



# Rat's Tales



Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc

## TOBRUK TALES

Rat's Tales Vol 2 Issue 2

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Chris Kelly

July 2024



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VX14380  
Lieutenant-Colonel  
Charles William Berry  
LITTLEJOHN  
2/4th AGH  
Rhodes Scholar 1909  
Commander of the  
Order of the  
British Empire  
Order of the  
British Empire  
Mentioned In Dispatch-  
es 23 Jun 1942  
WW1  
Military Cross  
(1918 - Ypres)  
Croix de Guerre  
(Belgian)



Stories about medical events, people and happenings are the theme for this years newsletters.

This story is about one of the unsung heroes of the War, one of a band of men who didn't fire bullets and seldom had their chests decorated with medals, men who fought with skilled brains and fingers to bring rest to the wounded.

### DOCTOR'S PLUCK IN TOBRUK BOMB INFERNO

*Mirror (Perth, WA : 1921 - 1956), Saturday 26 July 1941, page 14. Nedlands AIF Boy's Letter.*

This is the story of one of the unsung heroes of the War one of a band of men who fire no bullets, seldom have their chests decorated with medals. From his hospital bed in the inferno of Tobruk, Private William, Bill Salter, wounded in the legs and unable to hobble out into the air raid shelter, watched this hero working. And he has sent back to a friend one of the finest pieces of prose to come out of this war.

It is the story of Colonel Littlejohn of the AAMC and his quiet heroism, just like the twist in a kid's speech or a sad, cold light on a winter's evening, made soldier Salter think of other things than war. Bill Salter, formerly on the staff of Wigmore's Ltd, will be remembered as a great swimmer, sportsman and footballer. Here is Bill Salter's remarkable letter:

*The wailing note of the siren rose out of the dark silence and there followed an ever-increasing hum of aero engines "Bombers." Those of us who could walk or hobble on crutches, dashed out to the hospital air raid shelters, the less fortunate lay silent on their beds waiting for this unseen enemy to strike. Whie-ie-ie! — crump! There goes the first.*

*Bomb after bomb hurtles down on to the town, their authors regardless of their targets. So long as they land some where on this ghost-town of Tobruk, these madmen are satisfied. Ack-ack guns pound out their tattoo against the murderers of the dark; machine-guns chatter as thin pencils of light streak after each other in a mad race through the skies. Suddenly a lantern is*

*lighted in the ward and pale-faced stretcher-bearers rush in carrying a wounded man.*

*There follows a little grey-haired doctor. He calmly examines the wounded Digger, heedless of the rain of death outside.*

*His slate-blue eyes search for the wounds, while his steady fingers work unerringly with his tools. The walls shake and quiver, windows shatter; doors burst open; pieces from the ceiling fall all round. Still he works on, calmly. Outside, the row is increased as another, newer sound is added, a low even hum of Hurricanes. White, sweat-covered faces of patients gaze thankfully upwards, they know that the raiders will turn and flee before these newcomers. But the little grey-haired doctor, he works calmly on! The bombs have done their terrible job and one ward of the big, white hospital lies in ruins, while rescuers frantically pull away debris searching for some signs of life. They meet with little success and most have "dead-rescues." But the little grey-haired doctor works calmly on! What care he, if a bomb takes him! While he breathes, he can use his skill mending broken bodies, restoring crushed minds, creating almost miracles among the wounded. Hours later he has finished, he has done all that can be done and a little more. As I watch him he sits down, lights a cigarette and gazes thoughtfully at the spilt ceiling. His lips move and I know that he is praying! Praying for God to put an end to all this terrible murderous war. Praying that men may once again live their lives in peace, and I know he does not pray in vain.*

*Something inside me whispers that soon, somewhere, somehow will come peace and when peace comes that little grey-haired doctor will go calmly, quietly home and go on tending sick people; never talking about war; never mentioning the horrors he has seen. And why, you may ask! Because he is a man! An Australian volunteering to help his fellow-men though asking no quarter, fearing nothing, working on and on till he is no longer needed.*

*And when the day comes, when bands are playing and peace is heralded, think not only of the brave, heroic men who fight with guns, planes and ships, but give a thought to the men who fight with their skilled brains and fingers to bring rest to the wounded.*

*For they, too, won a war.*



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**RUPERT GOODMAN** kindly written and supplied by his daughter, Yvonne Hands.



VX37425 Lieutenant  
Rupert Douglas  
GOODMAN  
2/4th Australian  
General Hospital  
Aust Army  
Medical Corps  
Born 25 Nov 1915  
KEW, VIC  
Enlisted 18 Jul 1940  
ROYAL PARK, VIC  
Deceased  
22 Nov 2007  
BRISBANE, QLD

\*\*\*\*\*

*Bibliography:*

*Rupert Goodman:  
\* A hospital at war:  
the story of the 2/4  
Australian General  
Hospital 1940-1945  
\* I was a Rat: Tobruk  
1941: the story of the  
personal experiences of  
2/4 AGH during the  
Siege of Tobruk  
in 1941.*

*PART TWO; Continued from Newsletter No 4.*

The 63 nurses in the Unit (against the wishes of the CO) were forced to leave Tobruk on 7 April 1941, leaving 2 trained male orderlies, 25 nursing orderlies who could only operate under supervision of medical staff and 20 ward orderlies who were available for other work in the hospital. At that stage, there were over 600 patients.

Nursing orderlies had to take over the tasks of the nurses with the occasional instruction from medical officers and ward orderlies had to increase their work load. Remember most of these orderlies prewar had occupations such as butchers, plumbers, artists, dental mechanics, cooks, teachers, electricians, a lady's hairdresser and clergymen, among others and did not have any formal medical training other than that given to them by the nurses prior to embarkation.

