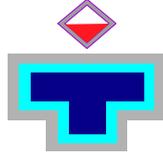


**The Furphy Flyer in Mufti.**



**I HOLD FAST**

Official Organ of the 2/24 Australian Infantry Battalion Association Inc.  
**Postal address : 10B Somme Parade, Edithvale 3196**

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**COMING EVENTS FOR 2009**

**Anzac Day March, Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> April – Reunion at Pascoe Vale RSL.**

**Battalion Birthday Lunch, Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July at Pascoe Vale RSL**  
*(the May "Furphy" will provide further details)*

**Annual General Meeting**  
*(the May "Furphy" will provide further details)*

**2/24<sup>th</sup>'s Shrine Pilgrimage – Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> October, 2.00pm**  
**(Assemble 1.30pm)**  
*(the August "Furphy" will provide further details)*

**9<sup>th</sup> Division's Shrine Service, Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> October**  
*(the August "Furphy" will provide further details)*

**Wangaratta Weekend Reunion, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> November**  
*(the May and August "Furphies" will provide further details)*

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**Vale**

Reginald G Hutchinson  
Harry W. Quinn

VX48275  
VX115264

October 2008  
1 February 2009

All members of the 2/24<sup>th</sup> Battalion Association offer their deepest sympathy and understanding to those bereaved by the passing of members of the association.

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## **ANZAC Day March.**

**Please note**, the meeting point for this year's Melbourne ANZAC Day March is again in Flinders Street on the **NORTH** side, (Saint Paul's Side) between Swanston and Russell Streets. Look for our Banner.

**Time of assembly is 9.30 am for an approximate 10.20 am start.**

We again welcome those marching to honour the memory of a deceased member of the 2/24<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Our President has asked that marchers uphold and respect the proud traditions of the 2/24<sup>th</sup> by following the directions of our leader and dressing appropriately; as smartly turned out as Dad or Grandad always looked.

Our banner will again be carried by students from Wangaratta High School. These students put in a very long day and we are grateful for their commitment and enthusiasm.

The ANZAC Day Commemoration Council has asked us to pass on the following guidelines so that we will not only honour our fallen comrades and forebears, but will also help maintain the ANZAC tradition we are all so proud of :-

- All marchers should conform to forming up and marching 8 abreast.
- Veterans should march directly behind their unit banner, accompanied by a carer if needed. The carer should be of an age where they can directly assist the veteran.
- Next of kin should march behind the veterans and be old enough to march the full distance (1.8 km) without assistance.
- Next of kin representation should be restricted to 1 per veteran
- Attire should be neat and tidy out of respect for the fallen (torn denim, sporting attire, dirty joggers, etc are not appreciated).
- Carrying pictures of relatives is not supported.
- Next of kin are to wear medals on the right breast (left breast is reserved for the original owners).
- Veterans are requested not to join or leave the march other than at the Assembly or Dispersal points.

A transport vehicle has been arranged and we will endeavour to assist those requiring transport during the march.

For those interested in attending the ANZAC Day lunch at the Pascoe Vale RSL, could you please advise us so that catering arrangements can be organised. A phone call to our President, Secretary or assistant Secretary will suffice.

Our President, Alan Macfarlane, has again been nominated by the 9<sup>th</sup> Division Association and the RSL to lead the 9<sup>th</sup> Division in this year's ANZAC Day March. Again, a great honour for him and the 2/24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion Association. The 2/24<sup>th</sup> will be led by our Vice President, Alan Nicholson.

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*In 1991 our famous bugle was presented to the Rural City of Wangaratta so that it could be displayed with our Pennant in the Civic Centre. Printed next to the bugle is the following information.*

### **An Historic Bugle.**

This now famous and much traveled bugle began its historic career in World War 1 when it became part of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion, AIF, seeing service with this unit on Gallipoli and in France.

During the period between World War 1 and World War 2 it was with the Citizen Military Forces.

After the outbreak of World War 2 the bugle was presented to the 2/24<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion, AIF on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1940 by Mr T B Davison, and was then part of the Battalion throughout its campaigns in the Middle East and the South West Pacific area.

