

BOOK REVIEW ARTICLE:

**A SELECTION OF SOME SIGNIFICANT AND
CONTEMPORARY PUBLICATIONS ON THE
MILITARY HISTORY OF
SOUTHERN AFRICA**

Cdr Thean Potgieter
Subject Group Military History,
Faculty of Military Science, Stellenbosch University

Introduction

The military history of South Africa and the region receives scant attention. Yet, a fascinating and multifaceted military past exists, a military history full of drama, destruction, excitement and despair. This is also a military history that tells the story of many different peoples and the struggles they waged; a history of various different military traditions; of proud warriors fighting against the odds; of changes and developments in the military sphere and of a long struggle for freedom. It is from this military history that a few significant sources will be selected for discussion in this paper.

Though numerous military history books on southern Africa have been published, there are considerable shortcomings in the military historiography of the region. Many of the sources on the military history of southern Africa lack a comprehensive understanding of war in the region and of the background against which many wars have taken place. Also, though various books might address military history themes, they do not provide the didactic approach to military history the scholar and military professional requires. In addition, some of the sources are politically biased and do not necessary provide the military historian with the analytical and descriptive picture of specific conflicts, their causes, course and effects. In the last instance too little research has been done on the military history of the region as a whole. This is to some extent due to factors like the language barrier (material relating to Angola and Mozambique is often in Portuguese) and a shortage of true practising military historians in the region. Furthermore, adequate

material on some military aspects might be classified, or were destroyed or simply do not exist. Then there is also a shortage of cash to fund and support research. However, the multifaceted, long and interesting military history of South Africa and southern Africa needs and justifies much more attention.

Despite the above limitations, considerable work has been done to document the military past of the region, and it is continuing. Deciding on which titles to select for this paper was very difficult though the criteria for choosing books were quite simple: the works considered did not only have to focus on southern Africa, but they also had to be by authors from the region. Since many recent works were available with regards to some of the themes, the works chosen had to make a unique contribution to our knowledge of the specific topic and show a unique approach to the subject. In some cases, the works chosen were simply “a cut above the rest”. In the end, the selection may have certain shortcomings and the fact that some very good sources were not selected for discussion is the fault of the author alone.

The themes of the books discussed in this paper are all relatively recent. Though South Africa has a long military history, much of it was not recorded and a great deal of the existing oral history on military themes has not been analysed properly. As a result of the unique history of South Africa, much of the written military history is about conflicts between European and indigenous peoples, or Europeans competing with each other for the Cape and also the wars Britain fought in southern Africa to establish its colonial authority or control over some of the rich resources of the region.

The earliest theme dealt with, is the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. Much has been written about this war as it has grabbed the imagination of a twentieth century audience. Perhaps this is due in part to the courageous Zulu *impi*, who with spears fought a modern British army and won the famous Zulu victory at Isandlwana or to the British success at Rorke’s Drift. The war has sparked a number of recent publications of which two are particularly noteworthy, *The Washing of the Spears. A History of the Rise of the Zulu Nation under Shaka and its Fall in the Zulu War of 1879* (London, 1966) by D.R. Morris, and *Rope of Sand: The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century* by John Laband (Johannesburg, 1995).

Of the books selected, two deal with the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). This is the largest war fought on South African soil in recorded history and lasted for about three years. Its opening phase was conventional, but after initial Boer successes early in the war, they were forced back by the rolling British war machine.

Following the capture of the capitals of the Boer Republics (Bloemfontein and Pretoria), the guerrilla phase of the war commenced. With the war came massive destruction of property and lives, on a scale not seen in South Africa before and since. As part of the British “scorched earth” policy, many civilians (white and black) were moved to the concentration camps to prevent them from providing support to the Boer commandos. This caused many fatalities and approximately 27 000 Boer women and children died in the camps (probably about a quarter of that segment of the population), while at least 20 000 black South Africans also died in the camps. Some of the Boer forces stayed in the field until the “bitter end” – when it was not possible to continue fighting anymore. The war had a dramatic impact on South African society, economy, politics and future.

The Anglo-Boer War literature is impressive and received much of a boost with the centenary commemoration of the war. Some of the most remarkable studies are the six volumes (in Afrikaans) by J.H. Breytenbach, *Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika, 1899-1902* (Pretoria, published between 1969-1996) and the highly readable account by Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London, 1979). Many publications deal with a specific front or specific aspects of the war, as does for example Fransjohan Pretorius, who focuses on the experience of the serving Boer in his *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Cape Town, 1999). The two books selected for this paper however deal with the concentration camp system and the autobiographical experiences of a young Boer burger fighting to the end.

The second half of the twentieth century has seen much upheaval in the southern Africa region. As the former European colonies received their independence throughout Africa, the same did not happen with Angola and Mozambique. They waged long liberation struggles against Portugal and eventually received independence in the middle 1970s, when the domestic situation in Portugal underwent fundamental change. Yet, this was not the end of conflict in these countries as internal conflict then ensued. Rhodesia on the other hand, was also a unique case as they unilaterally declared independence, which resulted in a liberation struggle that lasted until 1980.

In South Africa the Apartheid government came to power in 1948. The resistance struggle against Apartheid gradually picked up momentum and lasted for the best part of four decades. After the liberation movements were banned they moved underground in the early 1960s and organised themselves militarily for the struggle ahead. Many books have been published on the liberation struggle in South Africa. Some of these works are unfortunately biased and one sided as they were

sometimes created to serve a political cause. Specifically, works written before 1990 could fall into this category. Subsequently, a number of good South African and international sources have appeared on South Africa and its recent political history. An extensive personal view of the struggle is Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*. He is not only a great South African hero, but internationally he is a well-loved, esteemed figure. Of specific notice regarding the history of the struggle in South Africa is the literature series of the Mayibuye Centre. This series comprises more than one hundred and fifty titles and though some of the books might be thin and seemingly peripheral, as a whole it is an important document of the struggle, often told by those that participated.

