger quantities of the Christmas spirit was consumed today. Tonight the place was very quiet until the revellers started arriving home and some silly cow arrived inside with the air raid siren and made the night hideous for a while. Still no one was very much put out and everything was under control by 11.30 pm. Supply doing town piquet tonight. Priced a new diary for the coming year. £3 Syrian. Quite a large amount but I suppose I will have to part out if I want a suitable book.

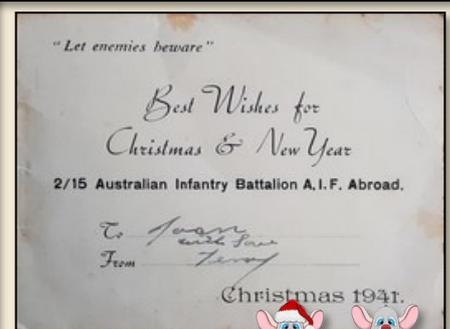
From the diary of Pte W H Munro VX 8221, father of Natalie Gretton.



From Barry McKiernan's uncle Terence J O'Meara QX7721



Pte W H Munro VX 8221



WE ARE ON THE WEB!

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





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CHRISTMAS ABROAD



29/12/41 AFTER LEAVING TOBRUK

Spr P BRISBANE NX58008
2/4th Aust Field Park Coy
R.A.E. 9th Div Somewhere in Syria



Dear Mum, Well, here I am again and over Xmas, ready for New Year. Got a letter from you today dated the 8th. Before I forget, I received your birthday card and Xmas cards OK and hope you got the cable also. XXXX the kisses are for you for Xmas. I hope also, Mum, you receive a book I had sent home to you for Xmas. And also hope you have received your Mother's Badge from the government. I only got three letters today. The first for over a fortnight, one from you, Pauline and Nancy. The only time I worry is when I don't get one from you. Well, Mum, Monday morning before Xmas, 14 of us drivers had to go down to Palestine to bring back 21 trucks. We arrived down there on Tuesday and the trucks weren't ready, so had to wait till Wednesday morning. You can imagine how anxious we all were, as we wanted to be back in Damascus with the rest of the unit for Xmas dinner. Ray and I were together, two drivers were in each truck. Well, at 2 o'clock on Wed afternoon, the trucks were ready and away the convoy started. Haifa was reached at 4 and we had to fill up with petrol. We were only there for 10 minutes when there was a large column of black smoke rising up in the air. I told you while up in Tobruk I seen the oil dumps go up in smoke, well, they had nothing on this sight. It was terrific. We started up again and driving past the docks we seen what it was, 3 ships on fire, two petrol tankers and an oil tanker, all done by sabotage. Well, it was now 6 o'clock and we moved and boy didn't we move! All we were worrying about was getting home. At 8, we were 40 miles off the Syrian border, so we stopped and changed over drivers. Well, Mum, that 40 miles was a nightmare as we were strung out all over the mountains and there was thick mist. You couldn't see a yard in front of the trucks. It was here we all got separated and some lost. 13 trucks took the wrong turn and finished up in Tiberias. Anyhow, we all caught up again at the border of Syria and Palestine at 11.30 on Xmas Eve, so decided to have steak and eggs, so spent Xmas Eve on the border and won't forget that one! We started up and drove the rest of the way in rain and arrived at camp at 3.30 am. I had a big Xmas dinner, Mum. Poultry and pudding and 1 bottle of beer each. Ray, Cec, George and I spent 1941 Xmas together and will spend the New Year also. Well, Mum, the section I am in called Bridging (Cec is with me) is separated from the rest of the unit. We are camped 25 miles from Damascus in the Lebanon Mountains, towards Beirut, at Zabadani and we get leave every Sunday to go to Damascus. Our section out here is bloody disgusted with our new CO and Captains. Last night they had a big turn out to celebrate the anniversary of us leaving Sydney (Boxing Day) and we weren't even invited to it, which is a bloody insult, as I for one was one of the first to join the unit at Liverpool camp. One of the boys wrote a letter to him and we all signed it. Christ knows what he will say, but it was a beaut. So, instead of going to spend New Year's Day with them, they can go to hell. It snowed around our camp here on Xmas day and all of it was covered, but seeing as I was in Damascus, I missed it and it was melted when we got back. But it will be here again for good soon.

