Rat's Tales

Part two of May/June 2026 newsletter. Page numbers following on from May edition.

Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

85TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK

Rat's Tales Vol 3 Issue 2

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Chris Kelly "The Pen."

June 2026

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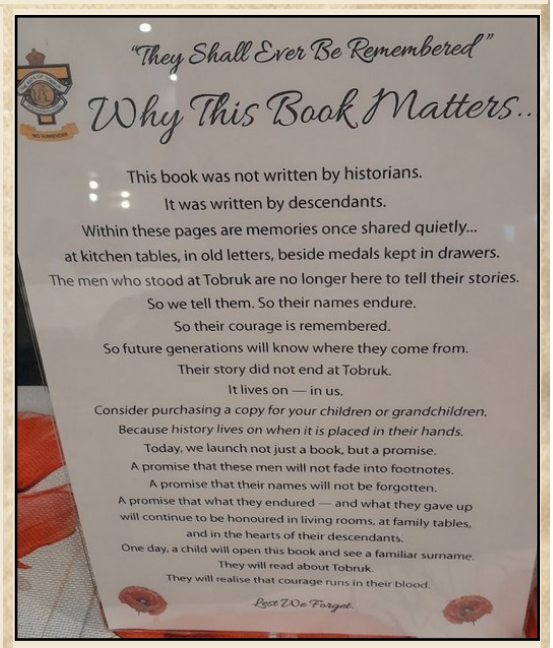
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Not wanting to flood people with too many pages at once about our amazing Reunion Weekend, we have divided the newsletter into two editions.

This is part two. We have left the page numbers following on from the first edition.





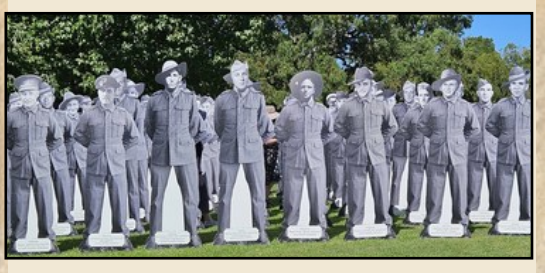






We hope you enjoy reading about the rest of the events and happenings over this memorable weekend.





Rat's Tales

Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

UNVEILING OF THE GHOST SOLDIER PROJECT

Recording the weekend activities.

Throughout the whole of the weekend, in the background and all around was Jan Hudson, taking video with several camera setups, to record the weekend.

I had a laugh cos at one stage she said to me, "when you do your speech for the Book Launch, just take note and try not to sway." I looked at her askance, and she said, "you will notice that most people just sway when doing speeches," and demonstrated. I laughed and then to my horror during the speech for the book launch, I felt myself swaying and, looking at her, thinking… that's what she said!!! And quickly stopped!!!!

Jan lives at Lake Conjola with her husband Pete. Her father-in-law was Ernie Hudson, 2/13th Bn. Pete, Ern's son, carried the 2/13th bn flag at the Memorial Service. She is a retired accountant with 30 plus years experience as a videographer/video editor. Just imagine the amazing family footage she has captured over that time! The Hudson's travelled overseas in 2012 with Deb Goodwin and her mother, Joe Madeley and John Pocock for the 70th Anniversary of the Second Battle of El Alamein. They met in Cairo after the Alamein services, went to London, then across to the Western Front battlefields, then Istanbul, where they left for a tour of Gallipoli.

Thank you Jan for your dedication over the whole of the weekend.







Unveiling of the Ghost Soldiers

During the Saturday night dinner at the 85th Anniversary Weekend in Sydney, guests experienced a deeply moving tribute with the unveiling of the Ghost Soldiers.

During the day, behind the scenes, behind the heavy black velvet stage curtains, Tobruk Rats were gathering.

Following dinner service, Sarah announced that some very special VIPs were about to be introduced.

As the black stage curtains opened, voices of the Ghost Soldiers echoed throughout the room, creating a powerful and emotional atmosphere. Voices talking about their experiences, talking to their mates, calling out to each other.

Six "men" stood there. Our soldiers. Our Rats of Tobruk. It took our breaths away to see these "men" standing there. *We were almost waiting for them to talk to us.*

In the group were Ernie Walker, Gordon Wallace, Henry Tranter, Lee Denman, Ray Widdows and Joe Madeley.