The bugle again traveled to the Middle East in 1989 – carried and played by an original 2/24<sup>th</sup> Battalion bandsman, Doug 'Dolly' Gray who sounded the Last Post and Reveille at the unveiling of the 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Division, AIF Memorial at El Alamein.

The bugle now rests here, presented by the 2/24<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Battalion Association, for safe keeping, to the City of Wangaratta - our host during the formation of the Battalion which has since carried the proud title of 'Wangaratta's Own'.

Engraved on the bugle are the Battle Honours awarded to the World War 1 and World War 2 Battalions which were designated by the famous numerals - '24'

*This article was kindly sent in by Alastair Davison*

### **A Battlefields and Historic Sites Tour 2008**

In October-November last year twenty-five Aussies and one Brit took a tour of battlefields of WWI and WWII travelling through Libya, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Israel. The group had a common bond of wanting to visit the battlefields – some out of pure interest, others with a mission to visit particular graves. We flew out of Melbourne on a 14-hour non-stop flight to Dubai where we met up with other members of the group from interstate. Another flight of six and a half hours took us to Tripoli. We arrived late afternoon and after a quick sortie through the souq, a local restaurant served us a typical Libyan meal of humus, soup, fish and a desert similar to baklava.

Early each morning before breakfast, and late after tea (schedule permitting), a group of us would go out on ‘dawn/night patrol’, taking to the streets wandering along back alleys, through souqs and medinas absorbing the local atmosphere.

In Libya our first major trip was a full day to the amazing Roman ruins at Leptis Magna that were only unearthed in 1920, with further remarkable finds coming to light in the new wave of ‘digs’ that started in the 1990s. The city was approximately one kilometre square with our tour starting at the grand arch of Septimus Severus, then moving through the Hadrianic baths, the basilica, forum, a near perfect theatre, market place and the nearby coliseum; as well as the Villa Silin, about 12 km away. This seaside 20 room ‘mansion’ had perfect mosaic floors and walls with frescoes in most rooms and marble in the bath rooms. The paved patio overlooked the beautiful harbour. The whole building had been covered by sand-dunes until recent times.

Tea that night was at the splendid Zunit Hotel near the Arch of Marcus Aurelius; built in 163AD to commemorate the last of the ‘Five Good Emperors’, and the only complete Roman ruin in Tripoli. The next morning saw us wandering the ‘new’ medina and touring the fabulous museum with its pre-Roman, Roman, and Byzantine collections; as well as more modern displays.

On our way to the airport to fly to Benghazi we made the first of our many visits to war cemeteries that are under the control of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Without fail these are beautifully maintained and the caretakers are proud of the work they do.

From Benghazi we toured to Cyrene, visiting Qasr Libia on the way. This small settlement had two old churches and a Turkish fort, with a museum containing mosaics going back to early Christian times. Cyrene is another magnificent Roman city built into the hillside and overlooking its port of Appollonia on the Mediterranean. The nearby museum contains many statues that were discovered only recently, having been covered by the debris from one of the many earthquakes that devastated the region. Nearby is a magnificent Temple of Zeus, the outline of a hippodrome and a gymnasium. We drove back to Benghazi to see the caves where Omar Mukhtar, the Lion of the Desert, hid out while waging his guerrilla war against the Italians in the late 1920s/early 1930s.

Next day we travelled to Apollonia with the remains of its Byzantine churches and then on through Derna to Tobruk.

Three days in Tobruk saw us visiting the Acroma (Knightsbridge) War Cemetery, some 25 km west of Tobruk. Mohamed Haneish and his wife are the caretakers, taking over from his father, who was the original caretaker.



We spent a considerable time going around the cemetery. Many of the group were commenting on the ages, countries of origin and the inscriptions. I went around looking for the headstones of members of the 2/24<sup>th</sup>, laying poppies and acknowledging their sacrifice. In particular I sought out **Sgt T Mackie** VX38878 and **Pte E G Dyke** VX48249 for Alan Macfarlane and **G G Welsh** VX45563 for Keith Clark.



We then went inland to the famous Fig Tree under which a Regimental Aid Post was maintained during the siege of Tobruk. The Fig Tree is healthy as the old cavern underneath is now a water supply. However settlement is starting to encroach on the surrounds. Some locals pointed us towards old Italian trenches about 50 metres to the north, including a still-standing sanger.