As the struggle against Apartheid gained momentum in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the South African government adopted tougher measures. Not only did the struggle have a South African dimension, but it was waged across the subcontinent as South African security forces were often engaged in punitive actions into and against countries that harboured the liberation movements and provided support to them. Furthermore, efforts were afoot to destabilise such countries and opposition movements received South African (and in some cases also Western) support, while countries like Angola received much support from the Soviet Union and from Cuba. After the end of the Cold War, as the other struggles in southern Africa subsided, Angola was still embroiled in a civil war. Two of the publications selected for discussion in this paper, *African Nemesis* by Moorcraft as well as Cilliers and Dietrich's study on *Angola's War Economy*, is concerned with conflict in the southern Africa region.

South Africa's location on a major international sea route was the reason that the West became interested in South Africa in the first place. The sea did not only bring contact with the rest of the world, but also conquest and colonisation. The maritime defence of South Africa subsequently became very important and the British maintained a strong naval presence at the Cape for nearly two centuries. The South African Navy was only created in the 1920s and its history as a fighting force in essence dates back to the Second World War. A number of books have been written on the history of the SA Navy and its involvement in the Second World War. In general though, it often lacks substance. The most complete history of the South African Navy is *South Africa's Fighting Ships* by Allan du Toit, the only naval related publication selected for this discussion.

As far as research facilities in the region are concerned, many good facilities exist. Specifically at some of the best-known universities, well-appointed libraries with excellent special collections are to be found. The National Library of

South Africa came into being as a result of the amalgamation of the State Library of Pretoria and the South African Library in Cape Town. Legal deposit libraries in South Africa are the National Library of South Africa, Library of Parliament, the Bloemfontein Public Library, the Natal Society Library and the South African National Film, Video and Sound Archives (one copy of every document published in South Africa must be deposited by the publishers). The National Library in Cape Town (formally the South African Library) in particular has a wealth of unique publications on the history and military history of South Africa. Furthermore, many academic institutes and museums have special collections that could be very useful. State archives could also be consulted in the different countries of the region. In terms of South African archives, the archives of the central government are preserved in the National Archives Repository in Pretoria and the provincial archive repositories in Pretoria, Cape Town, Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Ulundi, Port Elizabeth and Bloemfontein. Many of these repositories are specifically of value for research on military topics predating the formation of the Union of South Africa (1910). For material on the history of the liberation struggle in South Africa, good sources are available at the UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Archives, the official collections management unit of Robben Island Museum (a unique record of apartheid, the freedom struggle and political imprisonment in South Africa). The South African Military Archive Depot in Pretoria has a comprehensive selection of military documents, but these archives essentially date back to 1912, when the Union Defence Force was created.

Book discussion

1. Mandela, N.R., *Long Walk to Freedom. The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Little Brown & Co, London, 1994).

The image, stature and reputation of Nelson Mandela make him an international hero and a revered figure. He was a great spiritual leader in the Anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa, played a crucial role in moving South Africa towards majority rule, was honoured with a Nobel Peace Prize and was the first democratically elected President of South Africa. As a moral leader Mandela is invaluable in the fight for human rights and efforts to eradicate so much of that which burdens much of humanity, like Aids. His autobiography is no less impressive and on its back cover (of the Abacus edition) it is referred to as the “riveting memoirs of one of the outstanding moral and political leaders of our time”, a work that “brilliantly re-creates the drama of the experiences that helped shape Nelson Mandela’s destiny.”

Much of *Long Walk to Freedom* was written secretly during Mandela's 27 years imprisonment. He started writing it on Robben Island in 1974 and though the authorities confiscated a copy he had with him, much of it survived and was smuggled out of jail. *Long Walk to Freedom* is an eloquent and vivid account of Mandela's life, from his birth starting with his "country childhood" to his inauguration as South African President on 10 May 1994. Rolihlahla Mandela was born on 18 July 1918 in a small village in rural Transkei. As the foster son of a Thembu chief, he was raised in the traditional tribal culture of his ancestors. Mandela explains how his awareness of the inescapable reality and discriminating nature of the Apartheid system grew. He elegantly relates the narrative of his early years as an impoverished student and law clerk in Johannesburg, of his slow political awakening, and of how he became politically active as one of only a few black lawyers in Johannesburg. As President of the ANC's Youth League he was pivotal in the organisation during the 1950s and he describes the struggle to reconcile his political activity with his devotion to his family, the anguished break-up of his first marriage, and the painful separations from his children. In 1952 he played a central role in the organisation of the 'defiance campaign' against the discriminatory policies of the South African government, arguing for non-violent resistance to apartheid. The escalating political violence of the 1950s is vividly brought to life.

After the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 and the banning of the ANC, his position changed and his resolve hardened. It was clear to Mandela that the non-violent approach of the ANC for the first fifty years of its existence did not work – the state gave them no alternative but violence, in other words an armed struggle against the apartheid government. Though a military campaign was inevitable, many in the ANC were not convinced of its feasibility. In the end they took the position that a military movement should be created as a separate and independent organ and Mandela was authorised to "form a new military organisation, separate from the ANC ... linked to the ANC but fundamentally autonomous." The ANC would now be "a different organisation".

Mandela states that though he was "a military novice" he was now given the daunting task of "starting an army." The new organisation was called Umkhonto we Sizwe (The Spear of the Nation) or MK and together Mandela (as Chairman), Walter Sisulu and Joe Slovo formed the high command of MK. Mandela studied as much theory on revolution, guerrilla warfare and warfare as possible, including the works of Mao Tse-tung, Ché Guevara, Menachem Begin, Clausewitz and also Deney's Reitz (*Commando*). Mandela was crucial in launching the struggle and he vividly relates his experiences and dramatic escapades as an underground leader.

