Murray's memoirs detail a remarkable life

**I Confess – A Memoir of the Siege of Tobruk**
by Major General John Joseph Murray
Big Sky Publishing, $29.99

Major General John Joseph Murray DSO & Bar, MC, VD was a great man. Born to Irish immigrants at The Rocks in Sydney in 1892, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force in 1915 and saw a great deal of action during World War I. His first taste of combat was at Fromelles on July 19, 1916, where in just one night, 5533 Australian soldiers were either killed, wounded or captured. Murray was awarded the Military Cross for his deeds. He survived and between the war years he went into the transport industry.

At the age of 47, when World War II was declared in 1939, he volunteered for service. In October 1940 his brigade left Australia bound for the Middle East. He was to be awarded a DSO (distinguished service order), and a bar was added when he delayed the advance of the German forces at Mersa Brega and Er Regina, as the 9th Division withdrew to Tobruk in North Africa.

The book *I Confess* is Murray’s memoirs. He wrote it in April 1945, recording his amazing life, especially his experience as Commander of the 20th Brigade, 9th Division, during the siege of Tobruk. His grandson Andrew Murray is the editor. John Murray originally wrote the work on an Army typewriter while his memory was still fresh.

Tobruk is now etched into the nation’s military consciousness and stands with El Alamein, New Guinea, Gallipoli and many other battles as outstanding examples of our military success and endurance.

The siege of Tobruk was about courage and self-sacrifice and, according to Murray, what saved Tobruk was “this sticking power, this refusal to give way, no matter how black the outlook”. The overall commander of the Australian troops in North Africa was General Morshead, but when he was absent, such as travelling to Cairo, Murray was placed in sole command of the garrison.

His description of conditions and battle are first class, but he always had a humorous side and a soft touch. Murray preferred to sleep under the stars as “I always did have kindly feelings for the stars, as I lived mostly with them”. Murray was recalled to Australia as the threat from Japan loomed, but Tobruk was always in his mind.

When he sailed from the port, he felt remorse in that he simply was not there to help. Movingly, he wrote: “Aboard my ferry I sought out a quiet place and, as we stole out of Tobruk, I felt the need to be alone; looking back into the night, the distant gun flashes made me think first, ‘I could help if I was there’. Then I thought of the friends I had left behind forever, their bones to bleach in lonely desert graves. And so, with the steel deck of the destroyer beneath my feet, I looked back over the expanse of the desert that had been our home for so long. I did not think then, but do now, that it stands as a monument to British courage and endurance.”

Murray ended his war days as General Officer commanding the Northern Territory Force. He died in 1951 after a short diplomatic career.

The book contains many excellent photographs from the personal collection of Murray. A wonderful addition to any military library.

REG A. WATSON