We also visited the French cemetery (with the graves of those killed at the Battle of Bir-Hakeim); and then the German memorial before holding a ceremony at the Australian cenotaph in the Tobruk War Cemetery. Over one-quarter of all the graves are Australian servicemen and I found the headstone of Cpl **Ian Gibson** VX41844 and laid a poppy.

The next event was an attempt to visit as much of the Red Line as possible, including a trip out to Hill 209, which is also the site of an old Turkish fort, Ras-el-Medauar. The Red Line tour was a bit of a disappointment. Mohamed from Acroma is very knowledgeable about the Red Line, but he could not muster up enough four wheel drives, so the job landed in the lap of one Saladin, who carried in his hand a book on the siege of Tobruk. I don't think he had only just read it, but it felt that way. We went to the two parts of eastern sector (Z85 and 46) and then across town to Hill 209, which involved a long detour as an oil pipeline is being laid across country. I wanted to visit the Italian trenches around R7-10, but Saladin said it was unsafe, yet they were the start of Mohamed's tour of the Red Line! But we discovered that this was to become a standard excuse – unsafe, when in fact they either did not know about the place or just did not want to bother about it.

Tobruk has changed dramatically over the years. The only wartime building still standing, I was told, is St John's church. For some time it was a museum, but that has now been shifted to Rommel's HQ – which we visited and sat and waited for a curator who never turned up.



Tobruk is becoming a modern city with overpasses, multi-lane highways and apartment living. From the upper levels of our hotel we could see the harbour, and as one person commented as we looked out for the first time, 'That view looks familiar!' Apart from no sunken vessels the outline appears much the same as wartime photos. Our biggest surprise was when we visited a chemist, and upon identifying ourselves as

Australians the proprietor reeled off the names of the Australian Socceroos! Soccer is big and so is Foxtel! Then it was on to Mersa Matruh, now a large beach resort rather than a desert railhead.

After Matruh our next whistle stop was just before the border with Egypt at Bardia where the Australians fought their first battle in World War II. We stopped to view the mural painted by John Frederick Brill, not long before his death on the battlefield at the age of 22. Across the border into Egypt and a visit to the Halfaya-Sollum war cemetery, where again the caretaker was a descendant of the original one, and he hopes his son will follow him. Our Egyptian guide pointed out 'Hellfire Pass' after we had driven by! A military base is prominent in the foreground. On this part of the journey we were accompanied, for security, by a police motor cycle in front and a covered utility with 5 armed soldiers to the rear. As far as I was concerned it advertised us as foreign tourists, and I doubt that any of the soldiers would have been able to get out of their vehicle fast enough if we had been attacked.

Next stop: El Alamein, visiting the Italian and German memorials as well as the War Museum and the War Cemetery with the Australian 9<sup>th</sup> Division memorial. A disappointment was the blunt refusal to visit Trig 33 where members of the 2/24<sup>th</sup> captured Rommel's intelligence unit. The reason: 'There are mines', yet it was an established monument with a formed road only a couple of hundred metres from the Italian memorial! We quickly learned that Egyptian tour guides take you where they want to go, not where you want to! In fact the guides knew little about what we wanted to do and see, in stark contrast to our guide in Libya.



9<sup>th</sup> Division Memorial



El Alamein cemetery

El Alamein cemetery is staggering its size, and again we went looking for the headstones of Australian soldiers. I especially sought out **Capt P S Hayman** VX14987 and **Sgt F Henwood** VX43332. The time we spent there bewildered the Egyptian tour guides and they deserted us and went and had lunch!

