

Book Reviews

Warfare and Tracking in Africa, 1952-1990. By Timothy J. Stapleton. London & New York: Routledge, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-84893-558-7. Hardback, 204 pages.

Tracking is defined as “the ability to pursue and close with an animal or human subject by following signs ... left behind in the environment” (page 1). The post-1945 wars of decolonization in Africa were largely characterised by guerrilla campaigns fought by nationalist movements bent on expelling or overthrowing European colonial rulers or white minority settler regimes. The security forces which operated against the nationalist insurgencies, employed a number of counterinsurgency methods to find the elusive guerrillas who often had their staging areas in remote, uninhabited, areas. Tracking was one of the methods used during these counterinsurgency operations to locate and engage insurgents. The use of tracking in counterinsurgency warfare is, furthermore, largely determined by the local geography, technology and colonial culture of each specific military operating environment (pages 2, 137).

Timothy Stapleton, a professor of history at the University of Calgary in the province of Alberta, Canada, provide a fresh perspective on the role that trackers and tracking played in the African battlespace during the second half of the twentieth century. His 2015 publication, ‘Warfare and Tracking in Africa, 1952-1990’, utilises the decolonization conflicts in the previously settler-dominated areas of Kenya, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and South West Africa (Namibia), as a lens through which to study the use of trackers in these conflicts. His book offers five key chapters which sequentially deals with various aspects of warfare and tracking in Africa. Three of the chapters also serve as case studies, where the influence of tracking on warfare is critically discussed.

The first chapter of the book deals with tracking and identity. Stapleton argues that Europeans employed ethnic stereotypes to African communities during the colonial era based on certain superior tracking and hunting skills such as the Bushmen of the Kalahari and the Shangaan of the Zimbabwe/Mozambique/South Africa border regions. These colonial

stereotypes, though racial in outlook, initially focused the recruitment efforts of the security forces to these marginalised minorities, which were well known for their tracking prowess through their association with white hunters. The mainstay of the chapter tackle these stereotypes. The focus of the second chapter is on tracking and colonial warfare. Stapleton states that during the first half of the twentieth-century colonial forces mainly used trackers to pursue hit-and-run African and Boer fighters. During this period special colonial military units were created in an attempt to mobilise local tracking and scouting skills. According to Stapleton, tracking in colonial warfare was used in conjunction with other factors, such as superior firepower, to suppress indigenous resistance. The three core chapters of the book have a sterner military focus and are constructed as case studies where the influence of tracking on warfare is discussed in depth. The three case studies focus on: Kenya (1952-1956), Rhodesia (1965-1980) and South West Africa (1966-1990). The primary focus of the three chapters is on the use of tracking by security forces during the counterinsurgency operations in these distinct operational environments. In each of the three chapters, Stapleton provides valuable insights into the selection, training and deployment of both military and paramilitary trackers during these conflicts. He also alludes to how tracking, and anti-tracking, was used by the insurgents in each of these areas to evade detection and capture by security forces. The book has a detailed conclusion in which Stapleton summarises his findings.

The book is very well researched and is underpinned by a myriad of archival and secondary sources, including a number of published personal memoirs of security force veterans and insurgents from the aforementioned conflicts. Stapleton was able to gain access to valuable archival material at the National Archives in London, United Kingdom, as well as at the Department of Defence (DOD) Documentation Centre (DOD Archives) in Pretoria, South Africa. He was, however, unable to access the Rhodesian Army Association Archives which for some time was held at the now defunct British Empire and Commonwealth Museum in Bristol, England. The current location of these archives also remains unknown. Stapleton also comments that most of the South African documentation related to the military operations in South West Africa remains classified. This is only partly true, but since the promulgation of the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) in 2002, I find such a statement in part problematic. Access to former classified documentation has indeed become easier, though it remains a time-consuming process. According to the DOD

PAIA Manual, a researcher can only obtain access to post-1969 archival material, after making recourse to the relevant PAIA legislation. A PAIA application can often take several months from the first visit to the archives to identify the material, to the point where one may view the documents. This lengthy time frame, often hampered by military bureaucracy, is, however, a great hindrance to researchers travelling from abroad on a tight budget and schedule. This is disconcerting indeed, and one can only hope that the DOD, and the Rhodesian Army Association Archives through inference, will address the issues relating to the access of information to documents relating to the military conflicts in southern Africa.

