Rat's Tales

Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S THIRD ANNUAL GET TOGETHER

Rat's Tales Vol 3 Issue 3

Editors: Sue Trewartha
Chris Kelly "The Pen."

October 2026

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There has been several events since the Anniversary Reunion in April, and we have decided to produce a newsletter on what DOTROTA has been doing.

The South Australian *Rats Rendezvous*

Inspired by DOTROTA, Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Aust Association's 85th Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk Reunion, South Australian Peter Collins, whose father was John Collins, SX1793, 2/10th Bn, "The Face of Tobruk", asked me if I would come to Adelaide to do a South Australian launch of the book "They Shall Ever Be Remembered" at the Keswick Army Museum. So, any excuse for a trip to Adelaide from our little country town of Ceduna, we went ahead and started planning what we would do on that day. Peter organised the event to be held at the Keswick Army Barracks on Anzac Highway, which houses the Army museum. We are indebted to the AMOSA Foundation, the Army Museum of South Australia, for their wonderful support organising and holding the event at the Museum in the Barracks. Thanks also to Caitlin Heggie, professional photographer and museum volunteer, who seemed to be everywhere recording this event for us. Thank you also to Claire Forsyth for taking photos.

With Peter on the ground in Adelaide, he did most of the organising with Museum volunteers, it all came together and on Sunday 4 October, at 8.30am, Peter Collins, Martin Forsyth, both volunteer members of the Museum, Val Collins, Kevin Trewartha and myself, along with volunteers from the Keswick Army Museum, Keswick, arrived, armed with some souvenirs, memorabilia and flags to decorate the room and lots of energy to rearrange the tables and chairs. The boys went off and set up the Officers Mess Annex rooms ready for the event. It was quite special to be allowed to use this area for our event and we thank those in charge for the chance to use those rooms for our book launch event.

Over near the museum building, volunteers were setting up for directing people for parking, and others prepared for the onslaught of Descendants and friends to be shown around their displays.

Greetings and name tags took place at the entrance of the museum area and as 10am approached, and with around 90 descendants and friends present, everyone set off to look at the Museum. They were taken in four groups, moving along each 15 minutes, directed by Peter and his very loud whistle, around the Keswick Army Museum, with visitors taking note in particular, of the amazing North Africa and Tobruk World War 2 display.

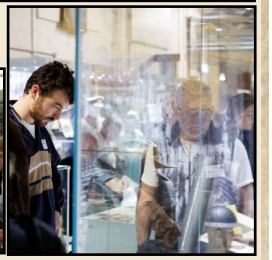


Included in above photo is Michelle and Brendan McEvoy, left, and Kaye Lee, right. Below, visitors, on left, Heather Hughes, right, Brian and Kay Whitmarsh. Photos by Caitlin Heggie.









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Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

BLITZ TRUCK UNVEILING



BLITZ TRUCK UNVEILING 4 OCT 2026

From there we all stepped out of the Museum doors to witness the unveiling of the restored Blitz truck. Geoff Laurie, an ex-army Museum volunteer and son of Captain Francis Stewart Laurie SX619, 9th Div AASC (Aust Army Service Corps), along with his crew of knowledgeable helpers, have spent some years converting it from a non operating vehicle to what we see today.

Marge, (blue green top,) aged 99, seated at the unveiling. Her father, Robert Stevenson, NX16794, born in Maryborough, Vic, 2/13th Infantry Bn, drove Blitz Trucks at Tobruk.

"The 1940's Blitz Truck has special relevance to the Rats of Tobruk, and some of you here today had fathers who were drivers in the Middle East, perhaps they even drove this truck.

The members of the Restoration Team who have worked hard as volunteers in order to complete this project, were Pete Jarrett, ex armoured Corps, John Black, ex RAEME, Tony Matz, ex Artillery, Ken Sanders, Ex RAN, and Len Ey, who has particular skills in working with canvas. Also extremely helpful in so many ways were the uniformed members of staff of the Army Museum.

I recall my father saying that the only truck available in the early days in the Middle East, were basic 2 wheel drive delivery trucks and how amazed he was at the skill of some driving to get them through the sandy deserts.



Once the range of Blitz 4 wheel drive trucks arrived, it revolutionised the Army's ability to operate in the desert. They were a strong and reliable vehicle that came in a variety of sizes and were for a variety of purposes; ambulances, radio trucks, workshop vehicles, troop and cargo transport and towing of artillery guns and ammunition to name a few.

This truck is a 3 ton GS Veh. Some may remember Tom Kruse, outback mailman, who used 2 or 3 Blitz trucks on his mailrun.

The Blitz had high ground clearance, large wheels and tyres and a reliable 6 cylinder motor connected to a solid 4 speed gearbox and high and low range transfer case, enabling it to operate successfully in the hard desert terrain and water obstacles that halted earlier trucks."

"During WW2, the Blitz truck was manufactured by both Ford and Chevrolet companies, this one being a Chevrolet, with around 800,000 made across Canada, USA and Australia, including in Adelaide at GMH in Woodville.

Being in what we thought was generally good condition before our project started, we originally thought our task was just to clean up and remove surface rust from the front of the cabin roof.

This was not to be…there was a large amount of surface corrosion under the tray and chassis members. This mean the tray was removed to get rid of all the corrosion, which took about 12 months, only recently completed!"

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BLITZ TRUCK UNVEILING

"As these trucks remained in service in the Australian Army until mid 1960s, it was painted a military olive drab green colour but as the Blitz truck originally made its extremely good name in the desert campaigns in the Middle East we thought it appropriate to change it back to a desert sandy colour, which took a fair bit more time, but we think it has scrubbed up pretty well.