Betty and Sarah's thoughtfulness extended to having some of our descendants recording wording to be used on the night.

Unbeknownst to Kevin and I, our son was one of the 'voices' and it brought a lump to our throats to hear his words, talking about his grandfather and great uncle who was KIA.





Each soldier on the stage was in uniform, facing forward, creating a solemn background for photos during the rest of the night.

These "Ghost Soldiers" have been created so that people, the general public, can learn more about the Rats of Tobruk, putting a face to our soldiers, not just a name and a service number. We want people to hear the stories they have to tell. We want to give them a voice. Read Mrs OTT's story on the next page; we want to bring these stories to life. See more on page 19.



A heartfelt slideshow to honour the Rats of Tobruk, showing some who had been Killed In Action during the siege, accompanied the introduction of the Ghost Soldiers, reflecting on their courage, sacrifice and mateship, accompanied by the song *"Forever Young."*

See more on next page.

FOREVER YOUNG

Forever Young.

For many years, Betty Murphy has kept this story, waiting for an appropriate time to share it. It was written by the wife of one of the men in her father's unit. The evening programme concluded with the reading of the story *"Forever Young"*, written by Mrs Gertrude Ott, the wife of Ray Ott, QX1039, of the 2/13th Fld Coy RAE. Ray was also Treasurer of the Toowoomba Sub-Branch of ROTA for many years. Mrs Ott entered *"Forever Young"* in a 1996 literary competition *"Personal Reminiscences Section"* at the University of the Third Age, Central Coast Region and received a *"Highly Commended"* certificate. This touching story served as a fitting tribute to the enduring legacy of those who served and the importance of keeping their memory alive for future generations.



Sarah Maas about to read the essay "Forever Young", by Mrs Ray Ott.

FOREVER YOUNG

"In a special box marked "Turkish Delight" which he brought back from the Middle East over fifty years ago, my husband, Snow, kept his special photographs. They will some day go to a War Museum.

I treasure them – but have been silently haunted by the ones of the graves of his mates left behind - some of them marked with a primitive wooden cross, some with the inscription "*Known to God*".

I was fascinated by this very private box, Snow's memorial to his mates, and often found myself having just another look. Snow never spoke of the photos. His silence, I felt, was a very deep seated feeling that words could not express. I respected this silence, after all what could I say not knowing much about the desert war. Time has educated me as I have had years to read the accounts of the desert campaign by the war correspondents.

And better still, by the Rats of Tobruk themselves writing from personal experience. They were there!

Still haunted by these lonely wooden crosses out in the desert, I decided to visit the War Cemetery in Tobruk.

With the fierce African sun bearing down on me, I walked through the Memorial archway into another world – the world of the dead, the war heroes. The eerie silence was broken by their young voices as though they heard my footsteps.

"It's somebody from home"

"It's somebody's missus"

"I wonder where she is from?"

As I slowly walked along the line of graves reading their names, the voices became louder, but oh! so very young.

"Hey! she's wearing a "Rat's life membership badge".

"Wonder whose missus she is?"

"Wish she would come closer so we can read the number."

As I reverently continued to walk in their direction, I heard a chorus of voices.

"It's a Queensland number, she might be from home."

"That's Snow's number, QX1309. I often wondered if he made it back that last night we set mines in the desert together."

"More of the boys have joined us just lately, they say things are looking good! Rommell is on the run and has been issued an ultimatum by Hitler "do it his way or else!" We greatly admired Rommell! He was a magnificent soldier. Snow and I used to see him through the field glasses when the air raids stopped for a brief moment, and we came up out of our holes like rats. How proud we are now to be known as the "Rats of Tobruk."

Rats of Tobruk. I knew that story. Snow told me about the name given to the boys, of Lord *"Haw Haw"*. He told me Lord Haw Haw was a British radio commentator who who defected to Hitler's mob. He used to taunt them by saying *"How do you enjoy living in holes like rats"*, and they could always expect another air raid after he finished his propaganda. Apparently his name was William Joyce.

It couldn't be more British.

"Best of British luck to him if our mob ever caught up with him," Snow used to say.

Away in the distance a very young voice is calling me. *"I was only seventeen when we did the retreat to Tobruk. The "Bengazi Handicap" they called it. I was in the truck behind Snow. He took the coast road when we reached the fork in the road. I was directed back into the desert by what I thought was one of our officers. I went straight into the enemy fire, as did many of our lads."*

"The boys tell me our Intelligence Officer shot him on the spot when he could not give the password".