In the conclusion of his book, Stapleton postulates as to what contemporary military forces could learn from the history of counterinsurgency tracking in Africa. I believe that tracking will play an ever increasing role in the current internal and external deployments of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in the twenty-first century. This is particularly the case for the current deployments of the defence force within South Africa as part of Operation CORONA. Stapleton's book provide a unique perspective on warfare in Africa during the second half of the twentieth century. It addresses several areas which have previously received little or no academic attention. I can highly recommend this excellent book to all those interested in warfare in Africa, in particular, those interested on the war in southern Africa. As such, it is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on the war in southern Africa and can be considered for possible inclusion into course material for university courses focussing on aspects of war and society in southern Africa.

Evert Kleynhans, Stellenbosch University

A Far-Away War: Angola, 1975-1989. By Ian Liebenberg, Jorge Risquet and Vladimir Shubin, eds. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-920689-72-8. Pp. 207. ZAR 350.

"Possessing a good book", Ian Liebenberg has claimed, "is becoming more and more challenging".¹ Although his reasons for this claim is motivated primarily by economics, the statement rings particularly true for literature

¹ I Liebenberg, "The Last Fighting Tommy: The Life of Harry Patch". *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 43/1, 2015, p. 156.

on what has become known, at least in South African circles, as the “Border War”.² A plethora of books have been published by former South African Defence Force (SADF) members over the last two decades, but nearly all of these are based primarily on personal recollections. McGill Alexander, himself a SADF veteran, identifies another defining characteristic in his critique of one of these publications by stating that the author is “unashamedly apologist”³ in his writing. The few exceptions - notably books by Scholtz,⁴ Van der Waag⁵ and, to a lesser extent, Nortje⁶ - are overwhelmed by these apologists.

At first glance, then, *A Far-Away War* seems to be the seminal work that Border War literature lacks. The editorial board is ideally comprised to present a balanced account of the conflict from the perspective of the main foreign protagonists: Liebenberg from South Africa, Risquet from Cuba and Shubin from Russia. As the title of the book suggests, the two countries in which the Border War was actually contested, Angola and Namibia, are not represented and Liebenberg illustrates why the war was largely fought by the foreign countries that are represented by the editors:

The consistent build-up of South African forces led to an arms race in Southern Africa, but even if they had combined their resources, the Frontline States [Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe] could not match the military power of South Africa.⁷

It does not take long, however, for the expectations of a balanced account of the Border War to be expelled. To his credit, Liebenberg makes

² Although different authors use various different designations, "Border War" is the most common name for the conflict in Namibia and Angola, in which these two countries, South Africa, Cuba and Russia were the main protagonists.

³ M Alexander, "We Fear Naught But God". *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 30/2, 2000, p. 330.

⁴ L Scholtz, *Die SAW in die Grensoorlog 1966 - 1989*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2013.

⁵ I van der Waag, *A Military History of Modern South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2015.

⁶ P Nortje, *The Terrible Ones: A Complete History of 32 Battalion*. Cape Town: Zebra, 2012.

⁷ I Liebenberg, "On Our Borders; Namibia seeks its own Destiny". In I Liebenberg, J Risquet, V Shubin (eds), *A Far-away War: Angola 1975 - 1989*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, 2015, p. 24.

no secret of the fact that this is a book written from "the point of view of Russians, Cubans and East Germans"⁸, establishing the tone of the book in the introduction and staying true to it throughout. It is this absolute emphasis on the pro-East (at some points even anti-West) perspective that initially seems to make the book unpalatable for the reader that has grown accustomed to the proliferation of pro-West, pro-South Africa and pro-SADF literature. Fortunately the fine literary skills of Liebenberg, who contributes the introduction and the first chapter, soon compensate for the unfamiliar sentiments he expresses. The reader is then able to recognise that the seemingly excessive pro-East stance in *A Far-Away War* is actually comparable to the pro-West sentiments of many of the existing Border War books.