Dad, being a teacher, had a little knowledge of German and Italian and frequently worked with POW patients in their wards.



*Bombing at the Tobruk Hospital 1941*

Many bombs fell on or near the hospital from 10 April to 20 Oct with over 70 falling on the hospital during 196 days and nights until the Unit was evacuated.

As Dad says on a quiet day there were only 11 raids on the hospital. Bombsomnia had a big effect on many of the troops and staff, with plenty of bomb happy cases (as was the term used then).

Apart from the bombs and other dangers, some of the other discomforts of the Siege that Dad mentions in his Diary include flies, fleas and the lack of any fresh food for the first three months of the Siege. In his down time Dad wrote in his Diary and also wrote poetry.

Dad, like many of his colleagues, participated in evacuation procedures at night to the Docks hospital where there was often a wait of several hours until the evacuating ships were able to get in. As a nursing orderly Dad also assisted where necessary in operations, often during air raids, where for the most part, surgery continued.

*to be continued...*



As Dad says in his Diary a continual problem for the hospital staff and patients was the constant bombing of the hospital even though the red crosses were clearly marked on the building.

This resulted in many casualties among medical staff and patients, this was no doubt due to the location of the hospital in the centre of the town and also the smaller area near the beach.



Above: Loading a patient onto a Destroyer at Tobruk, 1941.

Above right: A card from Padre Salter shows Tobruk Hospital with the red cross marked on the ground.

Below right: Unexploded bomb

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## LIEUTENANT-COLONEL RICHARD GEOFFREY CHAMPION DE CRESPIGNY SX1464 Part 2

Thanks to Anne Young, grand daughter of Richard Geoffrey Champion De Crespigny for sharing the diary of her grandfather. Geoff was a doctor, born 16 June 1907 in Victoria and enlisted in 1939 with the medical corps of 2nd AIF. When the 6th Division took Tobruk, 22 Jan 1941, he was appointed DADH (Deputy Assistant Director Hygiene) and was part of the re-establishment of the facilities and hygiene in anticipation of Tobruk becoming a forward base. When the siege commenced, he became DADMS (Deputy Assistant Director Medical Services) until the relief of the siege. For the early part of the war Geoff kept a diary, covering training in Victoria and visits home to Adelaide, his departure to Middle East in April 1940, posts in Palestine and Egypt and his experiences in Tobruk from Jan to Oct 1941.

**6 Apr.** 2/3 CCS turned up again, less some equipment and the rear party of the hospital. An enemy patrol was captured southwest of Tobruk. It was feared that a German armoured column was on its way here direct across the desert. Since we had nothing to stop tanks, things looked sticky and it appeared to be likely we would become POW. Felt a bit disturbed, but there was nothing to be done. Talk of sending the nurses away on an awful little cargo boat. The patrol was only a patrol and it was decided to send them by Hospital Ship next day. I went about a bit on Alice, my motorcycle.

**7 Apr.** DDMS and DADMS, Colonels Walker and Furnell, turned up, very fed up at the nature of the rout which seems to have been quite complete and we have lost much valuable equipment and personnel as POW. 9 Div have done very well but were hopelessly under-equipped to withstand AFVs (armoured fighting vehicles) and the 2 Armoured Div, much of it Iti tanks, had a hiding. A hospital ship arrived and I went to 4 AGH to tee things up. She turned out to be the *Vita*, a hospital carrier, with accommodation for only 240 patients and we had over 400 and the nurses to go! Prepared to get all possible aboard, but matters held up as ship's launches broke down. Eventually got a large number aboard, the nurses went in a schooner! 18 Bde arrived, I saw Gregory Bruer in the docks.

**8 Apr.** Arose early and got the remainder of the sick and the baggage aboard. We put 324 and the nurses onto the poor little chap. Had a conflag with McQuillan of 2/4 Field Hygiene Section as to functions. Opposition is closing in and all our troops that got away are now in Tobruk. Heard, to my distress, that Roy Binns and his coy 2/8 Fd Amb were captured. Have lost two Generals. Poor old Colonel Godding, who stayed with us at HQ, was captured. There has been some very remarkable escapes.

**9 Apr.** ...Rode out to POW cage to see about cleaning it. Frieberg (Fryberg) is to superintend. In the evening went to the hospital. When nearly home found a shoe heel missing, so returned and found it where I had started the bicycle. Nearly back again when fireworks started and I spent a perfectly horrid ¾ hour lying in a shallow depression and hoping no AA stuff would land on me. Some bombs fell moderately close. Made one dash for it but was forced to ground again. Eventually got in and went to the docks to inspect damage. There was an enormous hole on the dock, a 500lb bomb...

**10 Apr.** A horrid dusty day and spent most day indoors. Hoped to get to POW cage but dust prevented it. There was a lot of artillery fire all day. Ours we think! At 1800 hrs there was a fierce air raid, the objectives, the two hospitals at town and beach, no other places attacked and it seemed quite deliberate. Chambers and Schwartz were killed and Row from 2/2 CCS severely wounded and there were a number of casualties among patients and staff. Eric Cooper had an amazing escape as a bomb fell within feet and didn't go off. We all felt very sick about it. Another raid, no damage although bombs fell.