We are grateful to the manager and staff of *Crowies Paints* for advice and support in our projects.

Mr Len Ey gave very generously of his time and manufactured and installed a brand new canvas canopy which completes the trucks presentation.

Now painted in desert khaki colour with identifying tactical signs, (most military vehicles display one or more Tactical signs), front and back; No "50", which indicates the vehicle as being allocated to the HQ, Australian 9th Division; the 9th Division Rats of Tobruk platypus emblem.

The number "7" painted inside a yellow circle on top of the bonnet represents the vehicle's Bridge Weight Class. (The number allowed bridge sentries to cross-reference the truck's weight class against the maximum weight capacity posted on a bridge.)

This type of vehicle was used in Tobruk in the 2/1st Ordnance Field Park (including the Reserve Motor Section) and were permanently stationed inside the Tobruk perimeter during the siege, working hand-in-hand with the 2/1st Army Field Workshops."

Those present were invited to look around and into the vehicle, thinking about their Rat who may well have travelled in or driven that exact truck!

DOTROTA preserves the written and photographic history of our veterans and their era, and historical records and archival photographs give us the vital context, stories, and blueprints of the era. Our archives tell the stories of where these vehicles went and who drove them.

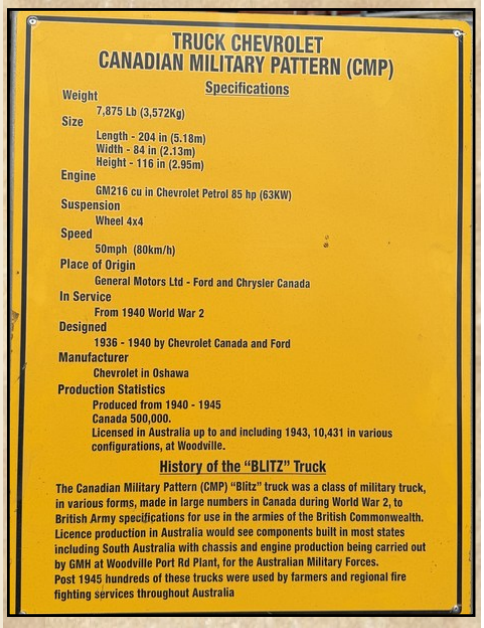
However, seeing an original wartime workhorse like the WWII Blitz truck meticulously restored to running order, brings that history into the three-dimensional world, where dedicated restorers ensure that physical machinery survives for future generations to see, touch, and hear.

Together, these complementary efforts ensure our history is never forgotten.









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THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN RATS RENDEZVOUS

From there, it was a short walk across to the Officer's Mess Annex and the rest of events of the day.

With a 9th Division Flag, a couple of Descendants Flags, and an Australia Flag as backdrops, some memorabilia was on display around a lovely goldfish pond in the room set up with tables and chairs. Kevin Trewartha, long suffering neglected husband of Sue, under instruction to give a free raffle ticket to each person there, insured we had numbers for the day. With 80 tickets handed out and some who had to leave early indicating we had over 90 people there, our attendance for the day filled the large room perfectly.

Tickets were drawn out by Warren Randall and winners chose their prize from the 8 memorabilia packs donated by DOTROTA.



Warren Randall drawing numbers from the hat, for a selection of DOTROTA memorabilia, with Kevin Trewartha supervising.

The room we were in had a large barbecue cooking area at one end and, in the background, the Army Museum volunteers were busy making salads and cooking hamburgers and sausages.

On sale at a special price for the day, were some Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk fridge magnets. We have an association with Don and Hanna Law of Yankalilla, south of Adelaide.

Don is on the committee of the Men's Shed there and they kindly designed, made and donated around 250 fridge magnets for our Association.



Claire Forsyth and Kevin Trewartha were in charge of selling them, another lovely way of boosting donations to the Association, *every dollar counts.* It is wonderful to see support of DOTROTA coming from those with no Rats connections and we greatly appreciate their work and donations.



With Peter Collins as MC keeping things moving with military precision, we had various anecdotes happening including some of the antics of his father, a bit of a rascal by the sound of things! *(Read his story, Anniversary book, page 66.)*

Peter's loud whistle caught the attention of all when needed!

Link to purchase *"They Shall Ever Be Remembered."*

https://www.ratsoftobruk.au/online-store/EVER-REMEMBERED-Free-Postage-Australia-Wide-p812265855

THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN RATS RENDEZVOUS



Virtual War Memorial Australia. First of the speakers Peter introduced was Sharyn Roberts, CEO of the Virtual War Memorial Australia, which has its foundations in South Australia from 2014. Retired Army Colonel, Steve Larkins, conceived the idea while visiting WW1 battlefields and then aimed to create a centralized digital space where families and researchers could share and explore veteran stories. First Patron was SA Governor Sir Eric Neale. From August 2019, General The Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove has been the Patron-in-Chief.

Sharyn gave a very interesting and information talk on what the VWMA was about, the stories posted by families and researchers, how they work at verifying what stories and photos go on their website before posting, what else they did, including recording entries from the *SA Premiers Anzac Spirit School Prize,* open to all Yr 9 and Yr 10 students, and the interest they have in mutually working with our Association. She indicated they don't have a lot of Rats stories recorded there from all the Rats of Tobruk.





Over time DOTROTA has worked hard to set up a database to record not only Rats service records, but to include relevant photos of the Rat, headstones, newspaper clippings, medal and memorabilia photos and relevant personal stories, and we encourage you to contact the Association to ask how you can have your Rats precious memorabilia forever recorded with his service records. It is important that your stories are recorded in DOTROTA, a place where we have worked hard to preserve Rats information in one place. Then, working together with the VWMA, families could consider sharing it there so we can work together to save the precious stories of those who served this country as Rats of Tobruk.