Mandela shows good appreciation for the military aspects and he understood the purpose of such a struggle well. The logical escalation to the violent option is well explained as well as the motivation for the type of actions undertaken. He explains that four types of violence could be considered: sabotage, guerrilla warfare, terrorism and open revolution. Mandela argued that open revolution was not an option for a small and fledging force; "terrorism inevitably reflects poorly on those who used it, undermining any public support it might garner, guerrilla warfare was a possibility", but since the ANC was very reluctant to embrace violence, sabotage would be the best as it "inflicted the least harm to individuals." Mandela was eventually arrested and had to stand trial. Though he eloquently defended himself and explained his political convictions during the subsequent notorious Rivonia Trial of 1964, he was sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of incitement to sabotage, treason, and violent conspiracy against the South African government.

Some of the most powerful passages in the *Long Walk to Freedom* are probably the eventful story of Mandela's twenty-seven years in prison. This forms more than a third of his book and makes for impressive reading. In the notorious prison on Robben Island, where Mandela spent most of his imprisonment, the political prisoners formed a "university", as many participated in distance education programmes and the prisoners (essentially political prisoners) supported each other in their educational endeavours. While on the island Mandela read books like *War and Peace*, resisted being embittered and found decency in some of the Afrikaner jailers. He was moved to a mainland prison in 1985 and though he was unable to consult with the exiled ANC leaders, he participated in complex and delicate negotiations with the government that led both to his freedom and to the beginning of the end of Apartheid. This is indeed a fascinating story.

Finally, he provides good insight into the unforgettable events since his release and the intrinsic negotiations that led to the demise of the Apartheid State. Unfortunately the period since his release in 1990 is written with less openness and not in such a penetrating style, as the rest of the work. Perhaps this is due to diplomacy and the hectic schedule he followed since his release. Yet, his belief in creating a new society is inspiring. As he believed that all people, black and white, must have real freedom, and commenced with his long road, this commitment had a fundamental effect on his family, who "paid a terrible price." He ends with the conclusion that his "long walk" to freedom is only at its beginning: "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

During this period Mandela knew much sadness in his family life. He was separated from his family and for 21 years he was not permitted a contact visit with his wife Winnie. After his release he split with Winnie but still supported her during her 1991 kidnapping case. "In South Africa," he states, "a man who tried to fulfil his duty to his people was inevitably ripped from his family and his home."

For now, the last word on *Long Walk to Freedom* should be a remark from the renowned South African author André P. Brink, who stated that it "burns with the luminosity of faith in the invincible nature of human hope and dignity..." Perhaps that is what our world needs most as we move into a troubled twenty first century – faith, hope and dignity.

2. Laband, J. and Thomson, P., *The Illustrated Guide to the Anglo-Zulu War* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2000).

"Unless history can teach us how to look at the future, the history of war is but a bloody romance", Major-General J.F.C. Fuller stated in 1925. Studying wars of the past must therefore not only be purely historical, but also have a didactic function. With their authoritative study on the Anglo-Zulu War Professors John Laband and Paul Thompson (University of Natal¹, Pietermaritzburg) succeeded in creating an important historical source as well as a proper analysis of the military history of the war. The *Illustrated Guide to the Anglo-Zulu War* is therefore both a fascinating and informative record of one of the most interesting colonial wars Britain ever fought.

In 1979 Laband and Thompson published a *Field Guide to the War in Zululand* which quickly became a standard source on the Anglo-Zulu War and had three reprints (last in 1987). However, as our knowledge of the war (specifically of the Zulu side) grew, the entire text of the *Field Guide* was rewritten and expanded upon. New maps were also generated to reflect the new information on battles and operations.

In their examination of the war, the authors placed it within the context of the time and against the backdrop of colonialism and power politics of the nineteenth century. The book also makes an important contribution towards our understanding of Zulu warfare and Zulu strategic-military planning. The *Illustrated*

¹ Currently University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Guide to the Anglo-Zulu War comprises two parts, the first being an overview of the Anglo-Zulu War and the second focussing on battlefields and fortifications.

In Part I the authors explain the origins of the conflict, compare the opposing military systems and strategies, discuss the role of war correspondents, and present a narrative of the war. The discussion demonstrates a clear understanding of pre-industrial South Africa and the economic and political influences of colonialism. India (not Africa) was central to British commercial interest and status as an imperial power, hence safe sea-lanes of communication and adequate port facilities on the route (both via Suez and the Cape) were essential. The prime importance of South Africa (and Egypt) was in its strategic location. Britain had difficulty in maintaining its dominance in South Africa because of the political and economic fragmentation of the region – specifically the independent black kingdoms and the Boer republics were a major obstacle and posed a security risk. As the ill-defined boundaries of British colonies caused much conflict, imperial planners wanted to create a comprehensive political structure (a South African confederation) to “enable the sub-continent to fulfil its imperial strategic role.”

The authors display an excellent comprehension of the opposing military systems. The discussion on the Zulu Military System deals with the functioning and organisation of the *ibutho* system, weapons and dress, the role of rituals, mobilisation, logistics, tactics and the care of dead and wounded. With regards to the British side, the authors evaluate the British and Colonial Military Systems, their organisation and tactics as well as the role colonial forces played.

