

The second dimension to the book sets it apart from the usual fighter-pilot genre. Information gleaned from a mass of interviews held with engineers and technicians, who were, at various stages closely involved with the SR-71 programme provides the background to the formation and creation of the SR-71. *The Untouchables* relates the story of how the plane was built and maintained, affording a compelling insight into aero-technology. The uncomplicated styles of the writers means that even those who do not possess much knowledge in this field will find this portion of the book tremendously interesting. Of particular note are the manifold problems experienced by the USAF and Lockheed during the building of the plane, and the often ingenious solutions which the engineers devised to deal with this array of totally unfamiliar obstacles.

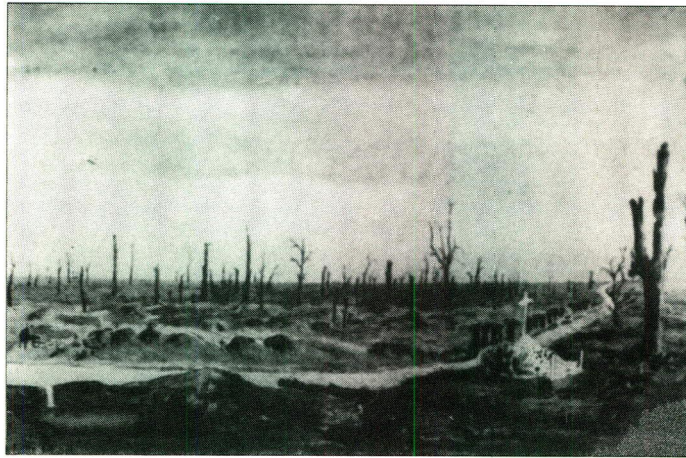
The Untouchables, a fascinating coffee-table type book, will enjoy the pride of place in many collections. This is primarily attributable to the book's classy appearance. The dust cover is a flawless, classic black while the hardcover of the book itself is in a material finishing with gold lettering. The glossy pages are complemented with excellent colour photographs and interesting backgrounds. It should be stressed that this is a superbly illustrated book containing many superb colour photographs which match the text exceptionally well. Unfortunately the book is not indexed, although it does possess a useful glossary.

The Untouchables comes highly recommended to anyone who has ever been interested in aeroplanes, military aviation or aeronautical engineering. It should be pointed out that *The Untouchables* cannot be regarded as an historical work (nor was this the intention of the writers or the publisher). However, it obviously contains information which is of historical value both in terms of text and pictures. The aim of the book is to immortalise the SR-71 and the people behind it, and to this extent the writers are largely successful. *The Untouchables* is light, absorbing reading and will appeal to a large section of the reading public.

This publication is not available at most bookstores. However, those who are interested in obtaining a copy may contact the publishers at the following address :

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THE HISTORY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN FORCES IN FRANCE

John Buchan

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The Imperial War Museum (in association with
 The Battery Press, Nashville)

illustrated, 404 pages

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With the exception of a few dissertations and theses, the most important works dealing with South Africa's role in the First World War are official histories. In addition to the work now under review - undertaken at the request of General Smuts and described by Buchan's biographer as a 'war debt' which he (Buchan) had to discharge - three other books detailing South Africa's role in various First World War campaigns, have appeared. J.G.W. Leipoldt's history entitled *The Union of South Africa and the Great War 1914-1918* appeared anonymously in 1924; while J.J. Collyer's works on the German South West and East African campaigns were published in 1937 and 1939 respectively. All of these were official histories, the last three being published by the General Staff in Pretoria.

In addition to these 'official histories', a number of books on 'the Great War' have made their appearance since the opening of the First World War archives in 1948. These include Peter Digby's *Pyramids and Poppies; The 1st SA Infantry Brigade in Libya, France and Flanders 1915-1919* (1993) - the solitary work dealing with this brigade since the first appearance of Buchan's work in 1920. To date Buchan and Digby comprise the only monographs on this topic.

John Buchan (1875-1940), first Baron Tweedsmuir of Elsfield, statesman, author and publisher, initially earned the respect of generals Louis Botha and Jan Smuts when, as a mem-

ber of 'Milner's Kindergarten', he was responsible for the resettlement of the Boers after the Peace of Vereeniging. During the First World War, he served on the Headquarters Staff of the British Army in France and later as Director of Intelligence. He represented the Scottish Universities in Parliament before being raised to the peerage and posted to Canada as governor general in 1935.