Mum, see if you can get that mug I sent you chrome plated, as I will be drinking my beer next Xmas out of it. I received a Milky Way [this was a kind of news bulletin, I think] with my photo on it and also the Herald that had that letter piece in of Tobruk I wrote to one of the Surf Boys about.

Well, Mum, I was only thinking today of what the Doctors said in Tobruk last June. There were a few stomach complaints at the time and the Drs said they wouldn't be responsible for the men's conditions as they couldn't live on tinned foods for so long without causing trouble. They reckon that all men that were in Tobruk for 6 months will have ulcerated stomachs in years to come. But I only hope that it is not true, Mum, I had tinned goods for over 6 months. Hope you have seen that news reel by now of Blamey giving us a speech in Palestine, as you may get a chance of seeing me. Well, Mum, I will have to close now, as news is run out and I hope you have had a wonderful Xmas and New Year. Your loving son, Pat

Men of the besieged fort at Tobruk get a little variety in their diet at times, according to their letters. "I expect you have seen photos of the boys bathing in Tobruk," writes Sapper P. Brisbane, formerly of North Steyne Life-saving Club. "Well, it's great to dive into the blue Mediterranean and blow up some fish. Sometimes 'Jerry' gives us some with his bombs, and it is a great treat as a change from tinned bully beef, which has been on for months."

22/10/42 Dear Mum,

Well, Mum, the time has come that we must do our bit again. Tomorrow night, at 10 o'clock is Zero Hour and the curtain goes up for, as you will read about, the bloodiest battle ever fought up here in the Western Desert. Yesterday, we were all given a lecture by our OC, and what we are likely to meet. At present, 20 of us are in a different Coy to help clear the Jerry minefields. But when writing to me, address my letters the same. By the time you get this note, Mum, we will either be in Benghazi or Berlin as POW, but if I know anything it will be Benghazi. We have equipment and air support, so that's OK. At present, we are all resting behind the front line, waiting for the time to start, and believe me, we are all fighting fit. Don't worry over me as I will be OK and as I said before, by the time you get this note, the battle will be almost over. Our OC said, "Men, you are about to go into battle, and as sappers, you have made a name for yourselves and I know you will continue to do so." Mum, don't expect any mail for a while after this note, but I will send a telegram now and again, so tell the rest of the family. Hoping you all have a good X-mas and New Year, and all the best of luck.

Your loving son,
Pat. Love to you and Gran.

My grandfather (with cap on),
Blue and Ray in El Alamein

Pat second from right and
other 9th Div soldiers with a
captured German tank at El
Alamein.

Thanks to granddaughter,
Lauren Mussig for permission to
use these letters.





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CHRISTMAS ABROAD

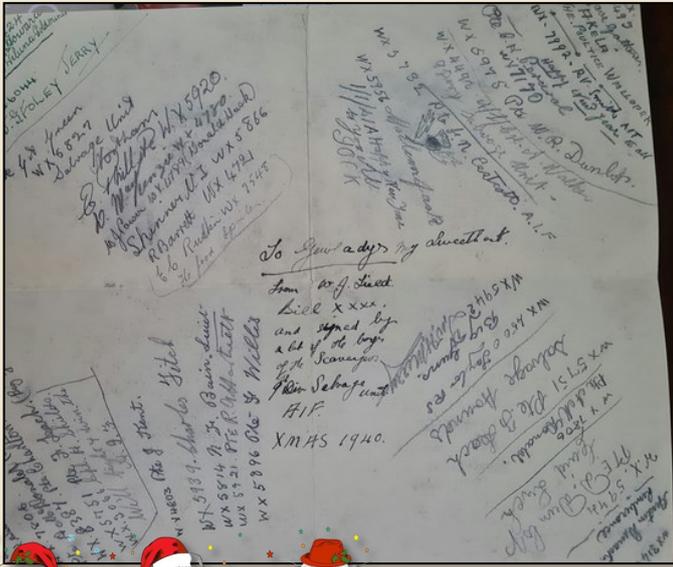


Shirley-Anne Ellis

This photo below of my family was taken at a ROTA Christmas picnic in Lockyer Valley Qld in December 1954. The Toowoomba Qld Branch was very active. Most families were large and didn't have cars. Buses were organized and the huge wicker prams for the many babies were strapped onto flat bed trucks and brought down one of the creeks on Toowoomba Range road. No family 4WD's in those days. Unsurprisingly such events were planned like military operations and created a great sense of connection for all the families. Such happy times were enjoyed by all. I am the baby...my first Christmas!