As two very different military systems with inherently divergent objectives opposed each other in Zululand, their strategies were at variance. Laband and Thompson make it clear that the strategy Lieutenant-General Lord Chelmsford and his staff devised smacked of British arrogance as it underrated the fighting ability of the Zulu, based on the British experience during the 1878 campaigns against the Ngqika and Gcaleka Xhosa. They nevertheless had a clear political objective (confederation) and aimed their military operations with this in mind. Furthermore the campaign was timed to facilitate defeating the Zulu “through the stomach” by attacking before the harvest could be brought in and sanctioning “the complete destruction of the enemy’s means of subsistence along the British line of advance.” By invading Zululand and dividing his army in three columns Chelmsford wanted to entice the Zulu into attacking the British as he believed the superiority of British firepower from defensive positions would be detrimental to the Zulu.

Although the Zulus were well informed about the preparations and intentions of the British, Cetshwayo (the Zulu King) understood his own limited strategic options too well. He turned to his African neighbours in a search for allies, but with no success. An important aspect that Laband and Thompson overlooked is that Cetshwayo also turned to the Boers of the Transvaal (Britain annexed the Transvaal in 1877) for assistance against the British. As Cetshwayo grasped that the British had access to large overseas resources, he adapted defence as the essence of his strategy, with a swift, hard-hitting but limited campaign as the objective. His armies could only win if they could force the British to give battle in the open and Cetshwayo ordered his generals not to storm prepared positions like laagers, forts or entrenchments, but to threaten British lines of supply and British territory to force them to fight. He hoped that a negotiated settlement could be reached, before British reinforcements arrived. The final section of Part I, *Field Operations*, is a complete narrative of the course of events (on the operational level) during the Anglo-Zulu War, elucidated by colourful campaign maps.

In Part II entitled *Battlefields and Fortifications by Sector*, Laband and Thompson focus on the tactical level of the war by analysing the important battles and skirmishes of the war and discussing the British fortifications. The discussion on fortifications and laagers contains clear and informative diagrams that would be valuable if one visits the sites. The sections on the battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift are no doubt of much interest and the battles are systematically discussed, while battlefield maps show attacking and defensive lines. Regarding the Battle of Isandlwana the authors deviate from some of the generally accepted myths of the battle. The informed reader will no doubt be gratified to find that they do not dwell on the dreary ammunition supply and ammo-box dilemma British historians are so fond of (blaming the defeat partly on the problems with the distribution of ammunition because of tight quartermaster control pertaining to it and the difficulties experienced with opening the wooden ammo-boxes). Instead, they discuss the actions of the opposing sides, and also show the military blunders the defenders made, such as the insufficient protection of the British camp (not forming a laager), the deployment of troops too far forward, no effective concentration of firepower, no unity of command and insufficient co-operation.

The *Illustrated Guide to the Anglo-Zulu War* is well illustrated with photos, sketches, maps, diagrams and drawings. The photos include some rare pictures, notably one of Lord Chelmsford and his staff, as well as a photograph of prominent members of the Zulu deputation of fourteen *izininiduna* that was presented when the British ultimatum was delivered on 11 December 1878. The well drawn, clear and colourful campaign and battlefield maps are a great attribute, contributing

much to the understanding of the war. Furthermore the diagrams (plans) of fortifications are very useful and give substance to the term “illustrated guide” in the title. Military history buffs and tourists could therefore utilise the book as a guidebook when visiting Anglo-Zulu War sites.

Perhaps some might view the *Illustrated Guide to the Anglo-Zulu War* as “unfashionable”, because it is about a bloody war and does not focus on enlisted men or common citizens, but on the experience of kings, generals, colonial administrators and their decisions. It emphasises war-making, campaigns and battles as well as the behaviour of those that waged war. This book provides a valuable analysis of politico-military interaction and decision-making in the Zulu State and Imperial Britain, explained against the background of the time. But, essentially, it narrates an important story and is a thorough account of the war, informing us of victories and defeat on the battlefield. As such it is a guide all readers will enjoy.

3. Spies, S.B., *Methods of Barbarism: Roberts, Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 2002).

Methods of Barbarism is a detailed historical documentary on the treatment of civilians by the British forces in South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). It examines the infamous concentration camps system and the difference in treatment of black and white civilians by the British military authorities. Its author, Burr ridge Spies was a Professor of History at the University of South Africa until his retirement in 1995.

As Spies tells us in the introduction, at a dinner party given by the National Reform Union on 14 June 1901, the leader of the Liberal opposition in Britain, Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman, answered his own conundrum: "When is a war not a war?" by stating: "when it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa." The term “Methods of Barbarism” referred specifically to the concentration camp system and the utter devastation of the country during the Anglo-Boer War. Meticulously researched and documented, this book makes for absorbing reading and as academic writing goes, Spies is rather readable.

When Britain appointed Field Marshal Lord Roberts and General Lord Kitchener in South Africa, it was the logical outcome of the major setbacks British forces experienced early in the war as Boer forces besieged border towns in the British colonies, and the British failure on all fronts to force the Boer forces back into the Boer Republics (Republic of the Transvaal and the Republic of the Orange

Free State). In Roberts and Kitchener, the British had officers who had not failed in one major undertaking that was entrusted to them.

The content of *Methods of Barbarism* is focused on the civilians in the Republics during Robert's march to Pretoria and after the fall of Pretoria, the British military administration in the Republics. It also deals with the measures introduced by Kitchener, as well as the severe winter of 1901 and the last phase of the war. Spies states that his objective is to explain and conclude about the policies of Roberts and Kitchener towards non-combatants in the Boer Republics. He analysed the conditions that gave rise to and brought about the measures Roberts and Kitchener took against civilians. He then evaluated these measures, not only as devices to bring an end to the war, but also against the background of the British administration of the occupied states. To properly explore this theme he studied the relationship between the civil and military authorities in South Africa, as well as the communication between the Commander-in Chief in South Africa and the British Cabinet.