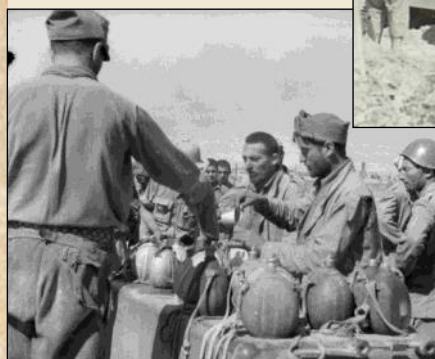
**16 May.** Went to the hospital for supplies and to HQ to see Cookie. Arranged for embarkation tonight on a destroyer. At 7, Jerry dropped bombs close to San Marco water point... seems to be our water he is trying for. We drove down just before dark and were made aware of a huge crater in the road made by one of the latest bombs, which would have been a death trap to our first ambulance. The *Vampire* was delayed but berthed at 1 in the morning and we started cramming them in, we got 109 stretchers and 98 walkers away. I found to my joy that Pat Reilly was MO. Delighted to meet him and have a short yarn. *She* left at 3 and after the usual signal parley we got to bed. But not undisturbed for there were a series of lone but noisy raiders.



*"Roy Binns and his coy 2/8 Fd Amb were captured. Have lost two Generals. Poor old Colonel Godding, who stayed with us at HQ, was captured."*



Photo above is of a POW cage In Tobruk 23 Apr 1941. AWM 007482



Left: POW filling water bottles Tobruk, 28 Apr 1941. AWM007567







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## DR JOHN DAVID RICE 2/43RD SX10147 *part 2*



*"On arrival at Tobruk, hygiene and sanitation was most primitive and the Pioneer platoon immediately began making fly proof box superstructures for deep trench latrines."*

Tobruk, August 1941. The shattered walls of a section of Ward 10 2/4th AGH after hit by an enemy bomb. Standing in front of the damage are, l to r: Captain J. Rice, RMO 2/43rd Battalion; Capt John Horan, Physician; Col L. Spiers VD, CO. AWM photo Donor Sergeant Maxwell.



*Continued from Volume 2 Issue 1.*

With the situation changing radically in the Mediterranean theatre there was no time for further training. The Allied forces were retreating in Greece and the Italian forces' poor performance meant Hitler sent General Rommel's Afrika Korps, to the Western Desert, moving his forces onto the offensive from mid-March 1941. By the end of April, Tobruk, a key possession for advances east or west, with a harbour and docks used to receive supplies for an advancing army, was under siege.

2/43's early duties in the Tobruk area involved cleaning up the substantial quantities of munitions and equipment abandoned by the Italians and guarding the many Italian prisoners. Conditions were difficult. Very little rain and little water for drinking or washing, prompted a warning from John Rice on the threat to hygiene and in time the Battalion would suffer common ailments of dysentery, infected sores and infectious hepatitis.

From a document supplied by Andrew Rice, grandson of John RICE, and Geoff Allen, whose family were treated by Dr Rice in times after the war: *"On arrival at Tobruk, hygiene and sanitation was most primitive and the Pioneer platoon immediately began making fly proof box superstructures for deep trench latrines. The type was a two seater and the Pioneer Platoon equipped each section with a fly proof latrine. The weather was still cold, flies were very numerous and strict attention to hygiene was necessary in order to prevent an outbreak of dysentery."*

Added to this were equipment problems, supplies were so poor that it had to resort to using Italian artillery, mortars and vehicles. The Medical Platoon used Italian medical supplies and an Italian ambulance.

*"No transport had been available until Mr Stewart, the Sig Officer, reconditioned a 6 wheeler Italian Ambulance and this served to transport all stores. From that time "Battling Bertha" as Driver Montgomerie christened his ambulance, evacuated sick and wounded personnel from forward posts. Not only was time saved in getting casualties to the RAP, but also it left the stretcher bearers in the forward posts to render first aid. "Battling Bertha" gave service for 10 weeks and was replaced by two 1 ton casualty trucks. A dump of Italian medical supplies was discovered and helped to build up medical stores.*

*"In June, 2/43<sup>rd</sup> moved to the perimeter's southern section and the RAP was situated in a cave at the rear of the forward posts. Evacuation at night times was by casualty*

*truck fitted with two stretchers and a complete outfit for splinting, from the post. The truck was in charge of the stretcher bearer Sgt who went forward and completely dressed and splinted a wounded man as far as possible, in the area in which he had been hit. The wounded man was then given morphia by the trained Sgt who was and put between blankets. By this method a man would arrive in the RAP with minimum shock and usually free of pain through the action of morphia. Because of intense mortar and MG fire, communication between posts in the daytime was impossible. It was necessary to have a stretcher bearer in each Section post. Anyone wounded in the day time was held in the post until after dark to be evacuated. Men had to sleep in the day, lying in shallow trenches and tormented by incessant swarms of flies. And only low 6" latrine boxes could be used. Conditions were extremely trying and men were not able to wash while in the forward posts. The men were in this sector without relief for 28 days. As a result of lack of sleep and some lowering of morale by being pinned down without moving all day, the physical condition of the men became very poor and they could not even go to the beach for a swim.*

*One casualty truck was stationed on the right flank and dealt with casualties there and the other stationed at BHQ. In that sector, the RAP was 1000m behind BHQ and under observation from Hill 209 and because of excellent communications it was possible for the truck to pick up a patient within 15 mins."*

John Rice established his first RAP in the Italian Marine barracks. It had *"three large rooms with Terrazzo floors..."*

In early April 1941, the Battalion moved from its position in the rear of the defence to the perimeter itself. On 12 April RAP treated its first battle casualty and more were to follow as the Battalion used patrols to harass the enemy's siege positions. John Rice's first major test of medical arrangements for battle occurred during a Battalion attack on 13 May. The RAP moved forward to a position in an anti-tank ditch to the immediate rear of the attacking elements and four stretcher bearer squads were attached to D Company, the assault force. These men worked in dangerous conditions, with much of the evacuation route under fire. Casualties were evacuated through 9 Division Fd Amb to 2/4 AGH, even here there was little respite from enemy action, as medical units were attacked from the air. Even evacuation from Tobruk by sea had perils after several hospital ships were sunk by air action.







