



**Sergeant Robert (Bob) James Knox Semple
VX25240, 2/12 Field Regiment
Rat of Tobruk
President of ROTA**



Bob Semple was born in Melbourne in 1920. He grew up in Essendon and left school when he was about 16, securing a job in the 'rag trade' at a warehouse in Flinders Lane. He decided to join the army around 1936, approaching the Victorian Scottish Regiment in South Melbourne. He had to scrimp and save to pay for his kilt.



Since Bob was from Scottish stock, his grandfather encouraged him to learn the bagpipes. He took lessons and became very proficient at 'wrestling the octopus'. Playing the bagpipes is something that has been very important to Bob the whole of his life.

Bob was just 20, when his then unit, the 2nd / 12th Australian Field Regiment, was called to fight German troops in the Libyan port of Tobruk. They first disembarked in Palestine in December 1940 and later they were moved to Tobruk. Lacking much of their own artillery, they were forced to rely on captured guns. There was one unforeseen problem with this, the captured guns used the metric system and Bob and his regiment were trained in the imperial system.



The landscape, being under fire day and night, the single water bottle per man per day and the searing heat took a toll. Bob's strongest memories of his time in the Middle East, is living in a hole in the ground, under difficult conditions, almost overwhelming odds and scarce resources. He once said 'Living in a hole in the ground does awful things... and the challenge brings out that quality of mateship and will.'

After Tobruk, the 2nd / 12th Australian Field Regiment fought at El Alamein. Bob and his regiment left the Middle East in January 1943. Bob went on to fight in New Guinea, and Borneo. He was honourably discharged from military service on 13 November 1945.



Back in civilian life, Bob went back to working in the 'rag trade'. He worked for Sargood Gardiner Ltd who were located in Flinders Lane, Melbourne. He stayed with them for 27 years.

Walking in Moonee Ponds one night after his discharge, he was moved to see the Hawthorn City Pipe Band playing in the park. He could play the bagpipes and because of his Scottish ancestry, he decided to join the pipe band. He is still a member. Bob Semple also helped to form the Rats of Tobruk Memorial Pipes and Drums band in 1960. In 1998, he was made Chieftain of Pipe Bands, Australia. In 1983, Bob was awarded the British Empire Medal. Then in 2016 he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal. Bob Semple became president of the Rats of Tobruk Association in 2016.



Bob Semple meets the then Prime Minister
Sir Robert Menzies, 1966

Bob Semple has lived his life by four principles: mateship, loyalty, integrity and respect. He is still living in Essendon and of course he is a supporter of the Bombers.

To read more about Bob Semple go to the following links:

<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/bob-semple>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/bob-semple-part-two>