The author also explains why the concentration camp system was created. The reason was simply that Roberts and Kitchener wanted to break the Boer resistance, after the fall of their capitals, Bloemfontein and Pretoria. A scorched earth policy led to the destruction of livestock and harvests and the burning of farmhouses, while the civilian women and children were huddled into concentration camps to prevent them from supporting the Boer forces fighting a guerrilla war against the British. The country was also divided by a system of blockhouses and barbed wire entanglements. These were controversial measures that produced traumatic effects.

British policy and actions in South Africa were not received well by all the British and even the zealous Lord Milner, anxious for a war against the Boer republics before, and eager for it to be concluded as soon as possible, was unhappy with certain aspects of Kitchener's campaign. Eventually it also placed much pressure on Kitchener and affected his health. In a report, a fellow general stated that Kitchener "hated the country, the people, the whole thing more every day." Kitchener actually pressed through with his pitiless methods and eventually forced the republican forces to the negotiation table.

With regards to humanitarian considerations Spies asks if the historian should pass a moral judgement on the British policies towards the civilians in the Boer Republics. Is all suffering and death inflicted by war evil and not to be legitimised, or does war legitimise all means and must all suffering irrespective of

its scale be accepted as inevitable? For Spies the answer is that the yardstick the historian could use in connection with the treatment of civilians during the war, are the rules and customs of warfare stipulated by international law at the beginning of the twentieth century. A comprehensive, but not all-embracing, statement on the customs of war on land, the so-called first Hague convention was accepted by Britain and twenty other states about three months before the outbreak of the war. The Boer Republics did not sign the Hague convention and some historians have expressed an opinion that since they did not sign it, it was not relevant to this war. How then to assess the conduct of war? Spies argues that as the Hague regulations reflected the views of the participating powers on the nature of warfare and the “usages of warfare”, the principles in the convention were indeed relevant to the war. British soldiers like Lord Wolseley however were of the opinion that the Hague regulations are for the “civilised nations” present at the conference in The Hague and that “adherence to those laws would be prejudicial to our military interests...” In contrast to such an opinion, the preamble of the Hague convention states that they were “general rules of conduct for belligerents in their relation with each other and with populations.”

As the Boer guerrilla campaign gained momentum another issue for the British was how to distinguish between fighters and civilians. Initial attempts to determine the complicity of civilians soon ceased and mere proximity to the scene of an attack became cause for punishment, for example farm-burning for a radius of up to ten miles in retribution for attacks on lines of communication. From this the eventual scorched earth approach and concentration camp system evolved. The death rates in the concentration camps were horrendous: 2 666 in August 1901, 2 752 in the September and 3 205 in the month of October. Children suffered especially with, for example, the death in one month of 345 of the 2 122 children in the Brandfort camp and 205 of the 1 326 in the Standerton camp. And so it continued. These are pertinent aspects of the British military policy and though it received much attention during the Anglo-Boer War and immediately thereafter, comparatively little detailed historical studies were completed on the various facets of this aspect of the war. In this regard Spies provides a standard work.

Methods of Barbarism illustrates that the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) must not only be analysed in military terms, but that the way the British military authorities treated the civilians in the Boer republics was a crucial facet of the war. It impacted on the conduct and course of the war and also affected South African and British affairs long after the end of the war in 1902. While Spies did not analyse the short and long term effects of the British approach on the developments of post-

war South Africa, he did at times comment on the political ramifications of these measures.

Even though *Methods of Barbarism* was first published in 1977, and again in 2002, the 25 years that have elapsed since its first publication did not harm the academic standing of this remarkable book. It has rather come to be regarded as a classic study on the war by a master historian.

4. Reitz, D., *Commando. A Boer Journal of the Boer War* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1990).

Commando is an incredible story of the adventures a young member of the Boer forces endured while on commando during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). The first hand account of narrow escapes, victories and defeat and the struggle to keep on fighting makes it a 'must read' for those interested in the war. Reitz wrote the book the year after the war ended while he was he was working as a transport driver in Madagascar. Yet, it was only published more than 20 years later for the first time. When he revised it, he took out the emotion and bitterness he felt immediately after the end of the war – creating a well structured, intelligent memoir that reads like good fiction.

Commando was a success since its first publication in 1929. It was published many times since and was translated into Dutch, French and German. It has sold more copies than any other book on the Anglo-Boer War and is in its own right became a minor classic on war. The 1990 edition of *Commando* is introduced by Thomas Pakenham and is greatly enhanced by colour as well as black-and-white plates, making it not only a highly readable book but also aesthetically pleasing.

When the Anglo-Boer War broke out in 1899, Deneys Reitz was only seventeen, but as the son of a former Chief Justice and President of the Orange Free State as well as Paul Kruger's Secretary of State, he joined immediately. Reitz went to the Natal front first, where he participated in some of the well-known battles such as Spioenkop. He then participated in the campaigns in the Free State and Transvaal as Lord Roberts invaded the two Boer Republics. When General Smuts invaded the Cape Colony with a guerrilla force, he was in company, fighting to the "bitter end."

In general Reitz gives a good and often very personal account of people he met and he often describes them in simple but honest boyish terms. The President of the Transvaal Republic, Paul Kruger, he stated had "an uncouth surly manner, and he was the ugliest man I have ever seen, but he had a strong rugged personality

which impressed all with whom he came in contact.” He specifically held the well-known General De la Rey, in high esteem. When the Boer forces retreated before the Roberts steamroller marching up through the Free State and into the Transvaal, Reitz tells us that De la Rey raised fresh commandos, “infusing new spirit into the fighting men by his ceaseless activity, and by the great affection they had for this wonderful old man.” Reitz called him a “doughty old warrior,” that addressed his men “in eloquent words that moved many to tears, for besides being a fighter he had a fine gift of simple speech.”