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## FIELD AMBULANCE



*"In June 1940, the 2/3rd Fd Ambulance was split in two, half remaining as 2/3rd Fd Ambulance and the other half becoming the 2/11th Fd Ambulance."*

Thank you to  
Stuart Jones  
Secretary RAAAMC and  
HEALTH SERVICE CORPS  
ASSOCIATION  
for permission to use Fd  
Ambulance information in  
our newsletters.  
Much appreciated.  
[http://www.raamc.org.au/web/index.php?](http://www.raamc.org.au/web/index.php?Associations:Unit_Associations)  
Associations:Unit\_Associations

**2/3RD FIELD AMBULANCE.** 2/3rd Australian Field Ambulance formed at Redbank, Qld in Nov 1939 part of 18th Infantry Brigade, 6th Division. In Dec they moved to Rutherford and Ingleburn, NSW, in Jan 1940. In May 1940, they embarked as part of the third convoy to the Middle East, but because Italy entered the war they were diverted to Cape Town and the UK. While in Lopcombe Corner, Wiltshire they were split to form 2/11th Aust Fd Ambulance, with reinforcements bringing them up to strength. The 2/3rd moved to Colchester, Essex in October 1940. In January 1941, they left for the Middle East where they were allocated to 9th Infantry Division.

In March 1941, they deployed to Tobruk with the 9th Division, where they were besieged for six months. They were deployed to Hill 95 in Palestine during September 1941. At the start of the Pacific War, the 9th Division relieved 1 Australia Corps in Syria, which was sent home to defend Australia.

They moved to Tripoli then Batroumine, Lebanon in May. The German advance towards the Egypt/Libya border led to the 9th Infantry Division and its units being rushed back to Egypt

where they participated in the defensive battles near El Alamein. They moved back to Julis in Palestine during December where they prepared for their return to Australia in January 1943. Following a period of leave, the 2/3rd Aust Field Ambulance reformed at Kairi in Queensland.

*part 1 to be continued*



2/3rd  
Fd Ambulance  
1942



### **2/11 FIELD AMBULANCE** *part 1 to be continued*

With the formation of the Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF) at the commencement of World War 11, one of new units raised was the 2/11th Field Ambulance. When the AIF deployed to England in 1940 unexpected problems in relation to medical care were discovered and a more extensive medical service was required. Part of the solution was to increase the number of field ambulances. So in June 1940, the 2/3rd Fd Ambulance was split in two, half remaining as 2/3rd Fd Ambulance and the other half becoming 2/11th Fd Ambulance.

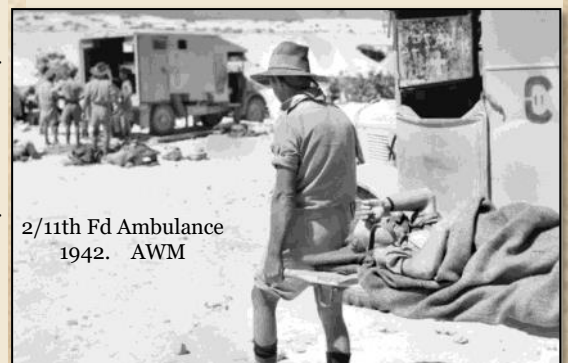
The 2/11th Fd Ambulance was at Tobruk for the next seven months, being relieved on 20 October 1941. After leaving Tobruk the entire 9th Division was granted a period of rest and training.

The 9th Division was then sent to relieve the 7th Division in Syria, with 2/11th Fd Ambulance relieving 2/4th Fd Ambulance in January 1942. Duty in Syria was generally quieter than it had been in Cyrenaica with non-battle rather than battle casualties with malaria the most significant disease.

The Division moved south to the Western Desert in June 1942.



After training in England 2/11 Fd Amb transferred to Palestine and in March 1941 to Egypt as part of the 9th Division. By end of March 1941, the 9th Division was spread along the north coast of Cyrenaica with German forces pushing Allies east.



2/11th Fd Ambulance  
1942. AWM

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# Rat's Tales



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## FIELD AMBULANCE



*“Evacuation by sea, especially on naval ships which often arrived with little warning, led to the establishment of a small evacuation hospital in an old Italian ammunition tunnel in the cliffs under Admiralty House and facing on to the docks.”*

**THE 2/5TH AUSTRALIAN FIELD AMBULANCE** was formed at Puckapunyal, Victoria in May 1940. They left on 20 October 1940 aboard “RMS Mauretania”. 2/5th Fd Amb saw service in Cyrenaica, Egypt, Syria, at the Siege of Tobruk from early May until late August 1941. Unit Historian, Sgt Lloyd Tann wrote... “Our ship sailed out of Port Philip Bay and joined a large convoy to Bombay. We landed on 4 November and entered the Suez Canal on 24 November 1940 aboard “HMT Dilwara”, disembarked at El Kantata then trained to Palestine. They arrived at Camp 6, Julius, 8pm and found that 2/1st Pioneers had set up all the tents, very welcome after a long, hot day. Spent first Christmas at Julius. 4 Jan 1941 moved out of Julius to Ikingi Mariut in Egypt and transferred from 21st Brigade in 7th Division to 18th Brigade in 6th Division. **Thank you to the 2/5th Fd Ambulance Group for permission to use information from Lloyd Tann’s book “2/5th Fd Ambulance”. Of course we do not have room to publish all of it, but anyone who would like to read this great piece of history, copy and paste this link.**

[https://www.ratsoftobruktribute.com/images/BO OKS/The\\_2nd\\_5th\\_Aust\\_Field\\_Amb\\_History\\_by\\_Lloyd\\_Tann.pdf](https://www.ratsoftobruktribute.com/images/BO OKS/The_2nd_5th_Aust_Field_Amb_History_by_Lloyd_Tann.pdf)

“Medical units in Tobruk at the start were 2/4th AGH, 2/2nd CCS, a section of 15th Indian General Hospital of 100 beds, the 2/3rd; 2/5th; 2/8th; and 2/11th Australian Field Ambulances, 2/4th Aust Field Hygiene Section, the 36th British Field Hygiene Section, the 5th Advance Depot Medical Stores, a mobile ophthalmic unit, a mobile bacterial laboratory and the 16th Motor Ambulance Convoy. The last five were British units.