QX1286 Corporal Frank George BROSE
47th Light Aid Detachment
Royal Corps of Aust Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
Born 12 Feb 1919, Enlisted 19 Nov 1939 and Deceased 19 Jan 1978 TOOWOOMBA, QLD



William James FIELD WX8350
father of Gladys Glands



"This is a postcard my Dad sent to his sister Kath while overseas. The front of the postcard is a picture of my Dad, Joey Sheppard VX46482 2/23rd and his best mate Jackie Lee. The message on the back reads "To Kath, From Joey. Wishing you a Merry Xmas And a Happy New Year"



"My Dad and Jackie Lee were together for most of the war. Their friendship continued after the war."

Jimmy Sheppard

Unfortunately we have been unable to identify this soldier, Jackie Lee, despite extensive research, can anyone out there help us??



Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!



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CHRISTMAS ABROAD

Rats of Tobruk

THIS picture has been reproduced from a Christmas card sent to an Adelaide man by one of the "Rats of Tobruk." He is Warrant-Officer II. Jack Williams, ex-South footballer, who enlisted in 1940, and was in Tobruk during the famous siege.

During this siege Lord Haw-Haw dubbed these men the "Rats," and the name has stuck. Members of a South Australian battalion who were at Tobruk had the Christmas card bearing this figure printed. They're proud to be "Rats."



News Adelaide 27 Nov 1942

Sergeant John WILLIAMS SX7358

2/43rd Infantry Battalion

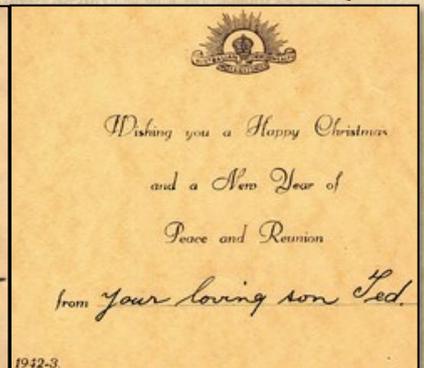
Born 11 Jun 1901 GAWLER, SA

Enlisted 1 Jul 1940 ADELAIDE, SA

Wounded in Action

27 Oct 1942 Second Battle of El Alamein, Egypt

Deceased 6 Apr 1995 LEEDERVILLE, WA



LINK TO CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

A Christmas message from Lieutenant Colonel William John Victor Windeyer (later Major General Sir William Windeyer, KBE, CB, DSO & Bar). Lieutenant Colonel Windeyer was stationed in the Middle East as the commanding officer of 2/48 Battalion when he recorded this personal Christmas message to his family "from the land where the first Christmas was".

<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/a-christmas-message-from-the-awm-collection>

The footage in this light-hearted Christmas video has been selected from rushes and offcuts from film taken by Frank Hurley in Palestine in November, 1941. The footage was originally intended to be edited together into a comic Christmas story for friends and family back home entitled

"Xmas Greetings from the AIF overseas."

FROM STATE LIBRARY OF SA.

A Christmas card from Ron Searle, 2/43rd, to wife Ina.

SEARLE Ronald Henry "Smokey"

SX11179

2/43rd Infantry Battalion

Deceased : 17 Feb 2010



SLSA: B 70024/45



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WHAT WE NEED AND WHY



When people join they receive a checklist of items we require to complete a tribute. This is all about the need for positive proof of his service and qualification as a RAT of TOBRUK. In the vast majority of cases this means the pages from his service file at the NAA. If his file has not yet been digitized it will be, eventually. There also may be a photo of him in uniform in there which we can use on his tribute. No Guarantee of that though.