During his leave, when Reitz was in Pretoria he went with his father to meet Winston Churchill, then a prisoner of war in Pretoria. Churchill gave his father some articles to send to a newspaper in England. “My father read portions of the articles to us at home that evening and said that Churchill was a clever young man, in which he was not far from wrong” Reitz tells us, “for soon after the prisoner climbed over a wall and escaped out of the Transvaal.” In the same way he discusses his comrades in arms and their adventures, always frank about individuals and characterising them in a unique way. *Commando* provides good insight into the Boer character and culture of the time and the meaning of honour at the end of the nineteenth century.

Concerning his perception of war, Reitz states that he initially looked on “the prospect of war and adventure with the eyes of youth, seeing only the glamour, but knowing nothing of the horror and the misery.” At one stage after a battle he sees the dead soldiers he had shot, and looked at them with mixed feelings, stating that “I never hated the English, a fight is a fight, and though I was sorry for the men, I was proud of my share in the day’s work.” Reitz refers to the war as “years of hardship, danger, and ultimate exile.” Specifically during the guerrilla phase, the commandos were constantly hunted by numerically superior British forces and had to live with hardship, exertion and death. He tells us how perplexed they were when many of the Boer burgers that wore khaki were shot out of hand after being captured, stating that “neither did we know that the death penalty is attached to wearing of khaki, and although after a while rumours reached us through the country people that our men were being executed, these stories left us doubting and perplexed.” They did not wear khaki to mislead the enemy, but because their only source of clothing (and weapons and ammunition) was the British soldiers they captured and had to release again.

Reitz maintains a chivalrous approach to his enemy and the war. Even on the subject of Kitchener’s proclamation about the shooting of those wearing khaki, he is not condemning but simply refers to Kitchener’s explanation to him about it,

when he met him years later. An interesting example is to be found in the events of 17 September 1901. While British columns pursued the exhausted and ragged commando of General Smuts endlessly, they managed to surprise and rout a British camp with many supplies and protected by soldiers and cavalymen of the 17th Lancers. Amongst the seriously wounded was Lord Vivian of the 17th Lancers. Reitz tells about his conversation with Lord Vivian and Vivian's offer to Reitz to help him from his bivouac tent, as he would not need anything anymore. He did just that and equipped himself from head to toe, also taking a new rifle, a fresh horse and a mule. Lord Vivian gave him a button with the scull and crossbones of the 17th Lancers, Reitz tells us that he treasured it, keeping it as a keepsake.

Though *Commando* is at times harsh about the nature of war, it is also a testimony of Reitz's empathy and respect for others. Even for his horses he shows much compassion; referring to a roan mare that faithfully carried him through difficult days as a "gallant little beast [being] so exhausted that ... she could scarcely put one foot before the other ... she had shown the mettle of her Free State pasture and the marvellous endurance of the South African horse." This and other references to horses are very telling of the extreme importance of the horse in the vast expanses of South Africa during the war. The Boers were excellent horsemen and Reitz tells us that he learnt to ride and shoot almost as soon as he could walk. Specifically in the guerrilla phase of the war, fast moving Boer commandos relied heavily on their horses for mobility and for their escape from incessant pursuit by British flying columns. For this, the horse paid a massive price; close to half a million British horses died in South Africa during the war, while the hardy South African horse breed, the so-called "Boerperd" was virtually wiped out.

The account of the guerrilla war against the British in South Africa is fascinating and often leaves the reader in awe of the ability of the Boer Commandos to survive, despite the vast numerical superiority of their enemy and the destruction of the countryside. His wartime adventures, described in *Commando*, are so amazing that Jan Smuts felt compelled to comment upon the truthfulness of the account in the preface.

Reitz's account of war is informative, though very personal. It is very readable and in the style of a young man setting out for war. Though this is probably the most approachable book to read on the subject, it may be, after all, as Reitz states, "[a] lamentable tale of things done long ago – and ill done."

5. Du Toit, A.K., *South Africa's Fighting Ships: Past and Present* (Ashanti, Rivonia, 1992).

Though this book carries the title, *South Africa's Fighting Ships*, it is more than that and is in essence an encyclopaedic work on the South African Navy. At the time of publication (1992) the author, Allan du Toit, held the rank of Commander in the Australian Navy. He however grew up in South Africa and served in the SA Navy until 1987.

The book tells the story of the SA Navy, not in boring administrative terms, but in a way which interests seamen most: the tales of ships and those that served in them. The book is also about the passage of time and its effect on warships. New ships are commissioned; serve for many years and then they are decommissioned – often only to be sunk as targets.

The history of the SA Navy is recent and dates back to 1922. Before then, maritime defence was always a colonial responsibility. The presence of the British Royal Navy at the Cape of Good Hope dates back to the age of Napoleon, and lasted to the 1970s. During the two world wars, Simon's Town was an important base to the Royal Navy and the sea-lanes of communication around the southern tip of Africa was of strategic importance to the Allied war effort and had to be defended.

When the South African Navy was created in 1922, it had three small former British vessels, which were unfortunately paid off during the depression in 1933-34. Only a skeleton staff remained up to the outbreak of the Second World War. South Africa then created a small ocean-going navy by requisitioning ships from trade and converting whaling and fishing vessels into anti-submarine vessels and minesweepers. These 'little ships' had to defend the Unions' ports and coastline and some of them even served with distinction in the Mediterranean for most of the war, where South Africa lost four ships (a considerable loss for such a young and small Navy). Du Toit tells the fascinating story of these small ships and their gallant crews during the naval war in the Mediterranean. Specifically the story of the little minesweeper *HMSAS Parktown* is fascinating. The *Parktown* was in Tobruk harbour when Axis forces started shelling the town on 20 June 1942. Ships were ordered to embark evacuation parties and leave. *Parktown* was still alongside when Axis armour and motorised troops overran the Harbour. She cast off under heavy fire and was the last Allied ship to leave Tobruk. Her decks were cramped with soldiers evacuated from Tobruk and outside the harbour she took a disabled tug in tow, which brought her speed down to five knots and left her far behind the other ships. As Du Toit tells us, early the next morning "she was attacked at close range

by six Italian MAS boats ... with her captain killed, nearly half her ship's company wounded and all ammunition expended, it was finally decided to abandon ship."

