

## **Address given by Dr. Mark Johnston at 9th Division Pilgrimage**

*Mark is an associate member of the 2/24th Battalion Association and patron of the 9th Division Association*

We are here to remember the 9th Australian Division, which during World War II was the best known of all Australian Divisions. In fact wartime newspapers usually referred to it as "the famous 9th Division". It was not only admired by Australians. The great German General Rommel called it "an elite formation", and the man who beat him at Alamein, the British General Montgomery, referred to "that magnificent 9th Australian Division". Of course Army units only get that kind of reputation by fighting hard and achieving remarkable things. The 9th did that: in 1941 it held Tobruk when the Germans were sweeping all before them everywhere else. In 1942 it fought the terrible battles around Tel el Eisa, when Rommel had finally taken Tobruk off other troops and was advancing on Suez. As Montgomery's tribute suggested, it was critical in the victory at El Alamein, one of the war's great turning points.

Then in New Guinea, it had the lion's share of fighting in the 1943 campaigns, and in 1945 made two landings in Borneo, where it swept all before it. These victories brought fame and they brought honours: the 9th Division, for example, won more bravery awards than any other Division. But it all came at a great human cost. Of the 45,000 men who served in the 9th Division, the huge total of about 10,000 were killed or wounded. The two Victorian Battalions of the Division, the 2/23rd and 2/24th Battalions, between them suffered more than 2,200 killed and wounded. Every 9th Division veteran can talk of mates who died in this force. So in remembering what a great Division the 9th was, and its outstanding achievements in the desert and jungle, we must always recall the men, the troopers, gunners, sappers, signalers and riflemen who had the guts and the skill to ensure that the 9th Division never lost a campaign and contributed substantially to Allied victory.