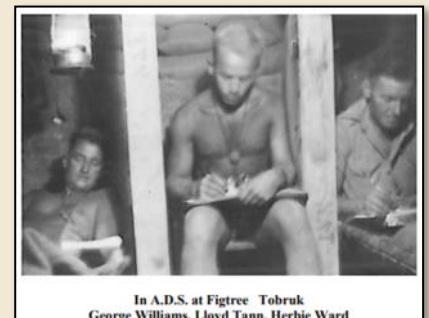
“7 April 1941 the 18th Brigade arrived in Tobruk. By noon on Good Friday, 11 April, Germans had bypassed Tobruk and cut Bardia Rd. Tobruk was cut off!! The Germans attacked repeatedly throughout Easter, but were repulsed by the infantry battalions, with strong support from artillery and anti-tank regiments. After the Easter Battle, Gen Lavarack issued a Special Order of the Day, congratulating all ranks of the garrison on their determined defence, finishing with, “Everyone can feel justly proud of the way the enemy has been dealt with. Well done Tobruk!”

“Evacuation by sea on naval ships, led to the establishment of a small evacuation hospital in an old Italian ammunition tunnel in cliffs under Admiralty House, facing the docks, and a section of 2/2 CCS became a medical holding unit to evacuate patients from 2/4th AGH. Later, 2/5th Field Amb took over this evacuation hospital. On 26 April, 13 ORs were detached from 2/5th for duty with 2/4th AGH to help in nursing duties for many weeks, taking over several wards, including Ward 4 holding wounded German prisoners.

“The “Lord Haw Haw” broadcasts were always a bright spot daily and when a radio was tuned in, a large crowd gathered. Night after night, he made dire threats to exterminate the “Rats” in Tobruk. In dubbing them “Rats”, Lord Haw Haw ensured their place in history, a symbol of defiance against overwhelming odds.

On 16 April, a dawn attack with 2/23rd Bn saw Capt Friend in charge of a mobile section, responsible for the collection and evacuation of casualties. The attack commenced on Posts S6 and S7. A RAP was established, but because of a long carry, they established a mobile section at the 2/12th Bn RAP and used 2/12 Bn vehicles to carry wounded to the RAP at Figtree. On May 1, a message was received that German tanks had broken through western defences and formed a salient.

to be continued



In A.D.S. at Figtree Tobruk  
George Williams, Lloyd Tann, Herbie Ward



The Sanger in Wadi Auda – Tobruk  
Tom Cummins, Terry Wade, Jim Behan



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## FIELD AMBULANCE

### 2/8TH FIELD AMBULANCE

The 2/8th Field Ambulance was raised at Wayville, Adelaide, in July 1940, originally part of 24th Brigade in the 8th Division later allocated to 9th Division. 2/8th Fd Amb left Australia in Dec 1940 and arrived at Khassa, Palestine, in Jan 1941. The 9th Division replaced the 6th Division in Cyrenaica, eastern Libya, in March 1941, with the 2/8th relieving the 2/2nd Fd Amb at Ghemines, northwest Libya. As the Germans advanced, 2/8th Fd Amb moved back to El Abiar and Lamluda, Libya, before reaching Tobruk in April joining the rest of the 9th Division. In Oct, the 9th Division was progressively relieved and taken out by ship and the 2/8th Fd Amb moved to Julis and then to Hill 69 in Dec.

With the outbreak of the Pacific War, 1st Australian Corps was returned to Australia but 9th Division was left in place in Syria under Command of the 8th Army. The 2/8th Fd Amb was now part of the 20th Brigade Group. The 2/8th Fd Amb supported forward Brigades in defensive battles before El Alamein. All medical units took part in the break-out from El Alamein in October 1941 before returning to Julis in Palestine in November.

The 9th Division left the Middle East in January 1943. 9th Division undertook training in Nth Queensland and assembled at Milne Bay to join the attack at Lae in September and served in New Guinea until war's end.

to be continued

### FIRST AID KIT

Not during Siege times, but no doubt similar items from this first aid kit may have been used at Tobruk.

This field First Aid kit is a mixture of items, some prepared for use in wartime, including World War 1 and some for use in peace time emergencies. The calico bag, produced by the Red Cross in Kalgoorlie, WA, has been used by the State Emergency Service and at a later date by a scout group. The name, "S Dempster" is on the striped calico bag. Samuel Dempster was born in Ireland and living at Panmure, Vic, when he enlisted and attached to 6 Ambulance training.

He served from 1942-46.

Eight flat bandages, five safety pins, six small rolled gauze bandages, three navy blue packages of white absorbent gauze, one rolled package bandage, rubber hose, two small and one large field dressings, two shell dressings, Armed Forces shell dressing, dark blue absorbent lint (yellow label), absorbent cotton wool (navy blue wrapper with red label), striped canvas bag, bottle Acriflavine, two rolled bandages.

Image courtesy of Warrnambool Historical Society, we appreciate their permission to use photos and information.



### "BLOOD BANK."

#### MANY LIVES SAVED AT TOBRUK."

Manning River Times NSW 9 July 1941.

