



Tobruk

Peter FitzSimons

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"Tobruk" narrates the taking of Tobruk as part of a general thrust in North Africa by Allied forces. A panicked Winston Churchill wrote: "Tobruk seems to be the place to be held to the death without thought of retirement...nothing must hamper the capture of Tobruk". In the dark heart of World War II, when Hitler turned his attentions to conquering North Africa, a distracted and far-flung Allied force could not give its all to the defence of the key city of Tobruk in Libya. So the job was left to the roughest, toughest bunch they could muster. "Tobruk" is the story of an incredible battle in excruciating desert heat through nine long months, against the might of Adolf Hitler's formidable Afrika Korps. This force's defence of Tobruk against the Afrika Korps' armoured division is one of the great battles of all time, yet rarely talked about. Drawing on extensive source material - including diaries and letters, some never published before - this extraordinary book is the definitive account of this remarkable battle. While Peter Fitzsimons is a celebrated historian, his popularity stems from his fantastic storytelling. "Tobruk" is written in a narrative style, putting the reader next to men such as General Leslie Morshead as he decides the fate of his men, next to men such as Jack Harris, as he stands in the blood of an injured mate. While detailed and well researched, "Tobruk" reads like a novel.

Tobruk Details

Date : Published November 1st 2006 by HarperCollins Publishers (first published January 2006)

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Author : Peter FitzSimons

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Bill says

Fitzsimons can certainly tell a story, in his over-the-top Aussie Bloke fashion, and his books have opened Australian war history up to a whole new audience, which is great. His research is impressive, particularly the personal stories and letters of individuals soldiers and their families. These stories were my favourite part of the book. However, as work of history, this book is terrible! Fitzsimons' attempts at historical comment were superficial and openly biased. His attempts to guess at the thoughts and emotions of key figures seem to convey his own opinions more than anything. And - the ultimate sin for a blokey war history book - the battle descriptions are cliched, over-dramatic and vague.

Jason Harris says

Raw. Intense. Moving. Amazing.

I wish every Australian would read this book. The history is fascinating. But it's more than that. WWII was so profoundly defining for modern Australia. Gallipoli was defining in the early days, but to understand our current place in the world, WWII is crucial, and Tobruk is a definitively proud and instructive aspect of that story. And this pride is not the pride of mere nationalism, but of something deeper, stronger, more human, more worthy. The Rats of Tobruk were, without a doubt, pretty decent blokes.

Reading this book in public gave me the privelege to meet several of these soldiers' families to whom we owe gratitude and respect.

Debbie says

A compelling (but not too heavy) read about the Australians in Tobruk. Historical research is amazing with personal stories from both stories as well as home. Fitzsimons describes the horror, mateship and human spirit really well with a sprinkling of humour throughout. I feel really well informed on the events of Tobruk now.

Steve Markham says

An honest, open and well researched and heartfelt account of the Australians part in one of the most important battles in the North African theatre of the second world war.

Am planning to read another of his books as it was engaging and enjoyable to read.

Christopher Owen says

4 stars, mainly because the source material is so phenomenal, rather than FitzSimons' writing

Bruce Baker says

I had no idea of Australia's involvement in WW2 Africa and Europe. The personal stories of the free spirit of the troops and their courage and strength was an inspiration to read. A great listen.

Paul W says

The weeping nationalistic generalisations and folksy anecdotes, are at best distracting and at worst misleading for anyone interested in anything other than a superficial overview.

If you are a person who would otherwise not have taken an interest in this critical period in Australian military history then Fitzsimon's book may hold some appeal.

For everyone else there are so many better books that FitzSimons' on the mediterranean campaign and on the battle at Tobruk.

Nocheevo says

Having had a grandfather in the Ninth division, on of the "Rats of Tobruk", I was keen to pick this up as soon as I heard ex-rugby bloke and journo Fitzsimmons was working on it.

The book covers the lead into the war in North Africa and predominately the first seige of Tobruk - before the Australian's were withdrawn to the Pacific. Being a siege its a story of stubbornness rather than epic clashes of fire and fury. I found the most interesting parts to be regarding the command of Morsehead, the goal of dominating no man's land.

The author has had access to a lot of personal communications and has used these extensively to personalise the Tobruk experience by focusing on a couple individuals. A letter from one soldier "The Hun fights with grim determination, the Tommies fight by number, but the Aussies tear about like kids at a picnic, swearing and laughing the whole time"

Essentially this is written as a populist history book. Following the example of the quote, the author writes in a casual style of the "Aussie vernacular" and unfortunately invokes the tone of some of the nationalistic tendencies that has been creeping into ANZAC Day* commemorations and myths in recent times.

* ANZAC Day - 25th April - the veteran's day equivalent in Australia and New Zealand

Kieran says

I would have read dozens of books on the topic of the Second World War, mostly popular histories like this one or the biographies of former participants. I rate Peter Fitzsimons' Tobruk as the worst I have read mostly because it reads like a rugby tour sports memoir where the Aussies are playing away matches against the Italians and Afrika Korps in North Africa and the middle east.

It seemed as though Fitzsimons was aiming for a story telling narrative with Tobruk similar to that of Stephen E. Ambrose's Band of Brothers following a group of young soldiers from their civilian life in Australia through their army training and to the battles against the Italian and German armies in the North African campaign. The problem is that Tobruk does not match the quality of Ambrose's compelling writing which gives the reader a much better sense as to what it was like to be involved in these events.

I also found Fitzsimons' narrative to be far too jingoistic for my liking and subsequently I decided not to read Fitzsimons' other world war two popular history Kokoda.

The well-respected Manfred Rommel wrote an introduction section for this book and I certainly hope he never actually read this jingoistic nonsense from an Author whose low points include describing a dream of a German officer a few hours before he is killed in battle.

Andrew Parnell says

I can't rate this book high enough and not because I'm Australian. The defense of Tobruk in the second world war, was the first time that the German juggernaut was stopped with their blitzkrieg style of warfare. Peter FitzSimons narrative is gripping, he managed to create protagonists from every aspect of the conflict.

Ken says

Like the author's style on this interesting piece of WWII history

Jeannie May says

A MUST read for all Australians. Fascinating, heartbreaking, uplifting, incredibly informative and well researched. I cannot recommend this book enough!!!

Kel says

I was hoping this book would provide some insight into the experiences my Grandfather had as a Rat of

Tobruk.

Overall, it was an excellent book - well researched and provided a great depth of information on the operations in North Africa during WWII. My only disappointment was that the book only focuses on a few of the battalions that were at Tobruk, it would have been great if all of them had been researched, although I understand that this would have been a huge undertaking for the author and his research assistants.

Stanley Turner says

Excellent book on the early years of World War II in the Middle East. I have read several works on the Middle East, but most were dealing with the Middle East after the U.S. became involved with Operation Torch. FitzSimons obviously spent many hours researching his subject and does an excellent job writing the story of the Australia involvement in Tobruk and the overall Middle East campaign. Highly recommended for anyone interested in World War II...