"Snow was lucky he took the coast road. He must have been meant to go back to you".

"So pleased you came," the whole chorus joined in. "It gets very lonely out here, so far from home."

"Yes," I replied. *"Snow did come back and I married him in '45. We had 42 wonderful years together."*

"Age did weary him and he died in '87 of war related injuries. He did not forget you, the ones he left behind, that is why I have come to visit you."

"You will remain "Forever Young."

Before the evening finished, some groups of the different battalions' descendants were seen getting photos taken in front of the Ghost Soldiers.

It was wonderful to see descendants mingling, making new friends and catching up with older ones. The night ended with clearing the tables, ready for the next day's luncheon after the service.

And yes we were all happy to head off back to our beds, after a hectic, enjoyable, busy evening!

We didn't even have to use the "late entry key" to get back into our accommodation, I think the days of that are over for most of us!

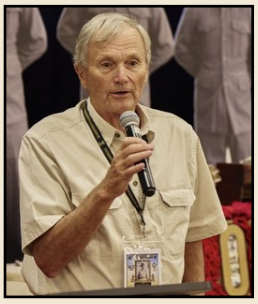
Off to bed now! What awaits us for tomorrow?

BANJO DONATION TO DOTROTA

Another highlight of the Dinner was when Ralph Scrivens, son of Sergeant Ralph Scrivens, NX14143, *(see his story on page 223 of "They Shall Ever Be Remembered")* made a presentation to DOTROTA.

Sgt Scrivens, born in Mount Morgan, Qld, had taken his banjo mandolin overseas with him. He brought it back, but on returning to Australia, never played it again. It has stayed in a cupboard all these years and his sons always wondered what to do with it.

On the round head of the banjo, there were many signatures and place names, one of those place names was Tobruk. These names have now been checked by DOTROTA researchers, leading to confirmation of 3 of these names from Ralph's banjo, and prompting a further review where 11 previously unidentified RATS from the Headquarters Guard Battalion *(the Old and the Bold)* were recorded and added to the database of Rats of Tobruk! We are pleased to be able to honour the men of the 2/1st Guards Battalion who were thrown into some tough spots in Tobruk. During the Dinner on Saturday evening Ralph Scrivens, on behalf of him and his brother Frank, generously donated this banjo to DOTROTA, where it is now on loan to Five Dock RSL in Sydney on display.



Ralph then recited this poignant poem to us all. Permission has given to share the wording.

This poem was written by Duncan Butler who was serving with the 2/12 Field Ambulance unit of the AIF in Singapore in 1942 when it was over run by the Japanese and he spent the rest of the war years on the Burma Railway. He survived, returned home, married and raised a family on a farm in Queensland and shortly before he passed away in 1987, his family asked him to write down his memoirs which he did but also wrote this poem which was later given to Murray Hartin *(one of the best Australian rhyming poets of the modern era)* who said that in no way could he fabricate the emotion of such a poem and didn't change a word.
Thank you Ralph for reciting this poem, it was another of the highlights of our amazing Reunion weekend!

MATES

I've travelled down some dusty roads, both crooked tracks and straight,
And I've learnt life's most noblest creed, summed up in one word, mates,
I'm thinking back across the years, a thing I do of late,
and these words stick between my ears, you've got to have a mate.
Someone who'll take you as you are regardless of your state,
And stand as firm as Ayers Rock, because he is your mate.
My mind goes back to '43, to slavery and hate,
When man's one chance to stay alive depended on his mate.
With bamboo for a billy can and bamboo for a plate,
A bamboo paradise for bugs, was bed for me and mate,
You'd slip and slither through the mud and curse your rotten fate,
But then you'd hear a quiet word, "Don't drop your bundle mate."
And though it is so long ago, these words I have to state,
A man don't know what lonely means 'till he has lost a mate,
If there's a life that follows this, if there's a golden gate,
The welcome that I want to hear is just "Good on you mate."
And so to those that ask us why we keep these special dates,
Like Anzac Day, I tell 'em why, we're thinking of our mates,
And when I've left the driver's seat and handed in me plates,
I'll tell old Peter at the door, I've come to see my mates."