We didn't get our lunch until we arrived in Alexandria just before sunset! Many of our hotel rooms had been deliberately double-booked to accommodate visitors to the new Alexandria library. After many explanations (all lies) four of us arrived at alternative accommodation around midnight. Next day we toured Alexandria, a once-beautiful but now chaotic city. Visits were made to the new library (absolutely stunning), war cemetery (a beautiful haven of peace and freshness away from the cacophony of the traffic), catacombs and Pompey's Pillar; which has nothing to do with Pompey and was erected in honour of Diocletian. A late afternoon dash to Cairo (actually Giza) where we were 'stunned' when the massive outline of a pyramid appeared beside our coach in the dusk. Next day's schedule was the pyramids, the sphinx and the Cairo museum with the unbelievable splendour of Tutankhamen's funerary ornaments. We were warned about pickpockets, but far more 'dangerous' were the touts around the pyramids who make Fagin and his ilk look like amateurs, all within sight of the useless tourist police.

While the group went down to Luxor I travelled up to the town of El Qantara (Kantara) on the Sinai side of the Suez to visit my father's grave at the War Cemetery there. Although there is the magnificent Peace bridge, we crossed on the ferry (no cost!) that sneaks across the canal between the continuous line of massive container ships, spaced some 500 metres apart.

Next day was around Cairo visiting the cemetery, old market and Coptic churches and synagogue. At the cemetery I was looking in my wallet for a note to give the caretaker, as he had opened the cemetery especially for us. I suddenly found I was the most popular person around with scores of hands thrust through the cemetery fence for a bit of baksheesh. Meeting the rest of the tour we flew to Damascus; probably the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. We did the touristy things – walked the Souk al-Hamidiyeh, bought ice cream at a café that has been making and selling it since 1895, toured the Umayyad Mosque, Saladin's tomb and walked a Street called Straight to the Chapel of Ananias; as well

as visiting the stunning museum of antiquity and seeing the Church of St Paul where it is said that Paul escaped from Damascus. We shopped in the back alleys, enjoyed the local food (the desserts were sublime!) and visited the museum at the Al-Azem Palace. A trip up the Barada Gorge reminded us of the Australian Light Horse defeat of the Turks there and the occupation of Damascus before Lawrence of Arabia's arrival the next day. Driving up the narrow gorge you can understand why some commentators have referred to the confrontation as a pigeon-shoot. We visited the war cemetery and walked freely around the city and suburbs.

By bus to Jordan with a stop at Jerash, another Roman ruin that was one of the Decapolis cities. It is an amazingly compact complex of a plaza, temples, arches and theatre. A long drive south brought us to Petra after dark. Petra is the Nabatean city built in the rock, whose Treasury was made famous in recent times by its use in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. The next day a group of us not only hiked the main sections of Petra but also climbed several tracks up the surrounding hills. By the time I got back to the hotel my clothes were stuck to my back! Petra, along with Leptis Magna, is a must-see location whose history and architecture are awe-inspiring.

Next day we went via Aqaba into the Israeli city of Eilat and up to Beersheva where the Australian Light Horse charged the town on 31 October 1917. We viewed the Allenby Memorial, Turkish railway station (where the 36 Light Horsemen who had been killed were originally buried), the war cemetery and the recently (2007) opened Australian Light Horse Memorial with its life-size depiction of a mounted soldier jumping the trenches.

On to Jerusalem where we wallowed in the luxury of the highest rated hotel of the tour, but did wonder whether we had been taken to the wrong place! We visited the Victoria Hospital, the Jerusalem War Cemetery set atop a hill overlooking the city, the Mount of Olives, Garden of Gethsemane, the old city, the Wailing Wall, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We drove out towards Bethlehem where the eight metre high concrete barricade separates Jerusalem from the Palestinian territories. Next day was the Shabbat (not much doing in Jerusalem), except that we attended the Remembrance Day Service at the War Cemetery. We were able to lay two wreaths for the Diggers who gave their lives in the Middle East and North Africa. After the service we chatted with the Australian peace keepers who are stationed in the region. We then travelled down to the Dead Sea (where some floated) and then visited Qumran (of the Dead Sea Scrolls) before crossing over into Jordan to end the tour at Amman.