In terms of warships, the SA Navy acquired its first purpose-built warships from Britain in 1944. During the next two decades it acquired a total of seven frigates, two destroyers and close to twenty minor vessels from Britain. South Africa now had a small, typically western navy, better equipped for the imperial role of Britain than the maritime defence requirements of a small developing country.

At the same time however, South Africa's racial policies were much criticised, leading to increasing pressure against South Africa and an eventual compulsory United Nations armament boycott in November 1977. Even before this Britain was not prepared to sell warships to South Africa anymore, and South Africa ordered three Daphne class submarines from France (delivery took place between 1970 and 1972). When the compulsory armament boycott came into effect on 4 November 1977, South Africa had *Aviso* class corvettes and *Agosta* class submarines on order from France, but these projects were immediately cancelled as a result of the boycott. The only warship programme that still continued was the strike craft project. In total the SA Navy took delivery of three *Reshef* class strike craft that were built in Israel, and a further six that were built in South Africa (delivery took place between 1977 and 1986).

Du Toit does not only relate good stories, but squarely tackles disasters in the history of the SA Navy. One such an event occurred in 1982, when the type 12 frigate *SAS President Kruger* collided with the replenishment ship *SAS Tafelberg* during an early morning exercise in the cold South Atlantic. The *President Kruger* quickly sank and though sixteen men were sadly lost, many lives were saved through damage control, good discipline and simple courage.

But, good stories dominate. In August 1991 four naval vessels participated in an extensive air-sea rescue mission when the Greek Liner *Oceanos* sank off the Transkei coast. In severe conditions, with winds gusting up to 80km/h, all 580 passengers and crew were saved before the liner sank (the Captain actually being one of the firsts to be taken off his sinking ship). Du Toit also provides a good record of the diplomatic role South African naval vessels performed. However such flag-showing exercises were few during the last decade of Apartheid, due to the international political condemnation of South Africa.

As the book was published before the *new* South Africa and during a period with much uncertainty regarding the future of the SA Navy, the age and

limitations of the South African ships are discussed. Specifically vessels with adequate sea keeping and endurance are important to consider for the vessel needs of the SA Navy. The strike craft that became the main surface combatants of the SA Navy after the last frigates were decommissioned in the 1980's are not suited for the South African waters and have many limitations with regards to sea keeping and endurance. Yet, the Navy utilised them to the full and they indeed were "maids of all work" in a difficult era in the history of the SA Navy.

South Africa's Fighting Ships provides good detail and a comprehensive history of all the ships that were commissioned in the SA Navy since its creation. For those interested, much technical detail regarding the specifications of the vessels and their weapon systems are available. Add to this many black-and-white and colour pictures of every class of ship, as well as useful appendices on fleet strengths (1922-1992), a list of ships and pennant numbers, battle honours, ensigns of the SA Navy and ships' badges. Altogether, *South Africa's Fighting Ships* is a broad-based and encompassing history of the largest and best-equipped navy in sub-Saharan Africa.

6. Moorcraft, P., *African Nemesis: War and Revolution in Southern Africa* (Brassey's, London, 1990).

If the recipe includes a proficient author, a controversial topic and excellent research the result is bound to be a valuable and highly readable work. This is the case with Paul Moorcraft and *African Nemesis*. Despite the fact that it was published more than a decade ago it is still the most comprehensive account of the disturbances that shook southern Africa since the end of the Second World War.

African Nemesis deals with a period of history many South Africans might not like to be reminded of, as it is about Soweto riots, states of emergency, detention without trial, destabilisation, insurgency, terror, hit squads, car bombs, disinvestment and sanctions. The internal war in South Africa during the 1970's and 1980's spilled over into a conflict between South Africa and many of its neighbouring states. Yet this history and its realities must be faced and in this respect Moorcraft makes an important contribution, as his work is an incisive analysis based on good factual content. But this is a difficult topic specifically as so much emotion is linked to the recent history of this region. Despite this, Moorcraft succeeds in what he sets out to do, which is to give, as he explains, "a dispassionate account which does not skirt the hypocrisy of both white and black antagonists" and analyses "both sides of the equation" without taking a "moral tract."

Moorcraft treats war in the region as the political instrument that it essentially is and he does not simply chronicle battles and describe campaigns but, identifies and discusses the various forces that shaped the destiny of the region. Furthermore, though much of his focus is on South Africa and its involvement in the region, *African Nemesis* also provides much history on the events within the other states in the region, their struggles against colonialism and the internal conflict some of them subsequently faced.

In the first section of *African Nemesis* (Pax Pretoria) the author creates the backdrop against which South Africa developed into a regional superpower. By utilising what Moorcraft refers to as “the naked assertion of white power” South Africa had much influence in the region. In the second part of the book Moorcraft discusses the colonial conflicts in Angola, Namibia, Mozambique and Rhodesia. Pretoria’s projection of power across its borders is illustrated and in the case of Angola, Moorcraft shows that South Africa’s involvement in the Civil War in 1975-76 lacked clear political aims. But, his version of the events during the so-called *Operation Savannah* differs from official South African accounts and the discerning student would do well to study both. Though Moorcraft’s chapter on the struggle in Rhodesia is interesting, he is too quick to call Rhodesia after UDI “another South African homeland” and does not give sufficient attention to the debate that ranged within South Africa as to what to do about the Rhodesia issue.