Rat's Tales

Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

85TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK MEMORIAL SERVICE

SUNDAY

Very few knew what was going to be on show the next day, for the Memorial Service, and I couldn't wait to get to the Memorial Park, on the corner of Park Road and First Avenue, Five Dock, to see the reaction of the Descendants. We pulled up along the south side of the street, and was pleased to catch a glimpse of the Sydney Harbour Bridge from where we were. We could see the 85th Anniversary Project, once again deemed insignificant and so funding was not available, as we walked across the lawned area to the memorial site.

Our Ghost Soldiers. Just how amazing were they?! Inspired by Gloria Yeoman who had one made to commemorate her Uncle, Roy Francis, NX21327, (read his story, the last one in *"They Shall Ever Be Remembered"*.)

Betty then spent a many months working on this project, developing the idea and how to present it for this Reunion Weekend.

The plan to do 242 Ghost Soldiers, one for each day of the Siege, was cut down to 60 men, due to lack of funding, but this did not take away from the magnificence of the display.

Words cannot express the feelings that descendants experienced as they moved closer to these men, and, those who had their Rat displayed, were reduced to tears. There was dad, uncle, grandfather, smiling down at them, in their Army uniform, young and proud!

Many photos were taken, many tears were shed, many showed their Rat to others as they walked between the rows of men. I would like to know just how many photos were taken that morning!

Flag Bearing Ceremony. DOTROTA members and supporters in an emotional tribute, carried unit flags to be displayed near the Ghost Soldiers. This flag-bearing ceremony is a formal, highly symbolic event to honour the nation and commemorate service and sacrifice, deeply rooted in tradition and protocol, with specific procedures.



Flag bearers were; 9 Div HQ Paul Clancy; 9 Div Artillery Mason Toy; 9 Div Signals Nigel Cox; Royal Engineers Daryl Randell, AAOC Phillip Price; ASDC Matt McHugh; Medical Units Robert Dow; 2/1st Pioneers David Dow; 2/9th Bruce Quinn; 2/10th Peter Collins; 2/12th Craig Smith; 2/13th Peter Hudson; 2/15 Neill Warner; 2/17th Steve Kelly; 2/23rd Evan Dower; 2/24th Maurice Bennett; 2/28th Neville Smith; 2/32nd Rhys Smith; 2/43rd Kevin Trewartha; 2/48th Brendan McEvoy; Polish Flag Dr George Toepfer; Navy Martin Forsyth; Air Force Ray Windlow. A symbolic way to start the morning's official proceedings, with flags placed near the Ghost Soldiers.


Matt McHugh


Gloria Yeomans


Brendan McEvoy



Miriam and Therese Clancy









Irene Morgan. Tricia O'Keeffe






David Dow. Bruce Quinn. Peter Collins.







85TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SIEGE OF TOBRUK MEMORIAL SERVICE

With some shelter and seating set up on the lawned area by the Memorial in the park, the Service began around 11am. MC was Mr Robert Ridge, who welcomed everyone. Naval Cadet Corps formed the Catafalque Party, standing watch as a sign of respect, honouring our fallen heroes. They were delightful young men and women.



Robert Ridge led the service with our DOTROTA chaplin, Rev Howard Smith saying a Prayer of Remembrance. The Hon David Harris, Minister for Veteran Affairs, gave the Commemorative Address.



The NSW Tobruk Memorial, located on the corner of Great North Road and Lyons Road, is to be relocated to this park, and costs to be funded by the Five Dock RSL. The dedication for a plaque to acknowledge this, was presented by Robert Ridge and both the plaque and the Tobruk Fig Tree to be planted there, were blessed by Rev Howard Smith.



Sarah Maas, Co-founder of DOTROTA, gave a talk about the Ghost Soldier Project.





The Call for Remembrance by Brig Phillip Bridie, AM, ADC (retd), RSL NSW Rep (Board Director), was followed by an Inspection of the Troops, by him and Sarah, of the Ghost Soldiers, standing there proudly on the beautiful lawned area, photo below.









"Abide With Me" was played by Ms Rachel Bostock, violinist and a descendant of a Rat of Tobruk. Her soul stirring music had everyone captivated as she played during the service.