I stayed an extra two days in Jordan, visiting Umm Qais in the north of Jordan. This Roman city overlooks the Sea of Galilee. Down into the Jordan Valley we drove to Pella where the University of Sydney is working on the excavations. This city had been inhabited from Neolithic times and burials caves of different epochs dot the hillsides. My last stop for the day was at the Baptismal National Park. UNESCO has uncovered the accurate site of Christ's baptism some twenty feet below the present level and east of the current Jordan River. At this place, known as John the Baptist spring, they have found the remains of an early Byzantine chapel. Overlooking the site is Elijah's Hill with a monument being built to commemorate Elijah's ascent to heaven in a chariot of fire. Although Muslim, King Abdullah is keen to maintain the peaceful relations between the three monotheistic faiths, but I suspect he is also looking to the tourist dollar.

My last day took me to Mt Nebo, from where Moses viewed the Promised Land and then to Madaba, Kerak and finally to Amman to pack and breathe a sigh of relief when my case came in just under 20 kilos.



Alastair Davison at the grave of his father, Cpl J L Davison VX31161

*The following is a toast to the Rats of Tobruk given by Rusty Priest, A.M. at the NSW ROTA Memorial Service at Club Five Dock in April last year.*

### **"Thieves in the Night"**

Mr Joe Madeley OAM, President of the Rats of Tobruk Association and members and your ladies; distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls. I am deeply honoured to have been invited to propose the toast to the 'Rats of Tobruk' on this occasion of your Tobruk Sunday Memorial Service.

I must admit, having spoken to the Rats on at least four other occasions, to wondering what was I going to say this time, when I came across an article which briefly discussed the situation that the Australians Forces faced in Tobruk in 1941.

In Northern Africa, the Germans confronted a very different breed of soldier. They confronted soldiers without respect for authority or for domineering powers. These soldiers were volunteers without dreams of glory but who instead believed that some things were worth fighting for. They were empathetic soldiers who were infuriated if their leaders brushed aside their suffering or dared express an attitude that any man was expendable or inferior. These soldiers were from Australia and at Tobruk; they gave Hitler his first taste of defeat.

In 1941, Great Britain withdrew most of its forces from Africa and sent them to defend Greece leaving Australians with the task of defending the portal city of Tobruk. The city had to be held as a strong point where future attacks could be launched upon German troops. The odds were stacked against the diggers. The German Force was twice its size and masterminded by Rommel, a military genius who had never been defeated in battle.

Despite the long odds, the Diggers never entertained the idea of retreat or surrender. But even though they had plenty of courage, the Diggers knew they could not win on courage alone, hence they decided to fight the battle to their strengths rather than their weaknesses

When Rommel charged Tobruk with tanks, the diggers didn't bother to resist, as to do so would result in certain destruction. Instead, they attacked the follow up infantry and once they were eliminated, the tanks lacking in ground support were easier targets.

When the Luftwaffe dropped waves upon waves of bombs the diggers didn't make much effort to shoot them down, rather they hid safely in Tobruk's network of tunnels. This ensured they remained focused on the task of defending the city against the German infantry,

When the Germans retreated to regroup, the Australians didn't wait in a siege mentality. Instead they went on the offensive; attacking German positions, stealing German artillery and then retreating back into the city like thieves in the night. Subsequently, the stolen artillery (known as 'bush artillery') was used against its creators.

The conviction of the Diggers even won them the respect of the Nazis. Major Ballerstedt, C.O. 2nd Battalion, 115th motorized infantry regiment, wrote to his superiors: "The Australian, who are the men our troops have had opposite them so far, are extraordinarily tough fighters. The German is more active in the attack, but the enemy stakes his life in the defence and fights to the last with extreme cunning."

The thoughts were echoed by a captured German officer struggling to explain how he found himself a prisoner of war: "I cannot understand you Australians. In Poland, France and Belgium once the tanks got through the soldiers took it for granted they were beaten. But you are like demons. The tanks break through and your infantry keeps fighting."

The Nazis had proven themselves to be supreme masters of propaganda and turned to such methods when success on the battlefield proved elusive. The Nazis had discovered that Germans responded to words of optimism, success, freedom, supremacy and excellence. Consequently, they described the Australians as the complete opposite believing it would lower the Australian morale.

They likened the fighting style of the Australians to that of a rat; a vermin that steals from the shadows. The propaganda expressed supreme confidence that the German victory was assured and the Australian defeat was imminent as the "rats" were caught in a German trap.

Naively, the Germans failed to appreciate that propaganda that would demoralize a German would motivate an Australian.