DOTROTA. *Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Aust Assoc.* Kaye Lee, *on right,* Adelaide researcher extraordinaire, daughter of Stanley Bryan Holmes, SX8133, 2/48th, then talked about DOTROTA. This is taken from her speech. She explained how during fierce, relentless fighting to retain Tobruk, William Joyce, a Nazi propaganda broadcaster, known as Lord Haw-Haw, broadcast jibes aimed at demoralizing our troops. He ridiculed their rat infested living conditions, illness, scorching hot weather and a decrease in food and water, among other issues. Leaflets were dropped urging the men to surrender. However, being called names and faced with challenges was part of the Australian culture and ridiculing these proud, very independent men with a very different sense of humour, as desert rats, had backfired. Instead they seized the quirky name Rats of Tobruk.



Much historically accurate information is available about Tobruk and WWII, but the title, Rat of Tobruk, is technically neither a military title or battalion, but it came home with the men. Post war, each state had a Rats of Tobruk Association, not to glorify those who returned, but to remember and honour their mates, so many of whom did not return.

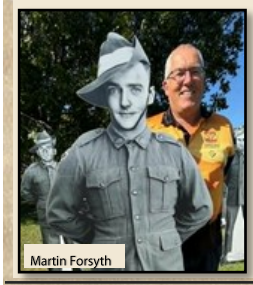
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THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN RATS RENDEZVOUS

Kaye Lee went on to explain that as Rats ranks thinned, the "Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia" was formed by Betty Murphy and daughter Sarah Maas, descendants of Corporal Joseph Oakley, QX4796, 2/13th Field Coy. This Association has gone ahead in leaps and bounds, with members joining from all around Australia and some from overseas, with volunteer researchers and descendants adding regularly to the Facebook page and website. Kaye pointed out the wonderful work done by the volunteer researchers, (Ray Windlow, Betty Murphy, Craig Proctor, Deb Goodwin, Denise Dobson, Matt McHugh, Martin Forsyth, Sue Trewartha) who do so much behind the scenes, to record our Rats information. Volunteers spend *many hours each day* contributing to the database, confirming and recording aspects of each Rat. Kaye told of the extremely detailed database that has been developed by Ray Windlow from names gathered over 15 or so years by Owen Carlton and Roger Murphy. It is now possible to check names to determine if they are on the database and if they are a Rat, remembering of course, that we are still finding new names to add frequently.

The 85th Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk featured in Kaye's presentation, talking about the Sydney launch of "They Shall Ever Be Remembered," which quickly sold out and was reprinted, and the emotion the 273 stories evoked as families came together to ensure the courage, sacrifice, and unbreakable spirit of the Rats live on for future generations. Their experiences were seared into their memories, but the Rats of Tobruk returned and attempted to get on with their lives. Perhaps these stories explain why we as descendants, so often saw, without comprehending, the bouts of silent withdrawal as each one remembered mates who did not return; or could not unsee events they could not share.


Martin Forsyth

The Ghost Soldiers really took centre stage, Kaye said, when they were revealed on Sunday morning at the Memorial Service. There were many tears as descendants found their soldier amongst the 60 that the Association were able to produce. Kaye explained about the unveiling of the "Ghost Soldiers" project, and said how so incredibly emotional it was to see youthful ancestors as they prepared to head to the Middle East.

The ultimate goal now is that descendants will sponsor their own ancestor and this "Army" will tour each state. Contact DOTROTA, Betty Murphy or one of the researchers, if you are interested in taking part in this project.

To sponsor your Rat for this collection, the cost is $200. These soldiers in the future, as this all develops, will have a QR code attached to them, taking you to a written or audio story about that soldier.

They will be available for Anzac, school and other commemorative events, around Australia in the future.

And for our South Australian descendants, keep early October 2027 available, as they may well be coming this way for our fourth South Australian get together event!

Kaye finished her talk by saying "Wouldn't it be great to see some more South Australian Ghost Soldiers in the group *and just how proud would our Rats be!*"

Thanks to Kaye Lee for explaining more about DOTROTA, "The Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Aust Assoc" to members and friends present that day.


Kevin Trewartha



https://www.ratsoftobruk.au/online-store/EVER-REMEMBERED-Free-Postage-Australia-Wide-p812265855

Link to purchase *"They Shall Ever Be Remembered."*
Copy and paste if needed.

https://www.ratsoftobruk.au/online-store/GHOST-SOLDIERS-Project-p831255275

Link to organize your Ghost Soldier.

THEY SHALL EVER BE REMEMBERED BOOK LAUNCH



Some more banter by capable MC, Peter Collins, *getting him off the microphone was our problem…* and the official South Australian launch of DOTROTA's 85th Anniversary book, "They Shall Ever Be Remembered" took place.

I was thrilled to have found a distant relative of Lieutenant Lance Howard Heffron over the past few months and to find she, Gaynor Muth, lived in Port Adelaide and even more thrilled that she would come along to our event. To make things even more exciting, Gaynor has now tracked down a closer living relative of Lance Heffron, who also has another Rat in her family. *A warm welcome to our Rats family to all of them!*



Thank you to Brendan McEvoy, whose father, Pte Laurence McEvoy, SX11122, was in the same battalion as Lance, 2/48th. Brendan read from Lance's diary "My Most Miserable Hour". Lieutenant Lance Howard Heffron, SX11171, 2/48th Battalion, on 12 November 1941, wrote in his diary: "I left a few men in Libya in their last resting places and I managed to visit the Cemetery before I left. I never spent a more miserable hour I can assure you and it was hard to leave them there - but I know that they shall ever be remembered."