Col Harold Cohen, Red Cross Commissioner Middle East, reports that before the battle of Tobruk a Blood Bank was formed at a field ambulance station near the front, saving many lives. So AIF have supply of blood serum, Red Cross in Sydney and Melb, is arranging for a Blood Bank sufficient to supply AIF and in case of a National Emergency. Sydney Hospital has placed a ward for 100 donors daily for Red Cross.

Whole blood lasts a limited period, but now blood serum is obtainable by separating red corpuscles and "dry" blood obtained from the clear liquid, the blood can be kept indefinitely.



2/8 fd ambulance dressing station above their HQs 1942

Source:  
McKenzie-Smith,  
Graham,  
"The Unit Guide"  
The Australian Army 1939-45  
ISBN:  
978-1-9-925675-14-6 2018  
Vol 4 Medical and  
Signals Units p.4.086





# Rat's Tales



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## REMEMBERING PRISONERS OF WAR

### "THE PEN" - EDITION 5

CHRIS KELLY



### JACK SHOVELLER, NX33471

It was February of '41. Blue-eyed Jack Shoveller, a single brickcarter's assistant - NX33471 - stepped from Sutherland into his war - oblivious. A stint in hospital with flu and slap on the wrist for AWL behind him, the young Aussie - armed with larrikin sprite - touched Middle Eastern soil as part of the 3rd Anti Tank Regiment.

Jack was a Rat and his war was one of confusion and diversity, and would be filled with sadness, much sadness. As we forward to July '42, Jack lay forever in a grave at El Daba Cemetery. End of story? Not quite! He was very much alive and a POW in Campo 57, up in the cold country of northern Italy. In hindsight it was the cold weather that started this fiasco, Jack wrote home asking for warm clothes after his 'death'. Whose remains then, lay beneath the ground at El Daba?

So begins the tangled web of Jack's story, woven in a quagmire of seventy nine pages of reports and international correspondence. Ah, the chaos of WW2 records! Two offences were recorded against Gunner Shoveller 'post death' and as I sifted my way through the muddled pages of Jack's file I discovered the remains laying beneath the sandy soil were in fact those of his sergeant, Bruce Templeman. This would later be attested by Sgt John Pope.

Meanwhile a 'cartolina postale' (postcard) addressed to his parents from Campo 85 arrived at Sutherland, his dilemma, he wrote, was a spot of bad luck! He was fine and no cause to worry - his nonchalant attitude to being captured. The authorities were in a tizz. Was he being impersonated? After all, they held an Italian death certificate dated 28th July 1942, complete with grave details, but so too a casualty report from Rome, placing him, scabies ridden, in hospital in Casserta Italy in February 1943. Which

report was true?

The gunner had inadvertently become the subject of much frantic correspondence flying back and forth. The army demanded answers from Italian authorities, how could they advise Jack's next of kin when they themselves weren't sure?

And finally, after a letter from the Croce Rossa Italiana (Red Cross Italy), assuring Mr Shoveller's case had been given the utmost attention. The deceased was wearing Jack's clothes - his greatcoat to be precise - at the time of his demise and his lack of ID disk meant they needed to look further. Jack's medical diagnosis papers were found on Templeman, it was - they said - easy to see why the mixup. Up at 57 Jack was questioned, he declared he had not been near a hospital since having a splinter removed at Benghazi. The letter bore the signature of The Ecclesiastical General Senior Count, Ambrogio Clerici himself.

After all this time on the 7th October 1943, the long overdue letter to Mrs Shoveller was sent, almost 15 months after Jack

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

NX17078

Private William Robert James

"Bill" LAMBOURN

2/17th Infantry Battalion

Born 15 Dec 1913

Enlisted 24 May 1940

Taken Prisoner

14 Apr 1941-1945

P.G. 66 Capua Italy

P.G. 57 Gruppignano Italy

Stalag XVIII-A Germany

Deceased 08 Jun 2002







# Rat's Tales

Descendants of the Rats of Tobruk Australia Association Inc



## REMEMBERING PRISONERS OF WAR



### "THE PEN" - EDITION 4

CHRIS KELLY

'disappeared', leaving one less mother wondering about the whereabouts of her son. Soon she would see her boy - her ratbag with his big personality.

Not so, Jack's fate took him many hours north to Silesia Poland, to work in several work camps, and it was rumoured he was living with a married German woman whose husband also lived in the home. Is this true? We'll never know. In April 1945 the Gunner was taken by ambulance - unconscious - to the surgical hospital in Graz. Why would they take him to Austria? Bear with me, as this complicated, confusing story continues it will become as clear as mud. Jack's POW number was 7729, a number originating in Stalag XVIII A Austria and how he got from Silesia to Graz, will sadly, I believe, remain one of life's mysteries.

to rest in the Pontigam Cemetery, Graz, on about the 18th of April - or so it is written - and after much administrative kerfuffle over the next few months, his body was exhumed to be consecrated in the more fitting Klagenfurt War Cemetery on the 24th November 1945. This would be Jack's final place of rest.

The complicated investigation of Jack's whereabouts, notes his DOD as 17/4/45, 18/4/45, 20/4/45, 28/4/45 and 8/5/45 at various points in time. His headstone - decided by the powers that be - reads "Died 18th April 1945, aged 27" and aptly the personal inscription under, etched for eternity says "His duty nobly done. Forever fondly remembered."

I know I'll remember you Jack, more than a tear was shed reading the complicated story of your short life. May you rest in peace.

*Lest We Forget.*

*Chris Kelly*



"Photo Credit - Paul Brazell"

But back to Jack's hospital admission, he arrived suffering memory loss, thankfully fellow patient - Pte Donnington Bruton - knew Jack, they worked in camp A/182/GW at Liebenau, Graz together for eighteen months. In the ensuing ten days the Private attempted, unsuccessfully, to get him to speak, but he did notice something was amiss with Jack's mouth. The French medical student attending Jack, diagnosed typhus prior to his transfer to a POW hospital where a signet ring was dislodged from his throat! His German physician at the time was said to have told an English O.R, the cause was poisoning...this I wonder?

