



Stories from the Plaques Joe Rorkin NX73811 (age 16)

In the Memorial Rose Garden, on the north wall (on the first row, plaque position 123) there is a plaque dedicated Joe Rorkin NX73811. It is a simple plaque with only a few details about this youthful digger, who was only 16 when he died in 1942, towards the end of the vicious Kokoda Track campaign.

However, while his life was brief, archival and other records reveal Joe Rorkin was a young man with an interesting background story.

Yoseph Rovkin was born in Poland of Jewish descent on 3 December 1925. He was one of three children, and his family were Russian refugees who had emigrated from Poland, eventually settling in Melbourne. Yoseph (anglicised to Joseph or Joe) went to school in Melbourne, but by 1941 the family was living in Albion Street in inner Sydney.

It was in Sydney where Joe enlisted at only age 16 on 17 September 1941 at Paddington (an interesting side note is that his father Gregory [Grisha] also enlisted in WW2, also at Paddington, on 28 March 1942 and served in the Volunteer Defence Corps [VDC], at age 47, until 3 July 1943).

However, on his enlistment papers, in his neat capitalised handwriting, Joe declared his surname was 'RORKIN', that he was born on 2 July 1922 (making him age 'EIGHTEEN') in Shepperton, and his religion was Greek Orthodox. Interestingly, his Army Service and Casualty Form states he was born on 3 December 1923.

He listed his occupation was 'factory hand', possibly one of the only true statements he declared on enlistment! His photo at enlistment shows a typical young dark-haired man, while a studio portrait reveals a proud young soldier in his slouch hat looking straight into the camera, with a slight grin.

Joe was originally assigned to 1 Officers Training School in 1941, but later arrived in New Guinea in early June 1942. Apart from a bout of measles, his Service and Casualty Form notes he was eventually assigned to Marourbra Force, the famous unit that initially blunted the Japanese advance on Port Moresby. His unit was then involved in the fierce fighting along the Track, including around Templeton's Crossing as they faced

determined rearguard action by Japanese forces as they were pushed back across the Owen Stanleys.

The circumstances of his death are not known, but on Saturday 7 November 1942, Joe was badly wounded in the head, and treated at the Main Dressing Station (MDS) by members of the 2/4 Field Ambulance unit. He sadly succumbed to his wounds at 1500 hours on that day. He was just a few weeks from his 17th birthday, a fact probably known to his mates, given his plaque states he was 16.

The plaque in the Memorial Rose Garden is from his 'A Company ... 3rd Battalion Mates'. You can view his plaque [here](#). It is a small but touching tribute to a young man who gave his life for his new country.

More widely, Joe's service and his sacrifice are far from forgotten. He is also honoured at the Australian War Memorial's (AWM) [Roll of Honour](#) (plus is noted as one of the 'Boy Soldiers' on the AWM [website](#)). His Jewish heritage and service is commemorated at the Sydney Jewish War Memorial, the [Australian Jewish War Memorial](#) in Canberra and the Victorian Jewish War Memorial in Port Phillip. He is also mentioned in the book Jewish Anzacs: Jews in the Australian Military (by Mark Dapin, published in 2017).

He, like many of his mates, is buried at the Bomana War Cemetery in Port Moresby, where his headstone is engraved with the Star of David, and with the sombre inscription: ['His duty nobly done. Always remembered by his parents and sisters'](#).

For one so young, Joe/Joseph/Yoseph Rorkin (Rovkin) experienced what many would not see in a lifetime. We can only speculate as to why he enlisted and then changed his surname, place of birth and religion, but it is easy to understand why he lied about his age (his niece has indicated he used his sister's date of birth).

In any case, we thank him for his service, and we are proud that the Walkway commemorates his life and service in the Memorial Rose Garden.

Lest We Forget.

Joe Rorkin/Rovkin images

1047-407
AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES
MOBILIZATION ATTESTATION FORM
 To be filled in for all Persons at the Place of Assembly when called out under Parts III. of IV. of the Defence Act, or when voluntarily enlisted.
 Army No. 1068 FOR SUBSEQUENT SERVICE SEE ATT
 Surname ROROKIN ROVOKIN Name JOSEPH ROROKIN
 Unit 3RD BATTALION
 National for war service at 17 SEP 1941 (Date)

Questions to be put to persons called out, preceding their entry for enlistment.

1. What is your name? JOSEPH ROROKIN
 2. Where were you born? Other town, I.O.S.T.P.H.
 3. Are you a British Subject? YES
 4. What is your age and date of birth? Age, EIGHTEEN; Date of birth, SECOND JULY 1923
 5. Present occupation? FACTORY HAND
 6. Are you married, single or widowed? SINGLE
 7. What is your present address? NO
 8. What was the reason for your discharge? NO
 9. What is your present address? NO
 10. What is your religious denomination? YES
 11. What, if any, of the following Educational Qualifications do you possess?
 1. Leaving Home. YES
 2. Technical. YES
 3. Leaving Home. YES
 4. Technical. YES
 5. Other Diploma. YES
 12. Have you ever been examined by a Civil Court?
 (a) NO
 (b) NO

Witnessed by Joseph Rorkin Joseph Rovkin
 National Archives of Australia NAA: 8865, NX73811

A.A. Form A.206
 (Form 206, 1937)
AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES
ATTESTATION FORM
 FOR SPECIAL FORCES BASED FOR SERVICE IN AUSTRALIA OR ABROAD
 Army No. 1068 PREVIOUS SERVICE SEE ATT
 Surname ROROKIN ROVOKIN Name JOSEPH
 Unit 3RD BATTALION
 National for war service at 17 SEP 1941 (Date)

Questions to be put to persons called out or proceeding to enlistment.

1. What is your name? ROROKIN
 2. Where were you born? Other town, I.O.S.T.P.H.
 3. Are you a British Subject? YES
 4. What is your age and date of birth? Age, EIGHTEEN; Date of birth, SECOND JULY 1923
 5. Present occupation? FACTORY HAND
 6. Are you married, single or widowed? SINGLE
 7. What is your present address? NO
 8. What was the reason for your discharge? NO
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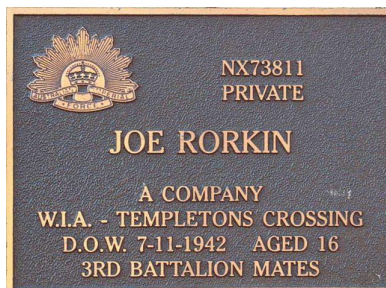
Joe Rorkin's (Rovkin's) Mobilization Attestation Forms (source: NAA)



Joe Rorkin/Rovkin in uniform (source: VMWA)



Joe Rorkin's/Rovkin's image on enlistment on his Service Record (source: VMWA)



KTMW plaque in the Memorial Rose Garden for Joe Rorkin (Rovkin)

Sources:

Australian Jewish News:

<https://www.australianjewishnews.com/putting-light-to-the-year-that-has-passed/>

Australian War Memorial: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1699080>

Commonwealth War Graves Commission:

<https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/2164354/joseph-rovkin/>

DVA Nominal Roll: <https://nominal-rolls.dva.gov.au/veteran?id=185722&c=WW2#R>

<https://nominal-rolls.dva.gov.au/veteran?id=393574&c=WW2>

National Archives of Australia:

<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=4654384&isAv=N>

Virtual War Memorial Australia: <https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/645442>

WW2Talk.com:

<http://ww2talk.com/index.php?threads/remembering-today-11-7-42-private-joseph-rovkin-nx73811-australian-infantry-a-i-f-3-bn.70393/>