Lance Heffron, born in Adelaide on 25 Jun 1915, arrived in the Middle East on 23 March 1941, did desert training, was ill in hospital with sandfly fever before being Taken On Strength to the 2/48th Battalion in May 1941. Sadly, he was Killed In Action on 22 July 1942 and was buried at Tel El Eisa then El Alamein War Cemetery.

On 12 November 1941, he sat down and wrote about his visit to Tobruk cemetery, in his diary that he had "never spent a more miserable hour."

From my speech: But Heffron didn't know then that he only had seven months left. He didn't know that his own name would soon be carved into a cross just like the ones he was looking at. But in that dark moment, he reached for a pen and made a defiant promise. He wrote: "They shall ever be remembered."



And as soon as I read those words very early when I was collecting stories… I knew that was the title of the book.

"In the heat and dust of 1941, a soldier stood among the fresh graves of the Tobruk Cemetery, amongst the white crosses, and made a promise to the dead. He was tired, he was grieving, and he was a long way from home.

As we open this book, we aren't just reading history. We are finally answering that call. We are making good on a promise made half a world away, eighty-five years ago.

To the descendants and families who contributed to this collection: thank you. It isn't always easy to reach back into the past—to sift through old letters and pull out the memories of those we miss. But because you did, those stories are now anchored for the generations to come.

Each story is unique, each is deeply personal, and together they give us a window into what the Rats of Tobruk endured—and something of the lives they built when they finally came home."

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THEY SHALL EVER BE REMEMBERED BOOK LAUNCH

We had some Rats descendants share short paragraphs from their stories to give people an insight into the book.



Bob Hare, aged 88, *on right*. He and his wife Geraldine, travelled from Melbourne for this event and Bob's heart wrenching story about his father, Arthur Ivan Hare, SX8897, on Page 124 of the book, is something we all need to read, *with a box of tissues.*



Trudy Purcell, daughter of Murray Charles Middleton, SX11808, 2/43rd, told us how her father was born on 23 March 1913 at Parkside, SA. He enlisted in the Militia Forces in the 10/50th Bn (The Adelaide Rifles) on 7 August 1934 under the name of Maurice Charles Middleton, a bit of a mystery as his name was Murray! He then enlisted in the AIF on 17 March 1941 in Broken Hill, NSW and after some training was allotted 2/43rd reinforcements and sailed on 19 April 1941 from Sydney to the Middle East. From the 24th Training Bn he was Taken on Strength to the 2/43rd Bn on 16 July,1941. After the Siege of Tobruk ended in December 1941, he attended a 9 Division Machine Gun School and then during the Second Battle of El Alamein in Egypt, on 1 November 1942, he was taken Prisoner of War.

He was held in two POW camps in Italy, until he was taken to Stalag 344 in Lamsdorf, Poland and was assigned to two work camps, both coal mines. As a recovered POW her father returned to Australia from the UK on 30 May 1945, disembarking in Sydney 7 July, 1945. He spent some time in 52 Camp Hospital at Wayville, SA and had rehabilitation time at the Aust Convalescent Depot at Strathalbyn. Trudy's mother said she hardly recognised him on his return home, and he only weighed about 45k. *(Story in Anniversary book, page 184.)*

Cynthia Davey, daughter of Daniel Keith Thiselton, SX1367, 2/10. "My Dad was Daniel Keith Thiselton born at Wirrabara Forest, Sam, 14 October 1909 nearly 117 years ago. He with his family went to the West Coast at age 4 months by bullock wagon and returned when Dad was 10 to Booleroo Whim. Dad met my Mum when she was 16 at Booleroo Centre Rifle Range. He went to Waikerie to work in the early 1930's with his widowed mother and sisters. My Mum followed him to Waikerie, something her family thought was outrageous at the time, and married 10 June 1939 at Booleroo Centre.



When war broke out Dad rode his motorbike to Adelaide and joined up, Dad's cousin, Wilfred Denzil Brooks was a Rat of Tobruk and his story is also in this book. *(Brooks pg 48, Thiselton pg 251.)*

Dad was an armourer and was wounded when a German weapon blew up. He was a rifle shooter all his life at Booleroo Centre, Waikerie and at the Dean Range and we went to Ceduna at Easter times for the Ceduna shoot and stayed with his cousin Stan Thiselton at Denial Bay.

My Dad also went to New Guinea. He was a very fit man when he went to war, a gymnast, played tennis but when he came back he was not. Dad build things to take his mind of the pain and worked in his shed. He build our house at Waikerie, trailers, boats, caravans and did watch repairs and even lathed tiny spindles for watches, very fine tooling. My Brother Murray has lathed Model Aircraft engines as well. He was made a TPI in about 1969 - 1970 after many tribunals. We visited his army mates on Sunday drives and on holidays and Dad marches in the Anzac Parades and we went to the Dawn Services." *cont*

THEY SHALL EVER BE REMEMBERED BOOK LAUNCH

"Some of his mates we visited were Frank Denbow (Francis Frederick Denbow SX 186); Chook Alexander (Charles Henry Alexander SX66); Tim Hughes (Timothy Hughes SX1570); Jack Hitch (Jack Henry Hitch SX978); Ken Simpson (Robert Kenneth Simpson SX379); Bob Sellars (Robert Ian Sellers SX388 Purple & Blue, 10th Battalion book also 443186 in Virtual War Memorial Australia); there was also someone we visited at Glencoe in the South East, I think J A Nolan (Joseph Alphonsus Nolan SX598.