Australians identify with the battler who demonstrates that even in defeat, victory can be achieved. As they identified with the battler, the Diggers knew that as long as they continued to make trouble, they were achieving success. If they kept saving their mates, they were achieving success.

Most importantly, if they tried their utmost against the odds and never surrendered, they had

achieved success. Consequently, the German prediction of failure merely gave the Digger more incentive to persevere.

In the words of Chester Wilmot: "Berlin Radio made a fatal mistake in trying to jibe and scare the Australian soldier into surrender. The longer the odds Lord Haw Haw offered against the Diggers chance of getting out, the more heavily the Digger backed himself."

The Diggers had come from a culture where the champions were the underdogs who stood up against those who expressed their 'superiority'. Consequently, the Germans preaching their superiority merely gave the Australians more motivation to cut them down.

Often instead of glorifying themselves as heroes or champions, Australians self depreciated by affectionately referring to themselves as "dickheads", "bastards", "mongrels" and "drongos".

Hence when the Germans called them 'rats', the Australians were not offended. To the contrary, they embraced the description; dubbing themselves the "Rats of Tobruk". It was seen as a sign that the underdogs were indeed making life difficult for the domineering power.

Above all things the Australian Diggers looked after their mates, the code of the bushmen and the miner, which first became apparent during the Gallipoli campaign and later in Europe and the Middle East. They carried with them the spirit of the Anzacs.

They retained their sense of humour under trying conditions as can be seen from this example, when on July 30, 1941 - Rules of cricket between Australia's 20th Brigade and Britain's 107 Royal Horse Artillery were established:

- Rule 1. Play to be continuous until 1800 hours, except by interference by air raids. Play will not, repeat not, cease during shell fire.
- Rule 2. Shirts, shorts, long socks, sand shoes if available. Pith helmets will not be worn or any other fancy head gear. Umpires will wear white coat (if available) and will carry loaded rifle with fixed bayonet.
- Rule 3. All players to be searched for concealed weapons before start of play, and all weapons found, other than ST grenades, mills bombs, and revolvers will be confiscated. (This does not apply to umpires).
- Rule 4. Manager will make medical arrangements and have ambulance in attendance.

The gallant story of the Rats of Tobruk and their victory against overwhelming odds deserves to be told in our schools and the community each year at this time.

Ladies and gentlemen would you please rise and join me and drink a toast to "The Rats of Tobruk"

*Bibliography Source: History/Tobruk – The Desert Rats defy Hitler*

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A man called home to his wife and said "Darl, I've been asked to go fishing in New Zealand with my boss and several of his friends. We'll be gone for a week. This is a good opportunity for me to get that promotion, so could you please pack enough clothes for a week and set out my rod and fishing box. We're leaving from the office and I will come by the house to pick the things up. Oh and please pack my new silk pyjamas."

The wife thinks this sounds a bit fishy but being a good wife, did exactly as her husband wanted. The following weekend he came home a little tired but otherwise looking good.

The wife welcomed him home and asked if he caught many fish?

He said "Yeah! Lots of trout but why didn't you pack my silk pyjamas like I asked you?"

The wife replied "I did. They're in your fishing box"

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*Having a smoking section in a restaurant is a little like having a peeing section in a pool.*

## Subscriptions are now due

Please note that receipts will not be sent unless a reply paid envelope is enclosed with your subscription. All subscriptions and donations will be acknowledged in the Furphy Flyer in Mufti.

### Subscriptions :

Les Adams, Nola Adams, Shirley Drayton, Danny Maher, Charlie Scales, Margaret Pickering, Terry Parsons, Pat Kelly, Ellen Webb, F Seymour, Arch Stiglich.

### Donations :

Alan Rooke, Lois Rourke, Margaret Pickering, Terry Parsons, Jack Webb, Arch Stiglich.

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### Magazines have been received from the following units and read with pleasure.

- Tobruk House News                      Rats of Tobruk Association
  - Dial Sight                                      2/7 Aust Field Regiment Social and Welfare Club.
  - Mud and Blood                                2/23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Association
- 

### *The Association has received the following letter from the Chief Executive of the Shrine of Remembrance*

On behalf of the Shrine Trustees I would like to thank you for your continued support this year.