For the Official Wreath Laying ceremony, wreaths were placed on the hedge leading into the Cenotaph and collected by visiting VIP and descendants to be laid at the foot of the monument, while Rachel played her unique violin music. Leche Gade, known as Les, aged 96, Polish ex Servicemen Association Vice President also laid a wreath.



Les Gard









The Ode of Remembrance was recited by Mr Robert Campbell.

"The Last Post" and "The Rouse" hauntingly played by Rachel Bostock, were something not easily forgotten.

Rev Smith finished off with a Prayer for Peace and the Benediction. The National Anthem was sung, followed by the dismount of the Catafalque Party.



THE GHOST SOLDIERS PROJECT



"So proud to know that myself and Uncle Roy Yeomans, NX21327, were the inspiration for the Ghost Soldiers project. He sure does attract a lot of attention Anzac Day, he marches with me in Tamworth, NSW, every year so that he's there in spirit.

So happy to know that many other faces of our heroes are getting the recognition they deserve with this project.

Uncle Roy's story is the last story in the fantastic book "They Shall Ever Be Remembered".

Thankyou Betty Murphy for including Uncle Roy in the lineup on Sunday."

Gloria Yeomans.



Betty Murphy explained more about the Ghost Soldiers Project. "This initiative aims to pay tribute to the bravery, sacrifice and enduring legacy of those who served in The Siege of Tobruk, providing a poignant visual representation of their contributions.

The project centres on the creation of the 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. These figures will serve as a powerful tribute to their courage. 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 in the future, 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, we will mark 85 years since over 14,000 men endured the 242-day Siege of Tobruk, the longest battle in British history, with anniversary reunion. Following that the Ghost Soldiers display will embark on a national tour, carrying the story of the Rats of Tobruk to communities across Australia. This travelling exhibition will not only offer a poignant visual tribute but will also serve as a powerful educational tool where school children and the public will be able to engage with the history of the siege firsthand, deepening their 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.



Kevin Trewartha



Miriam and Therese Clancy "Major General George Wootten."



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.

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.

How to Sponsor

Would you like to support this project? Sponsorship and donations can be made via website link **https://www.ratsoftobruk.au/online-store/GHOST-SOLDIERS-Project-p831255275**

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

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." LEST WE FORGET.



Dorothy Kent



Martin Forsyth



Phillip and Tricia Price



LAST GOODBYES



It was uncanny, that that morning was the windiest we had over the weekend. Did the Rats up above plan this? Several people came up to me after the service to say they felt those lined up on parade, were looking around the shoulders of those in front, as if to say, "Is this all for us", as the wind made them move sideways and back and forth a little. How uncanny that many noticed also, that during the playing of the "Last Post", not one Ghost Soldier moved.

Back at the Five Dock RSL, most of the groups gathered for a final get together. A lovely light luncheon was served as the crowd gathered after the Service, chatting and purchasing last minute memorabilia. Deb Goodwin, Vice Pres of the Association gave a speech to thank Five Dock RSL for their support and told something about NSW ROTA.



It was a perfect opportunity while there were so many people gathered, for DOTROTA's volunteer committee and researchers to be acknowledged and presented with beautiful boxed notebook and pen. Sarah Maas, Deb Goodwin, Ray Windlow, Sue Trewartha, Chris Kelly, Denise Dobinson, Carol Smith, Kaye Ross, Robyn Moody and Martin Forsyth. Absent were Craig Proctor and Matt McHugh.

It was lovely to see people staying around after the event officially ended, mingling, chatting, enjoying, not leaving immediately, still wanting to share stories about their Rat with each other. I bet the Rats of Tobruk were smiling down on them all; *perhaps recalling the Rats Reunions they attended in the past!*

COMMENTS from descendants about the weekend.