Joe O'Halloran, M.O at the first hospital continued to visit Jack and when hearing of his death around the 28th of May, he arrived at the hospital morgue, identified Jack's body, retrieved a photo from his belongings - later to deliver same to Miss Hughes in Sutherland, who confirmed it was indeed Jack - then quickly made his burial arrangements. Pte Bruton voiced his opinion, he was unhappy with Jack's medical treatment.

Gunner Jack Stephen Shoveller was laid

"The Pen" researched, written and put together by Christine Kelly.

**Gunner**

**Jack**

**Stephen**

**Shoveller**

**NX33471**







# Rat's Tales



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## ANOTHER NEW UNIT ADDED!

Although it is a very small number of people involved in our Research Team, we are very proud to announce that our researchers have found and verified a new unit which was in Tobruk and not previously acknowledged.

**This unit is the 2/1st Survey Regiment, Sound Ranging Battery.**

A chance conversation between DOTROTA committee member and volunteer researcher Sue Trewartha and David Bromwich through Ancestry, has led to the discovery of yet another group of Aussie Rats not previously recognised in the Order of Battle (OOB) for the Siege of Tobruk. (OOB is a listing done in 1958, of the units in Tobruk battles to show who was involved in the Siege of Tobruk, 10 April to 7 Dec 1941, basically, **the "AWM bible"**. If you were in one of the listed units, we then check the service records to make sure they are in Tobruk during the siege dates to verify they are a Rat. If your unit was not listed in the OOB then generally, you were not a Rat. This list is highly valued in any Rats research.)

David had mentioned a neighbour of his in Darwin, who often had told him about his time in Tobruk. His name was Douglas Lampe. Sue checked his service record and found he was attached to the Royal Australian Artillery 2/1st Survey Regiment, Sound Ranging Battery.

Sue consulted with another committee member and volunteer researcher, Deb Goodwin and the hunt was on as there was a letter from LAMPE in his Service Records, where he made application for the Africa Star, for his service in Tobruk. Sue and Deb were curious as to why he would apply to authorities for the Africa Star for his "service in Tobruk", if he was not there. If he was, this would make him a Rat of Tobruk. His service record indicated he was detached for duty to "R" troop, 4th Durham Survey Regiment, Royal Artillery on 9/6/1941 and rejoined his unit on 24/7/1941.

This identified the first man of the group as Gunner Douglas Patrick LAMPE DX601. Deb then checked the 2/1st Survey Regiment war diary and found an entry 1 June 1941, which mentioned a party of 3 Sgts and 3 ORs from S Rg Bty left for Tobruk. Research of this information revealed this was the Sound Ranging Battery of the 2/1st Survey Regiment, the regiment was made up of a Survey Battery, Flash Spotting Battery and Sound Ranging Battery. That established that 6 men of the Sound Ranging Battery were sent to Tobruk. One person was identified in the entry, Sgt BRAID I L, and research of the DVA Nominal Rolls identified him as Sgt Ian Leslie BRAID VX42526. A check of BRAID's service record revealed that he, too, was detached to 4th Durham Survey Regiment, Royal Artillery on 1/6/1941 and an entry, undated, "Evac to 2/4th AGH (Bronchitis) and transferred to X List", followed by an entry where he rejoins his unit from 4th Durham Survey Regt RA on 24 July 1941.

BRAID's evacuation to 4AGH confirms he was in Tobruk. In addition, BRAID had also applied by letter, for the Africa Star for his service in Tobruk.

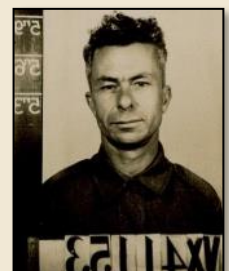
After many, many hours of trawling through the war diaries of the 2/1st Survey Regiment, 9th Division Royal Aust Artillery and 1 Aust Corp Royal Aust Artillery HQ war diaries, we were able to identify 3 more of the men who were sent to Tobruk. Sgt Jack Bonnel DONALDSON VX18690, also detached to 4th Durham Survey Regt and evacuated to 2/4th AGH, *providing evidence that he was in Tobruk.*

However, the remaining 2 men proved difficult to identify. Sue then found that a unit history for 2/1st Survey Regiment, called "Locating the Enemy!", had been published and contained a nominal roll and we hoped, a reference to the deployment of the Sound Ranging Battery to Tobruk. Further research discovered the book was well out of print and unavailable to purchase. Deb eventually located the unit history at the Australian War Memorial, sent a request for copies from the book and was informed it was subject to copyright. Further enquiries with the AWM resulted in success in obtaining copies of some pages for research purposes, an application was submitted and put in motion, with thanks to Sue Ducker from AWM. Those copies list the 6 men who were deployed to Tobruk, details of their deployment to Tobruk, location and living conditions, while there.

Copies of the relevant pages revealed the names of the remaining 2 men. So the list of the men is –



Sgt Ian Leslie BRAID VX42526  
Sgt Edmund SPREADBOROUGH VX43014  
Sgt Jack Bonnel DONALDSON VX18690



Bdr Persse Salisbury RAINSFORD NX29331  
L/Bdr Douglas Patrick LAMPE DX601  
L/Bdr Vernon William HERCUS VX41153







# Rat's Tales



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## ANOTHER NEW UNIT ADDED!

These 6 men were sent by 1 Aust Corp Royal Aust Artillery HQ, to the 4th Durham Survey Regiment (British) in Tobruk for training in the use of the latest sound ranging equipment used for locating enemy tanks and artillery guns by using listening equipment, enabling Allied artillery to lay down fire on them.