My Father died on 28 February 1972, at Daws Road Repat Hospital when I was 21 years old. He was 62 years old, Mum was 58 years old, he had been a TPI for under two years. He was a quite caring man who just kept going as long as he could but to be sure he is always with me even now as I remember him."

After launching the book, I gave a copy to Sharyn Roberts, VWMA, *below*.



One was also given to Rolf, *below*, who accepted it on behalf of the Keswick Army Museum.



A special moment was spent remembering those who were no longer with us, at the *Empty Chair*, a symbol of our deceased Rats of Tobruk.

Many thanks to the Keswick Army Museum volunteers for cooking up a lovely barbeque and salads, for all present.

I spent some time signing books and talking to people after that, before we all thought it was time for home. On the way, twenty stopped in at the Maid of Auckland Hotel for evening meals.

Then Tuesday we decided to do it all again.

In Adelaide in 1945, the 2/43rd Bn formed the 2/43rd Bn Club which, since then, has met monthly for a lunch. These days it is descendants meeting regularly at the Colley Hotel in Glenelg and an invitation is extended to any Rats descendants to come along, not only the 2/43rd. It was wonderful to see 37 people attend, enjoy a meal and chat with other descendants. Martin Forsyth had a short presentation before lunch was served and then Bob Hare again enthralled us with his talk about his father, Captain Arthur Ivan Hare, SX8897. Thank you to Bob and his wife Geraldine who travelled over from Melbourne for these two events. Again I encourage everyone to read his story on page 124 of the Anniversary Book.

And to top it all off, Kevin and I spent several hours at the National Military Vehicle Museum in Edinburgh looking at their impressive vehicle display before we set off for home on 11 Oct.







Above: Bob Hare, slideshow and talk at 2/43rd Bn Club lunch.

Lunch attendees.

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BUNDABERG TRIBUTE

Thanks to the Bundaberg Regional Council for use of this story, supplied by Bruce and Carolyn Quinn:

A special tribute to the troops who served during the Siege of Tobruk in 1941 will soon take root in Bundaberg's memorial spaces, following a generous donation of plants.

The Siege of Tobruk was a major campaign of the Second World War, during which Australian and Allied troops defended the strategically important Libyan port against German and Italian forces for eight months.



Locals Bruce and Carolyn Quinn, above and right, recently delivered four "No Surrender" roses and a Tobruk fig to Bundaberg Regional Council on behalf of Betty Murphy, founder of the "Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Association Australia."

The Rats of Tobruk were Australian and allied troops who defended Tobruk, Libya, during the siege from 10 April to 7 Dec 1941. Known for their resilience and determination, the Australian defenders became known as the "Rats of Tobruk."

The roses and fig tree have been planted at the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Park and Buss Park.

Bundaberg-based "Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association" member, Bruce Quinn, said the plants carried deep historical meaning and provided a tangible connection to the experiences of those who served at Tobruk.

Tobruk Fig Tree.
"The famous Tobruk Fig Tree was named because it marked the entrance to an underground network of caves used by the Australians to treat the wounded," he said. "This became known as the Fig Tree Hospital. Located inside the Tobruk defences near the Red Line and north of the Derna Road, the fig tree was the only feature in an otherwise barren desert. It was visible from miles away and as a result was an easy target for German artillery. The original tree still marks the spot today."

The "No Surrender" Rose.
The "No Surrender" Rose was named to commemorate the 80th anniversary of The Siege of Tobruk in April 2021.

Honouring service through our public spaces
Along with the plants, a commemorative plaque will be installed to recognise the significance of the donation. Mayor Helen Blackburn said it was a meaningful addition to the region's memorial spaces.

"This is a wonderful example of how our community continues to honour and preserve the stories of those who came before us," she said. "These plants will provide a living connection to history and will help future generations understand the significance of the sacrifices made by the troops of Tobruk."

The donation comes after Council's ongoing work to enhance and protect significant public spaces, including the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Park and Buss Park.







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SARAH'S SNIPPETS

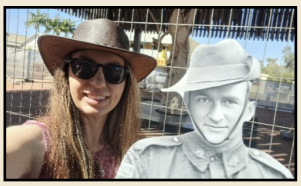
From Sarah Maas, co-founder of DOTROTA; In early September, I travelled to **Longreach** to present copies of "They Shall Ever Be Remembered," to several valued community organisations. It was a pleasure to donate these books to the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame, Longreach State School, Longreach School of Distance Education, Longreach Library and Longreach RSL, helping to share our stories of service, sacrifice and remembrance with the wider community.

Copies were also given to DOTROTA members Jacqui and George Woodfield, son of Staff Sergeant John Woodfield, QX1782, 2/15th Inf Battalion, 20th Brigade, for Ilfracombe State School and its library.

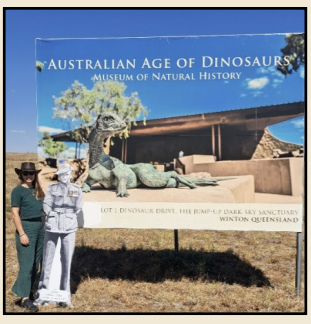
My grandfather, Corporal Joseph Oakley QX4796, 2/13th Fd Coy, came along for the journey, making it his first visit to Outback Queensland. I think he enjoyed the adventure as much as I did!











On 15 August 2026, 15 people attended our **social lunch at Gaythorne RSL**, sharing memories and reflecting on the Sydney 85th Anniversary Remembrance weekend.