>*Kaye Lee;* How do you thank Betty, Sarah and Travis for their magnificent planning, coordination, creativity and vision of the 85th Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk? The incredible attention to detail (see table settings) was an example of what was evident each and every day. The endless volunteer hours would be impossible to calculate - and all was done with such flair, grace and generosity. Huge thank yous to you all and your team of helpers. Such precious and lasting memories travel home with us as descendants.
>*Revhoward Smith;* I totally agree with you Kaye...no words are enough.
>*Linda Lou;* All the thought, care and attention to detail that went into Saturday night and today's service is a credit to all involved in making it happen. Your hard work did not go unnoticed. So wonderful to see so many attendees.
>*Barb Arazzi;* I wholeheartedly agree Kaye. Well done to all the amazing team. Just when we thought it couldn't get any better it did.
>*Denise Dobinson.* Great pics and was so good to meet everyone with a connection to the 2/15th. Terrific conversations at the table over dinner.
>*Bruce Muller Rath;* Congratulations to everyone involved in bringing this work to life, especially Editor Sue Trewartha and heartfelt thanks to Betty Murphy for her constant support of all I do in North Qld. Well done to all who volunteered, contributed and organised the 85th commemorations.
>*Cam Makin;* Ray Keith I'm really sorry I couldn't get to Sydney for this as it sounds like a fantastic get together. I also applaud you all for huge efforts in keeping the group going and intensive research - a massive commitment for the committee and volunteers.
>*Margaret Bougie;* What a wonderful publication was waiting for me on my doorstep when I arrived home yesterday. The work that has been completed by Sue and all involved is a tribute to them. Thank you for preserving their memory! I shed a few tears for my dad!
>*Naomi Abbott;* No words. Teared up without even opening the book. So grateful for everyone involved in this… huge thank you to Sue Trewartha.
>*Michelle Lucas;* Have just received our books. I have no words to show our family's appreciation for this incredible recognition. The tears are well and truly flowing. What an incredible piece of history. Thanks to Sue, Betty, Ray, the late great Owen, and all volunteers for making this happen.
>*Judy Crosswell;* "Pte Howard Blue Macarthur - father of 8, grandfather, great grandfather - RIP Dad. By contributing some of your story to this memorable production I hope to give you recognition to your bravery for generations to follow."
>*Wendy Matthews;* Have just received my book. Regrettably I was unable to attend reunion - had arranged to go but could not make it. Again thanks to everyone who worked to put this wonderful tribute together. Was very proud to be able to contribute a story about my dad.
>*Lexie Gilchrist;* Mine arrived today too! Congratulations to everyone involved, especially Sue. I was moved by the stories all written with such love and respect.
>*Ann Traynor;* We certainly had a great time. It was a bonus to meet lovely people. I think that reflects from the camaraderie our Rats shared.

BEST PART OF THE WEEKEND

>*Betty Murphy;* Mine was seeing your faces at the Sunday Service when you all found your ghost soldier.
>*Evan Dower;* Hi Betty that blew me away to see my father young and strong was so emotional and beautiful.
>*Chris Kelly;* I honestly couldn't pick one moment Betty the entire weekend was above and beyond. Thank you.
>*Margaret Armstrong;* The whole weekend was fabulous, a credit to Betty and Sarah and team.
>*Cassie Webb;* The entire weekend was fantastic. Meeting new people, learning about the research and the work the team does - amazing! The privilege of laying a wreath was a highlight. And oh my gosh the incredible violin rendition lof The Last Post. Goosebumps and tears. Congratulations to everyone who made the whole weekend come together. I'm also extremely grateful to have shared the experience with my daughter.
>*Wendy Rob Ohlsen;* Each day was brilliant. We were very impressed with all the work put in by your wonderful committee. The whole weekend was perfect.
>*Jules McKenzie;* My books arrived today they are amazing! Well done to everyone. I randomly opened the book and landed on my story about my Grandad Douglas Walter Eldridge QX5783 and even though I wrote his story I still cried reading it again today and thinking about how proud he would be knowing we are still honouring him and his mates and Mum would have a big smile on her face knowing he is part of this book. I will treasure this book.
>*Tricia O'Keeffe;* Put your feet up now, Betty, Sarah, and all volunteers.

BITS AND PIECES





Kaye Ross and friends hand made these!

Above and below; more of Betty's beautiful handiwork.









Val Collins. Carolyn Quinn





Tricia O'Keeffe





While some helped putting away and packing everything up, Betty, Travis and Sarah repacked things into their hired van ready to be driven back to Brisbane and home next morning, making another late night for them. The time they have put into this event, has just been amazing and their work over the past five years showed in the way every part, each decoration, each written word, every part of the whole weekend, was so beautifully detailed. What an amazing weekend, suddenly over, leaving us all wishing there was another day to spend with everyone! *Thank you to all for making it so very special.*

From Ann Traynor, Bundaberg, Qld

"From the moment we touched down in Sydney Wednesday 8th April, until we flew home yesterday, the 85th Anniversary of the Siege of Tobruk Reunion was an overwhelming mixture of emotions. Excitement, pride, laughter, tears and meeting so many Descendants over the 5 days. It was so good to meet you Betty, after having so many telephone conversations. A big thank you to you, Sarah and Travis for the countless hours of effort, and late nights in coordinating the Reunion with all the members of your committee.