So why do we need proof? Well if it's not obvious, the term "a RAT of TOBRUK" is something that is/was held in high esteem by most of the men themselves. Whilst an intended insult, it became a "badge of honour" to be worn with pride. To claim to be a RAT when not, could be seen as false bravado and to add to one's personal plaudits. It happens with medals as well but here it's the term "I was a RAT of Tobruk" that we are concerned with. So it is our responsibility to make sure that we verify as thoroughly as possible such claim and, whilst not always totally obvious, the NAA record will in most cases answer the question.

"History must be accurate to be complete"

In the event that no NAA file is open for view, we have to start an indepth look at the information. From the start we look at the UNIT the chap served in and obviously if it wasn't in the Tobruk Order Of Battle we need to look deeper. Often men spent short stints with Tobruk units and then transferred to other branches of service such as medical, engineering, artillery, etc, where their skills may have been of more value than in a trench. Even this is not always conclusive.

A recent case relates to the 2/3rd Light Anti-Aircraft regiment. The chap in question was according to the Battalion roll, part of 8th Battery. This unit only had one small part of its compliment at Tobruk. That fact alone matched against the Regimental roll often discounts some men as being RATs for this unit. BUT in this guys case he enlisted in March 1941 and his record revealed that he didn't arrive in the Middle East until July. Still enough time for him to have gone to Tobruk except in about 99% of cases men were first sent to a training unit to teach them how to survive in desert warfare situations, acclimatize to the heat, dust, flies and lack of sanitation. That generally took another couple of weeks along with paper handling to assign to a unit. With this chap he was marched out to 2/3rd LAA four days before the unit evacuated from

Tobruk! Now considering it took a day to get there, offload and then sent out to your billet, the logic of sending a man to Tobruk when the Unit Advance Party is leaving shouldn't and most probably wouldn't have happened. This is only opinion but one shared by the AWM and the Regiment association. And in this case seeing the rest of the regiment was in Palestine it make sense that he reported to HQ in Palestine and not in Tobruk and was assigned to 8th Battery after it arrived back there in September.

We often deal with relatives claims that their ancestor was a RAT but sometimes the claim just cannot be confirmed and it does lead to some ill feeling. This hasn't happened for awhile, but it does happen. And more often than not it is a "partial unit in attendance at Tobruk" that has little supporting documentation. So we have to dig deeper to see if there is something like a 2/4th AGH visit which would confirm it. Alas it doesn't always happen and we then turn to other resources like later events. In this case if we receive a copy of a photo with others at Tobruk that's an obvious confirmation if the location and soldiers he is with are confirmed RATS but again that's not always possible either.

We do accept evidence if the man is mentioned for some reason within a Battalion History or within the Unit Diaries or within a media article that we have reason to believe has been researched prior to production. An example of this is men interviewed by the UNSW for its Anzac series of videos.

Word of Mouth and short newspaper snippets are generally not sufficient unless its confirming death in action. A grave with the date located at one of the Libyan military cemeteries is also clear evidence of service along with the CWGC data.

We are obligated to do the very best we can with limited resource to confirm a RATS status. And we do our best to succeed rather than fail but it is of utmost importance that we have as much supporting information as possible to ensure what we do is correct.

So when you are submitting your soldier's details please make every endeavour to secure information prior to sending it through to us. This pains us to do but it all helps with our research.

Hope you all understand.

Ray Windlow

and the Research Team





Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc



REMEMBERING PRISONERS OF WAR

"THE PEN" EDITION 3

part 1



"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

Welcome to Christmas in the Pen where men sat dreaming of a land far away and empty seats at the family Christmas table. You've heard of Colditz, the magnificent castle King Henry IV commissioned as a watch tower to look out for the German monarchy in the 11th century? Fire ravaged the castle in the early 1500's handing Augustus of Saxonby the opportunity to convert it to his preferred renaissance style. After his reign the enormous castle gradually deteriorated for several centuries and was resurrected for use as a workhouse for the less fortunate and those under arrest. By 1829 it housed the "incurable insane". It's next uses were to detain war prisoners during The Great War, political prisoners post-war and at the onset of World War II, reverting again to a POW camp. This is where the story begins for us.