As with many composite books, *A Far-Away War* is essentially a collection of 8 independent essays that share a common theme. Nonetheless, the editors arranged the chapters in such a way that there is some continuity in the reading of the book. The chapters are relatively short - the book only contains about 120 pages of text - and are supplemented by around 30 pages of photographs. Liebenberg's first chapter provides an overview of the internal Namibian circumstances leading up to, and during, the Border War. Phil Eidelberg then provides a very brief Cold War backdrop to the Border War, though he prefers to use the term "Angolan War". Whether by accident or design, Eidelberg also refers to the "Cabinda exclave" on p. 37. As this is the part of Angola that was most supported and, indeed, coveted by the West during the war, it is conceivable that the author intended to distance the Westernised "exclave" from the rest of Angola. Whatever the case, the choices of terminology clearly affirms one of the aims of the book, to move away from the almost exclusive Western perspective on the conflict. Liebenberg returns with a well-constructed summary of the "Militarisation of South African Society", blending the existing literature with informative tables and photographs.

Chapters five and seven respectively deal with the Cuban and Soviet involvement in Southern Africa. The rather odd placement of the next Liebenberg chapter - an enlightening historical overview of Russo-South African relations - between these two chapters might have been an attempt to disguise their immense differences. Vladimir and Gennady Shubin are

⁸ I Liebenberg, "Introduction". In I Liebenberg, J Risquet, V Shubin (eds), *A Far-away War: Angola 1975 - 1989*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, 2015, p. 14.

rightly critical of unreferenced (footnote seven of chapter seven) and inaccurate, "propagandist" (footnote 34 of chapter seven) claims in their well-researched, though succinct, overview of the Soviet policy regarding, and support for, Southern Africa. Their critique, coupled with the importance of the subject, makes the fact that Hedelberto López Blanch relies on a single footnote to reference his entire, relatively lengthy, chapter on the "Cubans in Angola" seem bizarre. In addition, Blanch seems eager to address contentious topics, such as the South African assault on Cassinga and the battle of Cuito Cuanavale, in barely disguised "propagandist" fashion.

Klaus Storkmann and Ulrich van der Heyden examine the, often neglected, influence that East Germany had on conflicts in southern Africa. Their stimulating analytical narrative is backed up by strong archival research. The final chapter returns to South Africa, with Gert van der Westhuizen, Ian Liebenberg and Tienie du Plessis providing a sympathetic summary of the resistance to conscription and National Service. While not a unique topic, the overall perspective of *A Far-Away War* lends itself to a re-examination of the impact that conscription had on South African society. Significantly, this chapter is not only focused on *resistance* to National Service, but also addresses the "socialisation" of South Africa which led to a greater degree of social *acceptance* of conscription. The book is concluded by a large amount of photographs from the Russian, Cuban and South African perspectives and an extensive bibliography.

While *A Far-Away War* is not a definitive work in itself, it certainly manages to highlight the need differing perspectives on Cold War conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. It is laudable that the editors remained true to their ideal of writing and compiling a book from a new perspective. The very fact that the ideologies implicit within the book seem to lean so far to the left serves to emphasise the extent to which existing works lean, more or less subtly, to the right. For the most part, *A Far-Away War* is well written and well researched. The large dependence on secondary sources are understandable, given the short nature of the book. Even then, the selection of these sources is representative and they are used critically. Liebenberg, Risquet and Shubin have managed to compile a book that stimulates further reflection and research, while at the same time providing a valuable addition to the library of any serious student of the Border War.

Will Gordon, PhD candidate, Stellenbosch University

Iron Fist from the Sea: South Africa's Seaborne Raiders 1978-1988.

By Douw Steyn & Arnè Söderlund. Solihull: Helion & Company, 2015.
ISBN: 1909982288. ZAR 695.

The publication of *Iron Fist from the Sea. South Africa's Seaborne Raiders 1978-1988* by Douw Steyn en Arnè Söderlund capitalises on two important current trends in South African military literature. Firstly, most of the members of the so-called Border War generation, those who served in the South African military in various positions in the 1970s and 1980s, have retired. These men and women now have the time for reading, introspection and reflection and, more important, the will and time to write about their military experiences during a time of great turmoil in the history of South Africa. One of the interesting features of the South African armed forces at the time was the extent to which it could rely on the best that white society could offer for thinking, skills and leadership. The military, as a result, became a relative progressive institution in society in general. This reality is reflected in the nature and scope of this particular publication.