Of course seeing Dad as one of the Ghost Soldiers, was so overwhelming and totally unexpected. Tears fell from our eyes, and it didn't matter where we stood, his eyes seemed to follow us. It was eerie, but will always be a highlight of the weekend.

We were happy to help with the wrapping of the books on Thursday. We were a part of a very productive team, from cutting paper, sticky tape, wrapping, tying with string, and then the packing and addressing of the satchels for postage and bagging the books for the attendees at the dinner on Saturday night. To walk into the function room on Saturday night and see the beautifully decorated tables took our breath away. So much time and effort, and thought going into the table decorations, it was really a sight to behold.

The much awaited book launch on Friday night another highlight. Thank you to Sue Trewartha for giving our Rats stories such a beautiful home in "They Shall Ever Be Remembered."

The ceremony on Sunday a fitting tribute to all of the Rats of Tobruk. The flags of every battalion involved proudly carried by Descendants, Reverend Howard's prayers, President of the Five Dock RSL Club address, the unveiling of the Plaque and blessing of the Tobruk fig tree, and Ms Rachel Bostock playing the Last Post and Rouse on the electric violin. Thanks to Ray for his informative presentation on the research he is doing and to Chris for her emotional talk about the POWS. To Peter and Val, Sue and Kevin, Martin and Claire, Brendan and Michelle, Peter and Bradyn it was a pleasure to be able to spend time with you all and look forward to meeting up again. So from Ann and Phil Traynor, Bruce and Carolyn Quinn from Bundaberg Qld, a 10 out of 10 for the 85th Anniversary. We honour the Rats of Tobruk and we are committed to keeping their memory alive."

ANZAC DAY 2026



A SELECTION OF DESCENDANTS PHOTOS FROM ANZAC DAY IN VARIOUS TOWNS AROUND AUSTRALIA 2026.

Rat's Tales

Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

"THE PEN" BY CHRIS KELLY

Rat's Tales Vol 3 Issue 2

Editor: Sue Trewartha.
Chris Kelly "The Pen."

June 2026

Prisoners of war were a different sort of casualty during World War Two, but nonetheless, were casualties in their own right. That said, after collaborating with my dear friend Carol Smith - rather than submit a story - I'm pleased to submit two poems, one written by Carol, the other, myself. I believe they both encapsulate the many facets of being held prisoner.

'Gruppignano Campo 57'

Carol Smith

I can only imagine the mateship, when our boys caught up once more

The Aussies and the Kiwis taken prisoner, and held near Libyian shores

From Tobruk and Alexandria; El Alamein and every battle in between

Our valiant Aussie Diggers captured, and shipped to a hell hole in Udine

Catching up with mates was one good thing, about this wretched Camp

Gruppignano Campo 57 was home to our POWs, of so many different ranks

In charge was Colonel Calcattera, a short-arsed, fat gutted, little shit

But our men had got the measure, of this sadistic and murderous twit

Said the sign above Calcaterra's door; and this to his own men he would tell

Cursed are the English, but more cursed, are the Italians who treat them well

But then that day in forty three, when the Partisans evened the score

It was all over for Calcattera, and he could shove it – that sign above his door

Some had been shipped to Vercelli, to work in rice fields and on farms

Life for them was better, folk were kinder, less chance of strife and harm

And then when the Italians had had enough, in September forty three

An Armistice was declared; they swapped sides, no longer the enemy they'd be

But for those poor blokes stuck in 57, a big decision they must make

Head off now and cross the Alps, or wait for Allies – big risks to take

Some Officers had told their men – just wait, the Allies are on their way

Best to just stay put for now – don't go; the Yanks will be here any day

Wrong!! They heard the steady tramp of feet and thought all would be well

But no! Not the allies – it was German boots, and they faced another hell

Calcaterra had been conniving, and the German troops had taken charge

Loaded into railway cars – whereabouts unknown, for all the boys by and large

They knew not where they were headed, or what their fate would be

But in the hearts and souls of our Aussie lads, their courage was the key

So, they marched them off to Stalags, over Austrian Alps so steep

Tread carefully boys and be alert, those crevasses are deep

The march across the Alps was rough, for those tired and weary men

As up the mountain pass they went, forced forward at every bend

Close on their heels the Russians came, so the march was rough and quick

No care for stragglers falling back, or the men who might be sick

But the spirit of our Aussie boys, was never once in doubt

They got through it all with mateship, guts, and a bit of Aussie lout

What a great day when those Yanks arrived, in nineteen forty five

For with heads held high and thoughts of home, they did it – they survived.