If you know of any Rat at Colditz, please email me vistabay121@icloud.com as I've been unable to find even one Rat who passed through Colditz, but serial escapee Lieutenant JR Millett from Western Australia, Jack to his mates, did.

There were those before Jack, the very first "high risk" Polish Officers soon followed by French, Belgian and British men by Christmas 1940. What brought them together was a common desire, the need to escape, each one had previously escaped from somewhere or at the very least been caught in the process and Jack was one of them.

JR Millett fought in the first battle at Tobruk, not the siege, simply right place wrong time, therefore he is unable to be deemed a Rat but this by no means trivialised his role in the war. Shortly after the battle he was shipped to Greece, the country that ultimately finished his time as a World War Two soldier and as he waited in Salonika to be sent to Germany he planned his first escape.

He was sent to Lubeck where he lost three stone in the first three months of captivity, but it didn't dampen his wit, he noted the food wasn't fit for a cat! At his next destination, Warburg, he was caught in the throes of digging a tunnel, the Germans moved him on to Bavaria where he and 64 others dug their way under the latrine and into a local villagers' chicken coop. He'd been busy handing out detailed hand drawn maps to his fellow escapees as they planned their getaway, probably why the Germans dubbed him the ringleader.

He enjoyed 5 days of freedom until being set upon by a pack of savage dogs and captured. His time in Bavaria was over, he and the other escapees, ten of whom were fellow Aussies, went straight to Colditz where he quickly gained the reputation as "The Map-Maker of Colditz".

He didn't plan to go hungry this time and took matters into his own hands cutting a key to the camp food store for the men to use, Christmas would not be lean! He sat in the "escape proof" castle in the unassuming town of Colditz somewhere between Leipzig and Dresden, his determination to prove them wrong growing, and he wasn't alone. You can't lock this many escapologists up together and expect them to sit quietly behind a castle wall!



Colditz Castle 2011

"File:Colditz Castle 2011.jpg." *Wikimedia Commons*. 4 Oct 2020, 07:26 UTC. 10 Jun 2023, 08:14
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Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc



"THE PEN" EDITION 3 part 2

Mail arrived, so too parcels from the Red Cross, the latter weighing ten pounds, and along with Jack's key, aided the survival of the men, but the collapse of German infrastructure all but halted arrivals, very few made it through and it caused much hardship, the yearn to escape rose to new heights. Of the items received from the British and Commonwealth governments via Red Cross, one in particular piqued the men's interest because the grapevine had already told them to drop the humble decks of playing cards into water. Drop these "map-decks" created by the United States Playing Card Company in collusion with American and British intelligence agencies, in water and they peel apart, one deck creating a map of Germany with the Swiss frontier thrown in. It has since been reported the decks helped 32 of the 316 men who attempted escape. Other helpful items arrived in some of the parcels; pencils with clips containing a compass, board games hiding German money and combs MI9 embedded with razors. HMV used records to hide maps and money; very innovative! Are you wondering how on earth the men discovered this? I certainly was; an accidental breakage exposed these hidden gems and the men smashed every record, one by one, but to no avail. They later reflected on their haste because these were the items they waited so eagerly for in their Christmas parcels, the very same parcels boosting morale like nothing else was able. These coveted boxes did however hold the makings for dinners throughout the "festive" season and a few serves of jungle juice ensuring many a sore head, but even during these Christmas escapades, escape was always in their thoughts. In fact one POW in the deadly cold of December, studied the movement of falling snowflakes, in a lightbulb moment and after several more not so successful escape attempts, these snowflakes were the premise for the last ever escape plan at Colditz. An escape committee was formed, skills were combined and lookouts organised to watch over those working on the escape plan. Back to the snowflakes, the idea of gliding over Colditz was put to the committee. A workshop was created in a disused attic 300 feet above the ground, the launching area was born. They gathered materials and worked on "The Colditz Cock" for nine months and just as they completed the glider, news came via the contraband radio, Hitler had ordered the execution of 50 escapees from the camp in Sagan and any more escapees will be shot. The escape never went ahead and they did not get home for Christmas.