Secondly, there is within the military publication genre a specific and distinct interest in special and special operations forces. It is possible to link this interest to the mystique of these kinds of forces and to argue that what made them special is also the reason why the public in general is interested in reading about the adventures and exploits of these, usually small, groups of secretive, highly skilled, well-trained and specialised soldiers. The daring nature and cloud of 'we cannot talk about our operations' are precisely the reasons why the public are more interested in what these kind of soldiers have to say. Recently, a number of publications by special force operators have been published.⁹ Most of these publications fall within the autobiographical and 'history from below' categories with special force soldiers writing about their own personal experiences as part of the South African Special Forces. The authors of *Iron Fist from the Sea: South Africa's Seaborne Raiders 1978-1988* are very blunt in their view of these publications – "most of these books have only addressed the

⁹ See for example Stadler, K, *Recce: Small Team Missions Behind Enemy Lines*, Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2015; Diedericks, A, *Journey Without Boundaries: The Operational Life & Experiences of a SA Special Forces Small Team Operator*, Just Done Productions, 2007; Greeff, J, *A Greater Share of Honour*, Just Done Productions, 2008.

sensational actions of a few radical operators and have failed to document what it was really like to be a ‘recee’ operator or commando”.¹⁰ And with that the authors of *Iron Fist from the Sea: South Africa’s Seaborne Raiders 1978-1988* are implying that their publication is in many ways unique amongst the publications on South African Special Forces.

The purpose of the book, the authors explain, is to documents the history of 4 ‘Recee’ Commando, later to be named 4 Reconnaissance Regiment, and the operations undertook between 1978 and 1989. Thus, the authors claim, they were able “... to produce [an] accurate history of seaward operations undertaken” during this period.¹¹ The book is, however, much more than a unit history. It traces the development of a unique seaborne capability by the South African Special Forces; it provides an outline of the creation of a specific military unit that housed these South African “SEALS”¹² and offers a detail outline of the history of and unique operations these small group of men conducted, in cooperation with the South African Navy, between 1972 and 1990. The uniqueness of the unit is highlighted by the fact that, of the 480 soldiers who qualified as special force operators between 1978 and 1989, only 45 served in 4 Reconnaissance regiment.¹³

In general, though, the book is an outstanding and important contribution on an area of which very little is known in South African society in general; even by those who served in the military at the time. It provides an excellent exposition of the highly secretive operations that the South African Special Forces conducted, in cooperation with the South African Navy, along the coastline of Southern Africa – as far as Cabinda on the west coast of Africa and Tanzania on the east coast.

There is always some danger that authors that are closely associated with their topic, such as Douw Steyn en Arnè Söderlund, may be subjective

¹⁰ Steyn, D and Söderlund, A, *Iron Fist from the Sea: South Africa’s Seaborne Raiders, 1978-1988*, Helion, West Midlands, 2014, p.ix.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² This specific military capability is normally associated with the well-known US Navy’s Sea, Air and Land Teams, generally known as SEALs that are responsible to conduct small-unit maritime military operations which originate from, and return to a river, ocean, swamp, delta, or coastline. See the history webpage of the US Navy SEALs at <<http://navyseals.com/nsw/navy-seal-history/>> Accessed 31 March 2016.

¹³ Steyn, D and Söderlund, *op. cit.* p.ix.

in their analysis. However, the most outstanding feature of the book is the primary research that the authors rely on in the writing of the book. They succeeded in getting access to previously classified documentation and were able to interview many of the men that were involved in the creation and development of the unit and the seaward capability and the planning and conduct of these operations. This is reflected in the detail with which the planning and conduct of many of the operations are discussed.

The writing and the book in general is enthralling. Yet, at times it tends to be very factual. This may be the result of one of the motivational factors for the book that the authors outlined in the preface. Few journalist, the authors note, were able to find reliable sources or establish contacts within the Recce community, especially after the failed 1985 operation in Northern Cabinda. As a result, they resorted to publishing stories based on assumptions and unreliable sources – the Angolan news reports being specifically mentioned in this regard. Thus, the authors argue, "... the secretiveness and silence we had prided ourselves on previously now prevented us from defending our honour."¹⁴ This almost turn into a negative motivational factor for the writing of the book when the authors remark that "... we are doing every member of Special Forces – past and present – a great disservice if we continue to remain silent" and that "... it is time to document [the] history accurately using factual information rather than public versions – many of which are based on speculation or bravo – and to give a detail account of our clandestine operations whether successes and failures."¹⁵

Of course, the factual nature of the book is also its most outstanding feature and one that many historians will thank the authors for in years to come. The thoroughness of the research is impressive. Of course, it is possible that some special force operators, past and present, will resent the lifting or piercing of the corporate vial and the pros and cons of such a detail discussion of the South African Special Force doctrine and standard operational procedures is probably up for debate. There is no doubt, though, that this particular publication contributes to a better understanding of special force operations within the larger military fraternity and the public in general during a time that many operations were conducted by

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.xi.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

these forces and in which very little information was shared with the outside world about the nature of these forces and the employment.