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Rat's Tales

Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

"THE PEN" BY CHRIS KELLY

Rat's Tales Vol 3 Issue 2

Editor: Sue Trewartha.
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June 2026

'My Dad A POW'
Chris Kelly

Red dust , mended clothes, tell-tale signs you're a country boy
It didn't stop you lining up, over eager to deploy

The mighty Queen Mary, she did await, ready to take you to faraway places
Tall she stood in the Sydney Harbour, filled with men of unknown faces.

Not one of you spared, a thought for your future
You were too young, reality just didn't suit ya
You decided, no matter what adventure did hold
You'd suck in your Aussue breath, & be bold.
You and your cobbers, got into some strife
The outcome of which, forever changed your life.
Larrikin NX17078, had joined the mighty 9th Division
But you were there for adventure, just like in your vision
You wrecklessly crossed the desert, though it's sand you were sieving
And dug for your life, because it's where you'd be living

You dug & you dug, until exhausted you sat
Knowing not, Lord Haw-Haw would label you a 'Rat'
A Rat you said, never mind, no time to sook
It's an honour to be haled, a Rat of Tobruk
With this new badge of honour, you held your head high
Thank you Lord Haw-Haw, you are not quite so snide
You and your lot, would never be tamed
We know that now, it is why you are famed
You stuck with the highs, and you stuck with the lows
It's how you survived, for this only God knows.
You were ready for anything, or so you all thought
But when, to the pen, you were distainfully brought
Your world it did shatter, before your own eyes
You sat in the cold, hearing gut wrenching cries
The outcomes were many, but this was never your plan
How on earth will your mates, still see you as a man
To be taken POW, felt lower than low
It never occurred to you, but how could you know
You lost all your purpose, your reason to go on
The hopelessness felt , was so very, very strong
Do this! This! Or that! Or you will certainly be shot
The last thing you heard, before taking to your cot.
Your eyelids lift, was it all a bad dream
Damn it, it wasn't, you just want to scream
You MUST rise above it, if you still want to live
And your all, is the very least you must give
You got so much more, than you bargained for
Before returning, to the magnificent Aussie shore
The fact you came back, we will always be grateful

Not a bone in your body, returned that was hateful.
You chose US as your family, how lucky we are
Through our eyes when we look, you are forever our star.
So Bill Lambourn, for you and your mates
We have so much respect for all of you greats.

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Rat's Tales

Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

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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.**

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
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We appreciate your support.

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Welcome to our May/June newsletter.
As founders of this Association, Sarah and I would like to say a huge thank you to those who attended the 85th Anniversary Reunion over the weekend of 10—12 April 2026.
It was a weekend 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 happened. We would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to send emails, written on the Descendants Face Book page; made a phone call or somehow sent messages to us expressing their views of the weekend. It has been very heartwarming to hear from you all. We are so pleased that the weekend not only commemorated our brave Rats but gave people the chance to meet other descendants and form friendships. That is an important part of our Association, seeing this big family come together, as the Rats did after the war.
Thank you to those who sent in stories of their Rats to go in the Anniversary book put together by Sue Trewartha. We were surprised to see the first print run all sold after just three weeks! We are looking at another print run in the near future. Get in touch if you are wanting to order a book, or wish to buy one to give to your local RSL or school, spreading the word about our heroes.

As we are non profit, we rely on those who are interested, to become financial members to cover Association costs. Its easy to do this on the website! Thank you everyone for your continued support, please contact us if you have something to offer to help in some way. If you are researching information about your Rat and his unit, let us know, we are happy to help out. We encourage you to write up your relative's service records and 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 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, we must make sure our Rats are never forgotten.

Betty Murphy & Sarah Maas

Thank you to DOTROTA's committee and researchers: 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.