2008 was a very special year for the Shrine of Remembrance. We celebrated the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Visitor Centre and the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First World War Armistice on Remembrance Day. Growing attendances at the ANZAC Day Dawn Service and Remembrance Day and 140 commemorative services and pilgrimages continue to underline the importance of remembrance to the Victorian community.

Record numbers of visitors, more than 618,000 for the year, also highlight the acceptance and success of the Visitor Centre with overseas, interstate and local visitors. The Education Program has also been well patronized during the year with more than 34,000 students learning about the service and sacrifice of Victorian Veterans.

The Shrine conducted a number of major events during the year including the unveiling of the *Cobbers - In memory of those who fought and fell in the Battle of Fromelles 19-20 July 1916*. Our Calendar of Events including exhibitions, education and public lecture programs all have grown in attendance during the year. A total of ten temporary exhibitions have been held at the Shrine throughout the year including Old Parliament House travelling exhibition *'Billy Hughes at War'* and the Anniversary exhibitions such as the *'Battle of Beersheba'* and *'Peace: 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Armistice Day 1918'*. The Shrine's public program lecture series is designed to expand the knowledge and understanding of the Australian military history. More than 40 lectures, book launches and discussion panels have been held during 2008 which has seen record attendances.

The continuous success of the Shrine's public programs lecture series in 2009 is dependent on your support, both through your attendance and participation in the programs. I hope that you take up this opportunity to support us and I look forward to welcoming you here at the Shrine of Remembrance in the upcoming year.

*For further information please visit their website at [www.shrine.org.au](http://www.shrine.org.au)*

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Viagra is now available in powder form for putting in your tea.

It doesn't enhance your sexual performance, but it does stop your biscuit going soft.

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## **Sick Parade**

I know there are a lot of members out there with niggling aches and pains, and other conditions much worse. Please remember that we are thinking of you and our best wishes go out to everyone who is not feeling 100%.

A big cheerio to **Bob Clark** who is currently not well. Bob, a committeeman who has been doing hospital visits for many years, is currently in hospital.

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My welcome to the new Principal at Wangaratta High School, in the last Furphy Flyer in Mufti, was a little premature. Mrs Heather Sarau is the new Principal and the 2/24<sup>th</sup> Battalion Association looks forward to continuing our strong connection with the High School, especially having members from the school assisting with our ANZAC Day March in Melbourne.

The High School will be celebrating its 100 anniversary over the Labour Day weekend. On Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup> March, at 10.00am, our President and Vice President, Alan Macfarlane and Alan Nicholson, will have the pleasure of planting a fig tree at the school to recognise the strong bond between Wangaratta and the men of the 2/24<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The fig tree, carefully nurtured and grow by our President, was taken as a cutting from the original fig tree at Tobruk.

As an aside, Rhonda Diffey, a relative of the late Ernie Diffy, is on the organising Committee for the Centenary celebrations.

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## **Welcome to New Members**

It's with much pleasure that we welcome new Associate Members.

**Bryan Kesby.** Bryan is a relative of E G Dyke VX48249, who was Killed in Action in 1941.

**Shirley Drayton.** Shirley is the daughter of the late George 'Sport' Stewart, VX23015

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## **Correction.**

In the Vale section of the December issue of the official journal of the Victorian RSL, *The Mufti*, George Walter Francis, of Mansfield, was incorrectly listed as a member of the 2/24<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

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## **A problem with communication.**

This bloke walks into a public toilet where he finds two cubicles. One is already occupied so he enters the other, closes the door, drops them and sits down.

A voice from the next cubicle says, "G'day mate, how are you going?"

Thinking it a bit strange but not wishing to be rude, he replies. "Oh -not too bad," which brings the response, after a short pause. "So, what are you up to?"

Reluctantly he answers. "I was caught short, and I just made it. How about yourself?"

He then hears the voice in the next cubicle say – "Sorry mate but I'll have to ring back. There's some idiot in the next cubicle answering all my questions."

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The preacher came to call the other day He said at my age I should be thinking of the hereafter.