The book definitely challenges the opinion of many that special force operators are the most fearless and deadly killers. Instead, the image of special forces – working in close cooperation with certain naval contingents – portrayed by the book is that disciplined professionalism and clinical military effectiveness is not always a guarantee for operational success. The Clausewitzian fog, friction and change, together with modern-day money, politics and gadgets, always have their say in these kinds of operations. And this is precisely why the book is highly recommend for military practitioners and the public alike – to provide an understanding of how military effectiveness is the result of both institutional professionalism *and* external factors over which armed forces seldom have any control.

Abel Esterhuyse, Stellenbosch University

24 Hours at Waterloo, 18 June 1815.

By Robert Kershaw. London: W.H. Allen, 2014. ISBN 9780753541449, pp. 421.

In the spirit of the ‘24 Hours’ themed series, *24 Hours At Waterloo 18 June 1815*, takes a detailed look at the battle which ended the Napoleonic Era. Robert Kershaw’s extremely readable account provides a thrilling blow by blow or more accurately hour by hour discussion on the unfolding of the Battle of Waterloo. The publication of the book coincided with the celebration of the bicentenary of the Battle of Waterloo which held considerably more attention in Europe than in South Africa.¹⁶

Right from the start it should be clearly stated that this is a traditional military history written in the classical style of campaign and battle histories. Whereas the author does not apply the narrative of nationalist or imperialist methodologies the account remains true to the

¹⁶ The celebration of the bicentennial of the Battle of Waterloo saw many publications, some of which include, B. Cornwell, *Waterloo: The True Story of Four Days, Three Armies and Three Battles* (London: William Collins, 2014); T. Clayton, *Waterloo: Four Days that Changed Europe’s Destiny* (London: Little Brown, 2014) and R. Muir, *Wellington: Waterloo and the Fortunes of Peace, 1814 -1852* (New Haven: Yale University, 2015), amongst others.

profession of arms as it focusses on the combat experience and negates social and economic matters, only referring to them as relevant to and in relation to the battle. No surprise that Kershaw as a former colonel in the paratroopers, reveals the ‘soldier’s’ view of the engagement. The author adds a fresh perspective to a well-known story by demonstrating that history is, as E.H. Carr declares, a never-ending dialogue between the present and the past aiming to understand what has happened through a modern lens.¹⁷

The book commences with a prologue which includes the timeline, map and introduction which provides the context for the narrative to unfold. The body of the book is then divided into 10 chapters which breaks up the day of the battle into a division of hours and represent themes of attack and defence respectively. The book is concluded with an epilogue, endnotes, a bibliography and an index as well as a brief biographical introduction of the main characters who participated in and reported on the battle.

Kershaw’s account makes use of primary published and secondary sources in his well-written and well-structured narrative. The voices of the survivors are brought to life by their accounts and memoirs of the battle. The book is filled with nuggets of fascinating and interesting facts which give the account depth and context. The surviving officers were prime candidates for leaving behind their memoirs as they were literate in a time where illiteracy was common. In addition, and interestingly Kershaw adds that many sergeants were required to be literate because of their administrative duties within their respective regiments and thus they also left behind accounts of the campaign and battle. These participants who left behind accounts of the battle for posterity were advantaged to be able to observe a considerable part of the engagement unfold because of the relatively geographically inferior size of the battlefield.¹⁸

The Battle of Waterloo was the final combat which engendered the spirit of the *Grande Armée*. The battlefield placed approximately 200 000 soldiers, 60 000 horses and 537 artillery pieces in a localised rural geographical space in what became an all-out battle of attrition between two

¹⁷ K. Jenkins, *On What is History: From Carr and Elton to Rory and White* (London: Routledge, 1995), 55

¹⁸ R. Kershaw, *24 Hours at Waterloo 18 June 1815*, (London: WH Allen, 2014), xxii.