*The Colditz men playing cards Christmas Day

In April 1945 the Americans arrived in tanks to demolish the castle, one of them saw a Union Jack over a window and asked a child who lived there, he told him "Prisoners". After all they had endured, they were minutes away from being killed but the Americans turned tack and by the next morning had defeated the SS. The men, leaving "The Colditz Cock" up in the attic, walked through the gates to freedom. They would be home for Christmas after all, albeit a few years later!

I have not written about Christmas itself but you can see a common thread here, something always not far from the forefront of the men's minds was... *getting home for Christmas!*

And although most of our Rats endured a Christmas or four on foreign soil, they did not do so as Rats. We all know the dates (10 April to 7 Dec 1941) but how many of us stopped to think about this? I didn't.



*After their liberation...free at last.

We will remember them.

Chris

Kelly



"THE COLDITZ COCK"
 "The plan to build a glider was encouraged to stop prisoners becoming bored. The idea came from Lieut Tony Rolt, not even an airman, who had noticed the chapel roof line was totally obscured from German guards' view. He realised the roof would make a perfect launching point for a glider to fly across the river 60 mts below."

"File:Colditz Castle 2011.jpg." Wikimedia Commons. 4 Oct 2020, 07:26 UTC. 10 Jun 2023, 08:14
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Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

BLUEY AND CURLEY



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk - Australia Association Inc
Ray Keith · 59 minutes ago · ©

WINNER IN OUR COMPETITION "Name our Rats".

Prize for the best name will be an mounted Association Plaque (or an aluminium print of your RAT if his tribute has been done). Preferable Australian names rather than "Abbott & Costello" and from the war era. Get to it - The terrible two need some names ! In the event that replicated names are chosen the winner will be chosen based on the "order of posting so please check all other submissions to see if it's already been suggested".

COMPETITION CLOSES AT THE MIDDAY 14 MAY 2023

Thank you everyone that contributed suggestions to finding a name for our tribute RATS. There were some cracker suggestions but in the end one stood out.

BLUEY and CURLEY as suggested by a few different people

Two cartoon characters from the era that epitomise the larrikin of the Aussie diggers.

Congratulations to the winner **Ken Buckland**

Ken please reach out via Messenger about your prize.

Cheers



Alex Gurney, born in England, 1902 and moved to Australia in 1937, achieved fame as creator of the war-time comic strip "Bluey and Curley". After he sketched a couple class mates, it wasn't long before others wanted their sketch done and Gurney realised that he could be paid for art.

His famous cartoon strip featured a pair of soldiers, Bluey, who was a Great War veteran who had re-enlisted, and Curley, a new recruit to the AIF.

Gurney was accredited as a war correspondent, visiting troops to make sure he had authenticity in his sketches. Bluey and Curley even participated in the Victory Parade in England after Gurney was sent to England in 1946 for that Parade as part of an Australian Press Syndicate.

Bluey and Curley epitomised what was seen as the typical Australian soldier. They liked a drink, a gamble, showed their lack of respect towards authority and a loved a chat, always in colourful Aussie slang, often featuring some Australian pub and always planning some scheme!

His Bluey and Curley comic strip was also historically significant as it was the first time a newspaper comic strip had ever been transmitted from England to Australia by radio. Although thought *too Australian* for American newspapers, Gurney produced the strip from 1940 until his death in 1955, which were seen across Australia and appeared in New Zealand, New Guinea and Canada.

Following Gurney's death the comic strip was taken over by Norm Rice in early 1956, but he died in a vehicle accident that year. Bluey and Curley was then taken over by cartoonist Les Dixon who drew the characters for 18 years until he retired in 1975.

Bluey and Curley
Winning names for
"Name our Rats"
Competition
In May 2023.
Winner
Ken Buckland

Bluey and Curley



Above Sunday Times, Perth, 24 Dec 1944, Below: The News, 31 Oct 1944 *Trove*



Alex Gurney *Trove*

More information on Gurney, see <https://timegents.com/2020/04/04/the-adventures-of-bluey-curley-in-our-australian-pubs/>

<http://latrobejournal.slv.vic.gov.au/latrobejournal/issue/latrobe-82/t1-g-t6.html#latrobe-82-060a>



Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

REMEMBERING THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK REUNION *part 2*



Some memories here, of the wonderful Reunion weekend for the 80th anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk held in Brisbane 2022

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, 200 members, joined by VIPs, met on 8, 9, 10th April 2022.