Those attending included Sarah Maas, Betty Murphy and her son Travis, Lynda Moynahan, Margaret Armstrong, Don Adams, Neil Cadman, Kaye Ross, Rosemarie Allen, her daughter Annette, and her grandsons Luke and James.

It was wonderful to reconnect, reminisce and share our experiences from this significant commemorative weekend.

Continued next page.



The Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame
Longreach State School
School of Distance Education
Longreach Library
Longreach RSL









On the left; Sarah and her "grandfather" Joseph Oakley QX4796 visit the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame Barcaldine War Memorial Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Longreach Qantas Founders Museum and the dinosaurs at Winton.

Copy and paste this link to purchase *"They Shall Ever Be Remembered."*

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Rat's Tales

Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

SARAH'S SNIPPETS



We had a lovely **Social lunch** at Gaythorne RSL on 17 October 2026, sharing stories and forming friendships. Over 30 people attended, with some new and some familiar faces and some great great grand children attending. We had members travel from Maleny and Bundaberg to be there. The tables were set with placemats, sunflower lights, felt rats, scratch and win tickets, timber table rats and even a lucky door prize. Leftover apparel and merchandise was snapped up!



On 9 August 2026, Kaye Ross and I delivered a multimedia presentation at the **Naval Association of Australia,** Sandgate Sub-Section meeting. We shared highlights of the 85th Anniversary Remembrance weekend in Sydney with members. We also brought along a selection of merchandise for sale and were pleased to sell several books, helping spread the message and purpose behind "They Shall Ever Be Remembered".



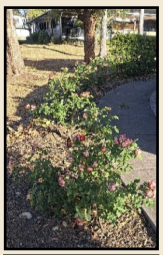


In June, I was also honoured to be a guest speaker at the **Gaythorne Legacy Care Group** gathering at Arana Hills Leagues Club.



Over the past two months, I have attended the **Defence Industry Networking** events at Gaythorne RSL on 20 August and 24 September, which provided valuable opportunities to raise awareness of what DOTROTA does, share our future goals and connect with others in the defence community.

At the August event, I started with a small table display. By September, I had expanded the display considerably, and the effort paid off, with nearly 10 books sold! It was encouraging to see such interest and to have further opportunities to share our work with the wider community.





As of 11 Oct 2026, the six **No Surrender roses and the Tobruk Fig** Tree at Sid Loder Park, Mitchelton, are looking well despite the lack of rain. It is heartening to see these living tributes continuing to grow, providing a lasting reminder of service, sacrifice and remembrance.

75th Anniversary of the Polish Ex-Servicemen's Association I have been invited to attend the ceremony marking the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the Polish Ex-Servicemen's Association, Sub-Branch No. 1 in Australia. The ceremony will take place at the Polish Consulate in Sydney on 28 October 2026.

Australian Navy Cadets Awards Ceremony. On 7 November 2026, I have been invited to attend the TS Paluma Australian Navy Cadets End of Year Awards Ceremony, where I will present the No Surrender Award. It is a privilege to be involved in recognising the achievements of young cadets and to continue supporting the values of service, courage and remembrance.

Thank you to everyone who continues to support our activities, attend our events and help share the stories and traditions that must never be forgotten.

SARAH HAS BEEN SPREADING THE WORD ABOUT DOTROTA AND "THEY SHALL EVER BE REMEMBERED."

CAROL SMITH REPRESENTING DOTROTA

VX45756 Private James Campbell McCracken.

Thank you to Carol Smith for the effort she went to, to honour this soldier. *More of his sad story in "They Shall Ever Be Remembered," page 176.*

VX45756, Private James Campbell McCracken, was captured on 22 July 1942 during an attack by the 26th Brigade on German positions immediately north east of Tel el Eisa, probably around Trig point 25. McCracken was held in an Italian POW Camp in Italy until he managed to escape after the Italian surrender in 1943.



In February 1944 he joined an Italian Partisan group fighting the Germans around Milan but on 15 April 1944 he was captured wearing civilian clothes, along with two British soldiers, Corporal Brown and Gunner Miller (probably 847083 Fred Miller, 1 Field Regiment, Royal Artillery), and a number of other Italian partisans at Varallo, north east of Milan. The three soldiers and the partisans were lined up facing a wall with their hands tied behind their back and shot in the back by members of the 63rd Tagliamento Battalion (Italian Fascists).

Before he was executed McCracken was allowed to write a letter to his family in Bendigo: "Just a line to tell you that I will not see you again as I am going to be shot...". Private James Campbell McCracken was recovered from the Varallo cemetery and buried in the British Military Cemetery in Milan.

Despite 3 appeals, *Honours & Awards* did not recognise his time served with the Partisans as meeting eligibility requirements for the Italy Star.

Thanks to Carol's perseverance and an overseas visit, she was able to provide more locally advised evidence after a visit to Varallo, Italy and meetings with local historical groups who honour the fight of the Partisans.





Roland Nicholson - 2/24th Bn Association President and Carol Smith receiving the long overdue medal.

We are delighted to announce the awarding of the Italy Star to Private James McCracken (posthumous). His family members were quite distant but enabled the application and subsequently donated the medal received to the 2/24th Battalion Association for their safe keeping. A marvellous outcome and yet another example of why we as a collective must do what we can to ensure these men who sacrificed all are never forgotten.

Outstanding work Carol!! No Surrender.

A busy lady, Carol recently attended a memorial service representing DOTROTA, on 11 October 2026, in Newborough, Vic, to remember the Changi/Burma POWs of the 2/29th who did not come home. The POWs (Boys from the Bush) from Lakes Entrance to Drouin were remembered.