well-armed, well-disciplined and well led forces. The rate of death and injury averaged between 60 – 120 casualties per minute.¹⁹

Chapter 1 discusses the first couple of hours of 18 June 1815, 00:10 to 02:00, and gives background and context by commenting on the previous engagements at Quatre Bras and Ligny. The engagements prior to Waterloo reflects Napoleon's success in outmanoeuvring the British-Allied force at Quatre Bras and Ligny. The dialogue then transfers to the technical level discussing the individual experience of soldiers, a theme that is carried throughout the book. The experience of the soldiers prior to the Battle of Waterloo is marred by the misery of the cold, rain and mud in which many of them spent that fateful morning. Wellington's force was exposed to diverse climatological elements which ranged from hot weather on 13 June, where his forces were compelled to retreat from Quatre Bras and Ligny in the face of Napoleon's surprise attack, to cold and wet conditions on the night of 14 June and the morning of 15 June 1815. The geographical setting for the tactical encounter is set in the first chapter, describing the approximately 21 square kilometres where the *Grande Armée* was to make its final stand.

The operational manoeuvre and battle at Quatre Bras and Ligny epitomises Napoleon's strategy of the central position which aimed at placing his forces between two opposing allies before they could amalgamate their forces, defeating them piecemeal. In the case of the battle preceding Waterloo, Napoleon divided his forces to attack the numerically weaker and unprepared British-Allied forces who were for the most part caught unawares. In discussing Napoleon and Wellington's decisions regarding the broad options of manoeuvre or battle, Kershaw reminds his audience of the administrative and logistical difficulties of gathering, mobilising and concentrating forces before the age of mechanisation.

The second chapter explores the gloomy hours from 02:00 until 10:00. Kershaw patches together a narrative from the many primary accounts and weaves together the grim picture of cold and anxious soldiers who were contemplating the forthcoming battle with reference to their previous experiences at Quatre Bras and Ligny. The thoughts and concerns of the men were often for their families, who would when allowed accompany them on campaign.

¹⁹

Ibid, xxii.

An interesting point brought forward by Kershaw was the role of woman on campaign and that many soldier's wives would apply for permission to go on campaign with their husband's regiment. Marriage was frowned upon by most officers who tried to convince their men against the option of matrimony. On the topic of woman on campaign Wellington is quoted as saying "it is well known in all armies that the women are at least as bad, if not worse than the men as plunderers".²⁰

Chapter 3 opens with a sketch of the battlefield and discusses the period between 10:00 and 11:30. The battlefield sketch offers the reader the opportunity to understand the relative geographic proximity and demonstrates, in a novel fashion, where the various narrators and participants stood in their battle formation. The opinions and views of Wellington regarding his polyglot force, which are by no means in short supply, are also mentioned in this chapter.

Wellington's opinions did not only extend downwards to his subordinates but also upwards to the British government, who he did not hold in the highest regard prior to the campaign as they did not provide him with the number of men and artillery which he requested. The British-Allied forces had 157 artillery pieces, which were 90 cannons less than that what Napoleon possessed.²¹ Kershaw makes the comparison of Wellington's troops to that of a modern NATO, where a polyglot force is employed to achieve national objectives in an international organisation.

The author brings to life the times in which Napoleonic and British soldiers lived and served. In terms of motivation for joining the army besides the fiscal reasons which included plunder, one advert, which when considered through today's perspective appears tongue in cheek, stated 'too much wife?'.²² The motivations and proclivities of the various military forces from different nations are discussed as the European Alliance and Napoleonic forces aimed for total victory.

The fourth chapter discusses the opening shots of the battle over the hours 11:30 until 13:50 as well as the terrain which shaped the battlefield. Kershaw alludes to the inaccuracy of timepieces of the day, but it is generally assumed that the opening shots were fired at approximately 11:00. The central aspects of the terrain which influenced the battle are

²⁰ *Ibid*, 45, 46.

²¹ *Ibid*, 80, 81.

²² *Ibid*, 98

outlined which include Mont Saint Jean Ridge and the built up obstacles of Hougoumont Chateau and La Haye Sainte farmhouse. Wellington had carefully selected the terrain where he placed his forces in preparation for defensive battle.