Deb continued researching by accessing the 1 Aust Corps Royal Australian Artillery HQ war diary, to look for requests, orders etc.

During this research, she found a request for a CBO (Counter Battery Officer) via a message followed by a war diary entry on 28/05/1941, directing dispatch of a CBO.

A message was found identifying the CBO and a direction to deploy him and his batman to Alexandria.

This information yielded another name - Lt Col Bruce Edmunds KLEIN, NX4, his service record is unavailable, due to post-war service and held by Dept of Defence. His title was CBO (Counter Battery Officer)



Left: Lt Col Bruce Edmunds KLEIN, NX4



Right: Albert GODWIN VX789

A message was located for the deployment of Lt Col Klein-2 Officers and 8 ORs to Mersa Matruh for passage to Tobruk. A war diary entry from Royal Australian Artillery HQ, 1 Aust Corps, on 1 June 1941 records the departure of Lt Col KLEIN and 3 Sgts and 3 ORs from 2/1 Survey Regiment to Alexandria.

A war diary entry from the 2/1 st Survey Regiment on 24 July 1941 records the return of Lt BRAID, promoted while in Tobruk, and 5 ORs from Tobruk.

Deb received a message from Robin McEwan-King with another copy from 4th Durham Survey Regiment war diary, listing casualties for June 1941, included in the list were two Australian service numbers, one already identified, the other VX789, now identified as Albert Victor GODWIN. A check of his service record has identified him as Lt Col KLEIN's batman.

Sue is continuing to research Ancestry to locate the descendants of these men and we hope to have some more families to welcome to the fold. In round about ways so far we have been successful in finding the families of Ian BRAID, Douglas LAMPE and SPREADBOROUGH.

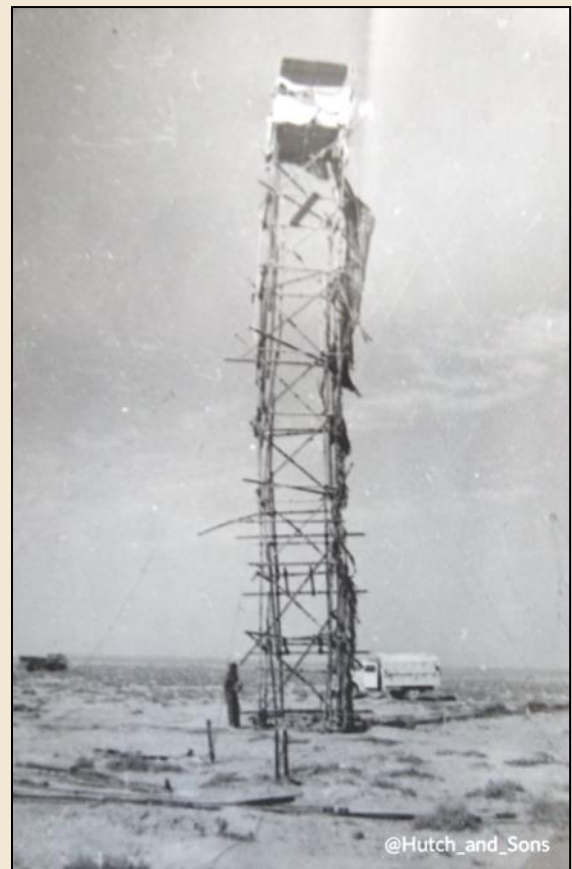
We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Robin McEwan-King, in the UK, who provided us with invaluable information about the 4th Durham Survey Regiment and shared memories of his British Desert Rat.

As was the case with the small detachment from the 2/1st Australian Railway Construction Company who were detached to 1018 Docks Operating Company in Tobruk, we believe it is important for this group to be identified and recognised as RATS of Tobruk.

We have been on a giant learning curve with the discovery of this unit, being educated in the contribution the Artillery Survey Regiments made to the defence of Tobruk.

Our findings were sent to the Australian War Memorial head historian Dr Karl James to be verified, which he did.

*"I read your report with much interest. You have certainly done an impressive amount of detective work to identify the names of these eight men seconded to a British artillery unit in Tobruk. Their service records and war diaries support your research."*



@Hutch\_and\_Sons

Flash Spotting Observation Tower  
from Col Hutchinson website, WW2Talk.  
An observation tower, built and used by the  
Artillery Survey Regiments in Tobruk  
(photo taken 1941)







# 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**.

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

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

**Don't forget, all memberships are due now.**



**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.*

Welcome to all! I would like to thank everyone who has paid their memberships already. *Don't forget, all memberships are due now.* Thank you to those who have paid and for donations made, it is much appreciated. *I have two unknown payments for renewals by direct deposits on 16/5/24 and 27/06/2024. If anyone has not received a receipt please contact me.*

### HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT THIS ASSOCIATION?

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

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

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

Have you seen the merchandise we have? AND the **Qstore** is getting a revamp; Polo Shirts and hoodies now in sizes to 5xl. We will be adding new products soon.

If you have any ideas for different items to add, let me know. Look at the website, put in an order, great Rats items in there. Link to website above.

**PHOTO TRIBUTES** If you have not received one yet or, the latest version with the blue and sand coloured background, please contact us. When you request a digital tribute, please make sure you return the checklist guide to help us confirm our files.

### YOUR RESEARCH

If you are researching your Rat and his unit, we are happy to help out. *We encourage you to write up your relative's service records for your descendants.* 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 about the Rats of Tobruk and their war service. Imagine how many stories would be preserved if we all did this! Please encourage other descendants you know to join with this group, it is a great way to make sure our Rats

*are never forgotten!* **Betty Murphy**

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