The third part of the *African Nemesis*, is predictably called “Destabilisation” and is about South Africa’s conflicts with its neighbours between 1976 and 1989. The list of states affected by South African “military adventurism” is long and includes Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia and even the Comores and Seychelles. In this section, Moorcraft also discusses the strategic objectives that was important for the survival of the South African regime, the territorial imperatives of regional hegemony and the effort to “replace the colonial glacis with a cordon of instability so that the frontline states would be too weak not only to succour ANC and SWAPO guerrillas, but also to impose or even urge sanctions.” He identifies operational goals of destabilisation and the strategic ambition to conclude non-aggression pacts with neighbouring countries from which the ANC infiltrated and discusses further secondary, political and economic goals of destabilisation. South Africa used both military and economic measures to achieve its goals, which includes everything from raids, sabotage and support for proxy forces to the use of both punitive and supportive economic measures. Unfortunately, when Moorcraft published his work, he could not utilise information on the above-mentioned goals and measures from official South African policy documents as it was all classified. It would be interesting to

know to what extent co-ordinated goals were pursued by the former South African government, and to measure his information against documents currently available in both the state and military archive depots.

The fourth and final section of *African Nemesis* is about “War in South Africa (1945-2010)”. Of the six chapters in this section two are to some extent future orientated. He discusses conditions on six fronts (urban warfare, trade unions, social action, students, community-based groups and economic warfare) and makes the point that South Africa will ultimately have a black majority government. However, he does envisage a rather authoritarian future for South Africa under ANC rule.

African Nemesis is not a standard work on some of the recent wars on the sub-continent and works like Bridgland’s *The War for Africa* and Heitman’s *War in Angola: The final South African Phase*, provides more depth in the Angolan conflict than Moorcraft. However, Moorcraft is an important source because of his broad sweep and thorough analysis of South African involvement in several of the conflicts in southern Africa.

7. Cilliers, J. and Dietrich, C. (eds), *Angola's War Economy: The Role of Oil and Diamonds* (Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, 2000).

Angola is a rich country with countless resources, yet people are poor and do not reap the benefits of their natural resources, since the country’s wealth has been used to fuel a protracted war. The Angolan war, which entered its fifth decade in recent years, initially coincided with a period of intense Cold War rivalry, but has continued unabated thereafter, reflecting remarkable adaptive characteristics and the ability to survive Africa’s political and strategic marginalisation. Cold War patronage was replaced with oil and diamonds becoming instrumental in fuelling the ongoing insurgency.

Angola's War Economy is a relevant book for studying the region and an important (local) southern African analysis of a complex situation and perplexing events in the region. It has significance for scholars, NGO’s and governments to assist them in understanding this conflict and the effect it has had on the region. This study reflects possibly the most complete work on the Angolan war economy to be published in recent years. Important aspects in the content are specifically the focus on resource wars as a new type of insurgency, and the link between arms and natural resources is clearly made. Furthermore, ethnicity is identified as a factor in

the conflict and the roles of major actors in diamond mining and oil exploration are discussed.

Though a number of books have been published on Angola, this work is unique because of a number of reasons. It provides a detailed analysis of the interdependence between war and economy and the massive impact this war has had on the Angolan society that had to endure it for far too long. The authors quite simply show that the war did not restrict mining and the exploitation of Angolan resources; on the contrary it has facilitated its exploitation. In the first chapter Jakkie Cilliers explains that this was a new type of war – resource-based insurgency. This type of competition for resources has fuelled a number of post-independence wars in Africa. In Angola this was to the financial gain of both the ruling party (MPLA) and the opposition movement (UNITA). Yet, Cilliers aptly points out that competition for resources in a war is not new, as logistic strategies were at the heart of many wars in the history of mankind.

The Angolan conflict has not been a limited war, as both sides aimed at inflicting a military as well as a political and economic defeat on their enemy. But not one of them could deliver a crushing blow to the opponent. Both sides had a strong ethnic support base, while both sides used food as a weapon (attacks on relief convoys could have a devastating effect).

The tally on the suffering of the Angolan people has been high. Casualties during the sieges of Huambo and Cuito could have been as many as 15 000 and 30 000 respectively, while landmines might have caused as many as 90 000 casualties. More than 1,7 million people have been displaced and it is estimated that more than half of the population had to flee at least once because of the war. Yet, not one party was able to establish uncontested national control due to their own power limitations.

As Andrea Ostheimer states in the book, though aid was forthcoming, it was not sufficient and in the absence of a clear solution and political commitment humanitarian relief was not enough. Dietrich is very pertinent in his analysis. For the first time he asks and answers questions such as “who is (was) mining” and “where and in what quantity.” He then focuses on the discrepancies between the reported and actual output before discussing issues such as the battle for diamond fields, smuggling and informal diamond business under the control of UNITA. Together with Peleman, Dietrich addresses the “imposition of restrictions to combat the sale of conflict diamonds.” These chapters as well as Clarke’s analysis of the

relationship between petroleum and politics could be regarded as the crux of the work.

Criticism against *Angola's War Economy* is that it lacks sufficient integration and causality due to the variety of contributing authors. Furthermore, no primary sources from Angola were utilised in the analysis. Authors had to rely on a large variety of other sources that ranged from interviews, NGO documents, newspapers to books and other secondary sources.

Angola's War Economy was sponsored by the Government of Finland and was published by the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria. It is a valuable example of what co-operation can achieve and this type of research-based involvement by the developed countries is important for the future of Africa.