It was a long wait until 6pm on Saturday, for those attending the Dinner at the RSL. Greeting everyone at the entrance was a curtain of hand cut, hand strung "identity tags" of over 14000 names of men who served at Tobruk. These were hand strung into alphabetical rows of 60 and over 200 of these hung from racks so that attendees could look for and find their Rat. This amazing work was carried out over 2 years by Sarah Maas, co-founder of the Descendants Association, with help from Lynda Monaghan and other local volunteers. An amazing display. (And Sarah says she is still vacuuming up pieces of these tags!)

Accompanying these ID tags were "The Voices". A haunting audio tape representing those who have passed and those who didn't come home from overseas, these "Voices" talking about themselves, of them watching their family and other families, coming to see them at the Reunion, seeing family members and telling their stories. The emotions were again running high, another amazing part of this Reunion.

After they had been allocated tables, people attending had a photo taken in front of a "Descendants" banner and then took their place at tables. Handmade red poppy flower ceramic bowls held a candle in the middle of each table. At each setting, laminated placemats with

a variety of sketches of soldiers and cartoons of the age, were used, creating a huge talking point at each table, comparing what cartoons each had received.

The accompanying menu displayed both today's version and a list of food that would have been available to the Rats of Tobruk while overseas. For example, the potato string wrapped prawns with mango salad was described as sardines in old potato skins with wilted cabbage leaves, the Roast Beef served with mashed potato and vegetables was described as "bully beef, gravy and spuds". The Mississippi mud cake with vanilla cream was "Trench Mud served with Tobruk sand, all served with a good dose of Tobruk sand, lice and flies!"

Random photos selected from the Reunion



Michelle Mrozowski
Jennifer Davies



Maurice and Dawn Bennett above left



Michelle and Brendan McEvoy above right



Sgt Joshua and Rev Howard Smith below right



Dick and Penny Smith above

Frank, Rosemary and Robert Mitchell



Cheryl Oldmeadow and Lynette Gardiner above



Carol Underwood and Glen Bound right



Bill Ahearn below left

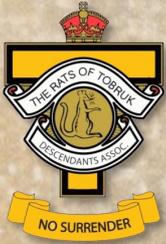


Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

REMEMBERING THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK REUNION *part 3*



Each person received a "Care Box" similar to what was sent overseas to the troops filled with items such as razor blades, matches, sardines, vegemite, cordial, chocolate, soap and other items they would not have easy access to. And on each seat was a hessian DOTROTA bag containing gifts of 80th anniversary merchandise consisting of a medallion, key ring, 2 different memorial pens, a beautiful hard cover note pad and pen, a listing of who attended with their Rat and Unit listed, a book about the anniversary consisting of Tobruk information and reunion happenings, as well as other goodies.

Surrounding these tables were more tables showing merchandise available and a huge range of Tobruk memorabilia, some brought along by attendees. This display was hugely popular and visited by all, who wished they had time to read all that was there. Various flags including a Rats of Tobruk marching flag and a beautiful Tobruk banner made by Darby Ashton, President of the Sandgate Naval Association, Sub Branch, and 2/43rd, 2/10th and 2/48th unit banners, were displayed around the room, creating more great talking points.

Next page



Random photos selected from the Reunion



Peter Collins, Martin Forsyth, Brendan McEvoy

Rob Spark, Maurice Bennett

Care boxes made by Kaye Ross



Michelle Ryan, (RIP 27/7/2023) Michelle Mrozowski, Rev Howard Smith, Erica Stuart above top

Denise and Stan Albert below left

Jules McKenzie and Susan Shore below right



Allan Bound and Coral Bound above right
Chris, Jeanne and Brian Chase above left
Warren and Skye Randall with Sarah Maas.
Brothers David, Philip and Robert Dow. right
Elena Lomas and David Goody far right





Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc



REMEMBERING THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK *part 4*



Some memories here, of the wonderful Reunion weekend for the 80th anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk held in Brisbane 2022