I told him 'Oh, I do that all the time. No matter where I am, in the living room, the kitchen or in the garage, I'm always asking myself – what am I here after?'

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*This item, a Toast to the Battalion, was made by Major General David Mclachlan AO (ret'd), at last years Wangaratta Dinner. Time constraints meant I was unable to include it in the November issue.*

To Alan Macfarlane, President, Cr Roberto Paino, Mayor of the City of Wangaratta, Mr Doug Sharp and Mrs Sharp, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

May I first say how privileged I feel to be here this evening as one of your guests in this historic town which is so important to you. You are an incredible generation of Australians.

Secondly, how honoured I am to have the opportunity to propose the toast to the 2/24th Battalion, 'Wangaratta's Own'.

There are many here that know well the history of this Battalion, but I would like to spend a few minutes remembering that history since the time of 1940, how you first came together here in Wangaratta as part of the 7th Australian division. The major recruiting drive commenced in May 1940 when it became apparent that an all out effort would be needed to win the war against Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy.

A great number of Victorians enlisted and went through the recruit reception depot at Caulfield and then to various training battalions hurriedly formed at country centres such as Colac, Shepparton and Wangaratta. Major Spowers was promoted to Lt Col and became the first CO.

The Battalion, from those early years of assembly at Wangaratta, was accepted by this community as their own; remarkable given that very few of the men came from the area. This acceptance was ever so evident when the time came for the Battalion to move to Bonegilla for its pre-embarkation training. A 14 foot pennant was presented as the final gesture of good will by the people of Wangaratta before you marched out.

It is also interesting to note there was a young sergeant, 22 years of age, by the name of Macfarlane who was selected to carry it on the first stage of your march. Alan soon became aware of the importance of this task and not understanding why the job seemed rather tiring. He was commissioned soon after and still serves today.

As you would know, that was because he was carrying an extra two whole bricks which someone had thoughtfully included in his pack!

In November 1940, Wangaratta to Palestine, on the vessel Strathmore, where you arrived a month later. Palestine was the beginning of an insurmountable history for the Battalion. In March 1941 you became part of the 9th Division AIF and saw service in North Africa with the defence of Tobruk, the Salient at Tel el Eisa, El Alamein. Then two years later you returned to Australia, retrained and went to New Guinea in August 1943.

From then to 1945 you saw action at Nadzab, Finschhafen, Warreo and finally at Tarrakan where you remained until the end of the war. The 2/24 Battalion returned to Australia and was disbanded in January 1946.

Your regiment colours registered this and in fact the entries on your colours are only exceeded by one other battalion who served during the second world war - the 2nd/25th battalion who has an additional campaign. We, as trustees of the Shrine of Remembrance, feel very honoured to have in our safekeeping your colours where they hang in the crypt for all to see.

The campaigns you were involved with will long be remembered in the annals of Australia's military history.

Your Battalion was known for its incredible courage, strict personal and regimental discipline and a desire to serve with the compassion associated with being in the military.

Furthermore, this contribution by the personnel of the Battalion was recognised with military decorations and awards that were won by 100 of your members.

Three Distinguished Service Orders with a Bar going to a fourth - Major Spowers. Military Crosses, Military Medals, many MID's and of course Orders of the British Empire. The Battalion produced some outstanding soldiers as well as officers where we saw the likes of Col Weir, George Warfe and Basil Findlay who went on to become a Major General.

The Battalion sadly lost 374 who were killed or died of wounds, 822 wounded, plus others who were scarred for life as a consequence of their service. 3,418 men served in the battalion and 269 were taken prisoner. One of your number, Lt Findlay, was perhaps one of the unluckiest men in the war - he was wounded three times, once by the Germans, once by the Italians and finally by the Japanese in New Guinea.

You have much to be proud of and I believe that is evident even today with your maxim "as ye train, so shall ye fight to go to war". Today, it could be extrapolated to "as we trained, we fought and today we live and we care for those who need our help".

So Ladies and Gentlemen, as I said earlier, I am honoured to be able to ask you to join with me in a toast to the 2/24th Battalion "Wangaratta's Own". You are wonderfully supported by your wives and families and we recognise them today.

**To the Battalion!**