DOTROTA DATABASE

We are ever grateful to Ray Windlow for the amazing amount of time he puts into this Association and especially the expertise he has to run our database, which seems to be forever improving, expanding and being updated.

These links below are some of the information available from this database.

Just a reminder to all, of our online systems now available through the website or by clicking (or copy and paste) one of the links below.

EXPLORE OUR MUSEUM EXHIBITS

https://www.ratsoftobruk.au/explore-museum

SEARCH FOR RATS INFORMATION

https://www.ratsoftobruk.au/rats-database-search

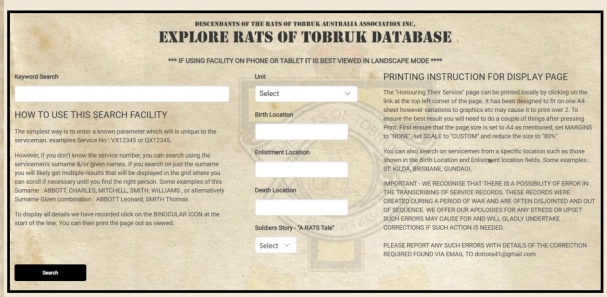
SEARCH FOR LOCATED RATS MEMORIALS

https://www.ratsoftobruk.au/rats-memorials-search

RATS CASUALTIES 1941-1945 ON THIS DAY

https://www.ratsoftobruk.au/rats-casualties-ww2

LEST WE FORGET



Much credit must go to the hard work of our volunteer researchers who have made it possible to add so much Rats information to this extensive database created by Ray Windlow.

Thank you to DOTROTA's researchers, committee and delegates: Roger Murphy, Betty Murphy, Sarah Maas, Debra Goodwin, Ray Windlow, Craig Proctor, Martin Forsyth, Sue Trewartha, Denise Dobinson, Matt McHugh, Carol Smith, Christine Kelly.
Delegates: Kaye Ross Tas,
Bruce Muller Nth Qld, Bruce Quinn Bundaberg, Rob Grover Gold Coast.

FIGTREE AT FIVE DOCK RSL

Figtree at Five Dock RSL, Sydney,
submitted by Deb Goodwin.

For those of you who attended the 85th Anniversary functions at Five Dock RSL, this is a follow up on the Figtree. Our association, DOTROTA, donated a Figtree, a propagated descendant of the original Tobruk Figtree, from a cutting originally brought home by Gordon Wallace, 2/15th Battalion and last president of ROTA Queensland. There are now numerous descendants of the Tobruk Figtree all around Australia!

During the Sunday service the Figtree was placed in its eventual planting place at Five Dock Park and blessed by the Padre, Rev Howard Smith, to be planted at a later date. After several months of attempts to get this done, it's finally been planted and is thriving.



Its location in the park was chosen so that it will be directly behind the Tobruk Memorial.

The Tobruk Memorial is currently located on the corner of Great North Road and Lyons Road, Five Dock and is now overshadowed by a unit block. It's subject to traffic noise and passing pedestrian traffic which makes having commemorative services difficult.



I approached Five Dock RSL Sub Branch and, through them, the local council, about relocating the memorial to Five Dock Park. I'm happy to say that those plans are well underway. It was hoped the memorial would be moved for the 85th commemorations but various council planning requirements delayed it.

The Tobruk Memorial will be placed between the Figtree and the Five Dock War Memorial rotunda. I will advise members when the memorial is to be re-dedicated, for those who might like to attend.

Rat's Tales

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THE GHOST SOLDIERS PROJECT



Are you interested in seeing your Rat included in this Ghost Soldiers Project??

Betty Murphy explains, "This initiative aims to pay tribute to the bravery, sacrifice and enduring legacy of those who served in the Siege of Tobruk... a visual representation of their service.

The project centres on the creation of life-size cutout soldiers, each thoughtfully crafted to capture the diversity of those who served during the Siege of Tobruk from 10 April to 7 December 1941.

Every cutout will be based on an actual photo drawn from service records or cherished family collections, giving a face and a story to each brave individual.

Whether showcased at memorial events, public ceremonies, or within educational settings, these cutouts will offer a poignant and tangible link to our shared history. Each cutout will carry a QR code which will link back to a digital tribute of the soldier and a written or spoken story about each one.

This year, 2026, marks 85 years since over 14,000 men endured the 242-day Siege of Tobruk, the longest battle in British history. An anniversary reunion was held in April 2026 in Sydney where the Ghost Soldiers display was unveiled.

In the future it will be available for various events, carrying the story of the Rats of Tobruk to communities across Australia.

This travelling exhibition will be a poignant visual tribute and serve as a powerful educational tool.

School children and the public will be able to engage with Siege history firsthand, deepening understanding for the remarkable endurance of those who stood their ground at Tobruk.

Looking to the future, our vision extends beyond the initial 60 cutouts. We aspire to grow this project into an enduring legacy; ultimately raising funds to honour all the soldiers who withstood the siege.

This ambitious goal reflects our deep commitment to ensuring every individual's story is remembered for generations to come and create a lasting, vivid reminder of the human stories behind our history.



Inspiration from Gloria Yeomans and her Uncle, RF Yeomans NX21327, story page 281.

This project is truly unprecedented—never has such an initiative been undertaken anywhere in Australia. For the first time, the faces of these extraordinary soldiers will be brought into the public eye, giving each story the visibility and honour it deserves.

Funding Request. To bring this vision to life, we are seeking donations and sponsorship. Your contribution will help cover; materials required for the cutouts, ensuring durability and quality; design and printing costs; transportation and setup for public displays. Every dollar contributed will go directly towards realizing this endeavour and making it accessible to communities far and wide.