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. Along with Her Excellency, Governor of Queensland, The Hon Dr Jeanette Young, PSM and her husband Professor Graeme Nimmo, RFD, VIPS included Airforce Group Captain Iain Carty CSN; Lt Col Craig Mann, Gallipoli Barracks; Captain Nick Woodley, RAN HMAS Moreton; Patron, Warren Randall; Mark Furner MP for Ferny Grove; Senior Ward Advisor Damien Tessmann; Jan Tkaczyk, National President of Polish Ex Servicemen Australia; Kay Danes, OAM; Rupert McCall OAM; Ken Cullen, Gaythorne RSL; Rev Howard Smith DOTROTA Chaplain and Sgt Joshua Smith.

Everyone was seated and at 6.45pm Her Excellency and her husband Professor Graeme Nimmo, arrived and were presented to the DOTROTA researchers, Ray Windlow, Deb Goodwin, Denise Dobinson, Martin Forsyth, Craig Proctor and Sue Trewartha. After photos and meeting the VIP guests at her table, the Governor and husband were seated and proceedings started with an address by Her Excellency. As the meal was served, Rupert McCall, well known author and poet of international renown, told of his connection to the Rats of Tobruk and read his "Heroes of Tobruk" poem to an enthralled audience.

The National President and Vice President of DOTROTA, Roger Murphy and Sarah Maas spoke of the work done by DOTROTA and what they hope to achieve in the future and recognised the work

done by the small band of volunteer researchers. Digital tributes containing, where possible, a photo of the soldier at the time of his service are produced for each confirmed Rat and passed on to their descendant. They spoke of their hopes for the Association to grow and be supported by Descendants so the Rats will never be forgotten.

Mr Ray Windlow, senior adviser and worker within the researchers, then spoke feelingly of the work done by the researchers and the resulting digital tributes produced for each researched Rat of Tobruk which are now being produced in books of 500 for sale.

These books, "Faces of the Rats", (so called as the Association want these service record numbers to have a face put to the number, another way of honouring and remembering these men), received an official launch and are available on the official DOTROTA website. One by one, these men are painstakingly researched, databased and a tribute done to them all.

photos selected from the Reunion

to be continued



L to R: Sue Trewartha, Professor Graeme Nimmo, RFD, Her Excellency, Governor of Queensland, The Hon Dr Jeanette Young, Ray Windlow, Martin Forsyth, Craig Proctor, Deb Goodwin



Volunteer Researchers, Ray Windlow, Martin Forsyth, Craig Proctor, Denise Dobinson, Deb Goodwin.

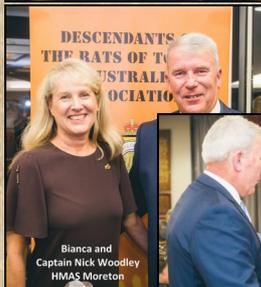


Glenyse Ford
Carol Smith below

Ben and Trent Dalton left



Maureen Rush above
Andy and Lucy Simmons left
John Hill right
Dianne and Peter Hodgson below



Bianca and
Captain Nick Woodley
HMAS Moreton



Iain Carty right



Kevin Johnson and
Sandra Leeson



Margaret Armstrong,
David and Mary Salleras





Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

MERRY CHRISTMAS!



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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>



HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT THIS ASSOCIATION?

Welcome! Our first two editions done and dusted and the next one ready to send out!

We would like to send warm greetings on behalf of our volunteer researchers for a Happy Christmas and wonderful New Year. Aren't we lucky that most of us have the opportunity to spend our Christmas in safety, with family and friends! Imagine the angst and thoughts of our Rats as they spent their Christmas, and often more than one, overseas. I am sure they tried to make the most of their celebrations with each other and hopefully received some comfort packages from their families in Australia.

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.

And also, introducing the new **DOTROTA COMMITTEE**. National President Roger Murphy, Vice President Debra Goodwin, Secretary Sarah Maas, Treasurer Betty Murphy, General committee Sue Trewartha, Craig Proctor, and Christine Kelly.

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 & Sarah Maas



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.

Donation Account
DOTROTA
Bsb: 124-001

Acct: 22 920 419

*We appreciate
your support.*

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