The importance of the climate and terrain is further highlighted in chapter 5 *The Muddy Slope* which covers the timeframe 13:50 to 14:15. There was extensive rain prior to the battle which resulted in waterlogged and soggy soil which hampered the movement of forces. During the planning process of military operations, terrain is seen as a neutral factor which can influence either side depending on the plan of the commander. The French forces commenced the attack with an artillery bombardment followed by an infantry advance. Much of the British forces were hidden in dead ground behind the ridge and the chapter discusses in detail the mauling of the French infantry as they crossed the ridge and met with British cavalry.²³

Chapter 6, *A Cascade of Cavalry* discusses the events from 14:00 to 15:00 and brings forward the sheer immensity of the violence which transpired on 18 June 1815. The author states that even for the Napoleonic Era, which was generally gruesome and harsh, the Battle of Waterloo was regarded as particularly macabre. Many of the soldiers, non-commissioned officers and officers were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or some form of combat stress prior to the battle which at the time remained undiagnosed.²⁴ Many more would show symptoms of combat stress after the battle.

The seventh chapter addresses the French cavalry charge during the hours 15:00 until 18:00, one of the critical events which influenced the outcome of the battle. Marshal Ney led the cavalry charge on his own initiative at an inopportune time, on waterlogged ground and towards a hidden enemy which were in a strong defensive position. Napoleon is said to have commented “this is a premature movement which may well lead to fatal results”.²⁵ The British infantry squares subsequently annihilated the French cavalry.

Kershaw highlights and elucidates the character of pre-industrialised Napoleonic warfare where the rudimentary level of

²³ *Ibid*, 169.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 199.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 228.

technology resulted in the forced use of masses of men to act as parts of a concentrated war machine. Volley fire made the single shot muskets effective through the concentration of fire. Iron discipline in line and square formations were required to absorb musket and cannon fire as well as cavalry attack. The book speaks to the brutality experienced by the soldiers on the battlefield as death or injury became a virtual certainty.

Chapter 8 discusses the events which took place from 18:30 to 19:30 as the day approached its zenith. The decimation of the French cavalry and part of the infantry had taken its toll on the British-Allied squares holding the ridge line. Wellington became concerned about his centre which was where Napoleon was directing his attention.²⁶ The impending onset of darkness created a desperation on both sides, with both fatigued forces anticipating the arrival of the Prussians although for disparate reasons.

The ninth chapter echoes the anxiety felt by the opposing commanders as the hours 19:30 until 20:30 are illuminated. Kershaw identifies the battle's 'tipping point' during this timeframe as Napoleon who was holding the Prussians on his right had to decide on his final actions with the remnants of his force which was the revered Imperial Guard. Wellington also had to decide whether to reinforce the Prussians on his left or whether to strengthen his centre.²⁷ The British-Allied forces maintained their defensive positions and their infantry squares broke the advance of the Imperial Guard whose retreat became infectious as the French offensive crumbled. The Prussian forces arrived on the scene from the East at the same time overwhelming the French forces.²⁸

Chapter 10 which is the last chapter discusses the French retreat from 20:00 until midnight. The British-Allied forces did not have enough in them to pursue the retreating French forces and the Prussians assumed the role. It was generally believed by British and French soldiers that without the arrival of the Prussians on the French right flank, the French forces would have stood their ground.²⁹

While reading Kershaw's account and on arriving at Chapter 10, I felt in some ways as if I had witnessed the battle and I could sympathise

²⁶ *Ibid*, 272.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 306, 307.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 326.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 333.

with the soldiers of both sides who upon the realisation of the French retreat breathed a sigh of relief as the epic day drew to a close. The physical and emotional strain must have been overwhelming and the only thing worse than surviving with psychological scars was being physically wounded with inadequate medical care. The epilogue discusses some of the political ramifications of the battle as well as the fate of many of the participants and survivors including the commanders and soldiers.

Within Kershaw's account of the battle are many sub-narratives which give context to the political dimensions of the Napoleonic Era. Furthermore, the micro-biographies of individual soldiers, non-commissioned officers, officers and commanders fill the book with an electrifying vivaciousness which thrills, saddens and elates its readers. In a time of *levée en mass* and concentrated warfare where the harsh military discipline echoed the times in which the soldiers lived, where the value of life was negligible, Kershaw gives a voice to those who anonymously fell in service to a "greater" cause.

Antonio Garcia, PhD candidate, Stellenbosch University