Why Your Support Matters. By sponsoring to this project, it will demonstrate a commitment to honouring those who served, preserve their legacy and contribute to an impactful educational experience that fosters gratitude and awareness."

Cont next page



Ernie Walker, Joe Madeley, Henry Tranter

SAVE THESE DATES

to see the Ghost Soldiers

Queensland,
BUNDABERG
18 April 2027

Tasmania,
GEORGE TOWN
1 to 3 October 2027

South Australia,
ADELAIDE
9-10 October 2027

More dates to be announced once we secure donations and sponsorship.

Rat's Tales

Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc



THE GHOST SOLDIERS PROJECT

How to Sponsor.

Would you like to support this project?

Our Ghost Soldiers Project Sponsorship is now online. Here is the webpage link:

https://www.ratsoftobruk.au/online-store/GHOST-SOLDIERS-Project-p831255275

Please copy and paste if the link doesn't work.

If your ghost soldier has been already done, we ask if you would sponsor him or nominate another soldier to be done. If you have questions or wish to discuss further, please feel free to contact Betty.

Together, we can ensure that the sacrifices and stories of these soldiers are recognized and remembered.

Your contribution will make a significant impact on bringing this project to fruition.

If you would like to include your Rat of Tobruk in this display, please follow the link above to sponsor.

Working together we will make this display grow. Just imagine how you and your family will feel to see their Rat of Tobruk on display!

The Ghost soldiers will remain the property of DOTROTA so they can be displayed together at memorial services and public displays.

Below: A taste of the Ghost Soldier Project at the Sydney 85th Anniversary Reunion Dinner.



https://www.ratsoftobruk.au/online-store/GHOST-SOLDIERS-Project-p831255275

Link to organize your Ghost Soldier.

SAVE THESE DATES
to see the Ghost Soldiers.
Queensland, BUNDABERG
18 April 2027
Tasmania,
GEORGE TOWN
1 to 3 October 2027
South Australia, ADELAIDE
9-10 October 2027

More dates to be announced once we secure donations and sponsorship.

More dates for these Ghost Soldiers to tour, will be announced once we secure donations and sponsorship.

If you or your business would like to sponsor this event, please contact

dotrota41@gmail.com

Your contribution will make a significant impact on bringing this project to fruition.

LEST WE FORGET.





Well known violinist and singer from the Gold Coast, Rachel Bostock, is a descendant of J M BOSTOCK, QX6910. She has played for us at Brisbane and Sydney Reunions. Just spectacular and so emotional!!!



Right: Dorothy Kent, with her father Joseph Oakley, QX4796.

Left: Phillip and Tricia Price with Private Sydney Allan Colborne, QX8040, 2/15th.





Left and below left: Therese and Miriam Clancy with their grandfather, Major General Sir George Wootten, NX7.

Major Alfred Greig Smith QX6199 on right.



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Promotional Photos:
At the Association's functions, photos may be taken for promotional purposes and publication. By attending any of these functions you give permission for the use of your image in the manner described above.

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 official 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.**

Sadly, with no known Rats of Tobruk alive, it is up to us to come together as one family and keep their memories alive for future generations.
Please support this Association.



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?

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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Victoria Point West
Qld 4165 Australia
Email: dotrota41@gmail.com

Our October 2026 newsletter is dedicated to the work descendants have been doing since the Reunion, and gatherings they have attended. The South Australian launch of the 85th Anniversary book, "They Shall Ever Be Remembered" was held by SA descendants in Adelaide on Sunday 4 October 2026. Almost one hundred people gathered at the Keswick Army Barracks on Anzac Parade, for South Australia's third Annual get together. We would like to thank and congratulate Peter and Val Collins and Sue Trewartha for the work they put into getting things organised. It is the time spent behind the scenes that makes all of this work. It is wonderful to see our descendants and friends gathering and not only enjoying their get together, but learning something at the same time. To those who travelled long distances, thank you for your dedication. By all accounts it was a great event, well attended, enjoyed by all, with lots of talking! It is great to see our community growing stronger! These recent gatherings in Queensland and South Australia brought local descendants together to share stories, connect, and keep memories alive. We hope this inspires fellow descendants in every other state to do the same. Meeting locally is a wonderful way to connect with others in your area and honor the legacy of our Rats of Tobruk.

As founders of this Association, Sarah and I would like to, once again, say a huge thank you to those who attended the 85th Anniversary Reunion over the weekend of 10—12 April 2026 in Sydney. It was a weekend we haven't forgotten, full of events we all remember and cherish. A lot of chatting took place, a lot of listening to our guest speakers and also, a lot of tears as unexpected things, such as the Ghost Soldiers, happened.
Thank you to those who sent in stories of their Rats to go in the Anniversary book edited by Sue Trewartha. We were surprised to see the first print run all sold after just three weeks! Get in touch if you are wanting to order a book, or wish to buy another one to give to your family, local RSL or school, spreading the word about our heroes, as we now have a reprint of the book available.

Betty Murphy & Sarah Maas
Corporal Joseph OAKLEY QX4796 2/13th Field Company

Thank you to DOTROTA's committee, researchers and delegates: Roger Murphy, Debra Goodwin, Sarah Maas, Betty Murphy, Ray Windlow, Carol Smith, Craig Proctor, Christine Kelly, Martin Forsyth, Sue Trewartha, Denise Dobinson, Matt McHugh, Delegates: Kaye Ross Tas, Bruce Muller Nth Qld, Bruce Quinn Bundaberg, Rob Grover Gold Coast.