John Buchan was a most prolific writer with more than fifty titles to his name. These included adventure stories, several biographies, articles and reviews for magazines and newspapers, and an autobiography, *Memory Hold-the-door*, which appeared in 1940. However, Buchan's multifarious writings brought him under attack. Lloyd George, the British prime minister, recorded in his memoirs:

"Mr Buchan, in his *History of the War*, lapsing into his fictional mood, gives a fanciful picture of my meeting General Nivelle at the Gare du Nord ... When a brilliant novelist assumes the unaccustomed rôle of historian it is inevitable that he should now and again forget that he is no longer writing fiction, but that he is engaged on a literary enterprise where narration is limited in its scope by the rigid bounds of fact ... The real explanation is that Mr Buchan found it so much less trouble to repeat War Office gossip than to read War Office documents."

These comments (which, in Liddell Hart's view, were 'needlessly sharp')¹ cannot be applied to the *History of the South African Forces in France*. In this case, Buchan went to great lengths to obtain primary sources and Smuts practically placed Major J.G.W. Leipoldt at Buchan's disposal, for the tracing of sources among the official war papers in South Africa. Many of these archival sources have not been used by subsequent historians, with the result that Buchan's work remains the best documented study on this topic. This has perhaps inevitably targeted his work, causing many modern historians to quote freely and even dishonestly from it. Despite even recent attempts, Buchan's contribution remains the standard reference work on the South African brigade on the Western Front. It is well-researched and equally well-written; and after more than seventy years it is still unsurplanted.

However, John Buchan was not an unaffected historian. He was very much an imperialist and an "old boy" of 'Milner's Kindergarten', and this permeates the book. He describes, for example, South Africa's decision to enter the war as

a "most honourable resolution" (page 13) and saw that the "fortunes of (South Africa) were indissolubly bound up with the fortunes of the British Commonwealth" (page 14). Like all historians, this was something which Buchan could not avoid. He was a product of his times.

Nonetheless, in many respects he was the right man to write this history. This Smuts must have seen when he approached him in 1916. Buchan was not only a lifelong devotee of South Africa, but had based several of his novels in a South African setting. He knew South Africa and was acquainted with the South African mentality. [This is clearly seen in his comparison between the Somme and South African landscapes - pages 47-48.] He had also written the popular and immensely successful twenty-four part series on the *History of the War*, which he later revised and had published in four volumes. Furthermore, Buchan had served as military correspondent on the Western Front during which time he had "had ... an opportunity to see something of the Infantry Brigade" (*Preface*); and, most importantly, he had enjoyed the company and confidence of many soldiers and politicians, including General Smuts, during and after the war (*Introduction*).

Buchan was very much the man on the spot; the observer and contemporary recorder. However, unlike many participatory contemporary historians writing on their own times, Buchan did not simply fall back on his memory and his own experiences. He made use of inter alia Major General Sir H.T. Lukin and the battalion commanders of the Brigade, as oral sources; and, as has already been noted, went to the trouble of a great deal of primary research - "I have had at my disposal all official papers ..." (*Preface*). This gives the particular scope and depth to the *History of the South African Forces in France*, which subsequent historians have failed to achieve. However, it is unfortunate that Buchan did not indicate his sources and this lack of referencing remains the only drawback. In this one respect, Lloyd George was possibly correct: as a writer of fiction, Buchan did not see the purpose of source referencing. The novelist is content to pitch the tent, while the historian has to go to the additional trouble of pegging it down - of securing his arguments with references.

The History of the South African Forces in France commences with a statement of purpose ("... a record of the deeds of that expeditionary force which represented South Africa on the front in the West"). After very briefly plac-

¹ J.A. Smith: *John Buchan; A Biography* (London 1965), p.230.

ing the Union of South Africa within the context of world history (pages 11-13), Buchan discusses how South Africa came to enter the war and despatch an infantry brigade to Europe, for service in France. He recognized that, of all the Dominions, the Union's task at the outbreak of the war was the most intricate (page 13). The Union was the only Dominion to have to face a rebellion within her own borders, and invade a neighbouring enemy territory. He also gives South Africa credit for being the first Allied country to resoundingly win a campaign and single-handedly conquer an enemy territory. These introductory pages are necessary, and brief enough so as not to interfere with the main body of the book.

After creating this background, Buchan sets off with the formation, training and equipping of the Brigade in 1915; before following the contingent from its early adventures in England to North Africa, where the men honed their combat skills before being plunged into the muddy and heartless battles of the Western Front.

The Brigade, after contributing to the defeat of the Senussi, landed at Marseilles on 19 April 1916 - at the critical stage in the campaign in France. The South Africans were attached to the Ninth (Scottish) Division and the brigade headquarters was established at Bailleul. After two months of training in the methods of trench warfare, the Division was ordered to move to the Somme : arriving just as the Battle of the Somme was commencing with its new method of "limited objectives" (page 49). The South Africans entered the line on 5 July 1916, showing their metal at Delville Wood (14 - 20 July 1916) : a battle which constituted "an epoch of terror and glory scarcely equalled in the campaign" (page 73). Of 121 officers and 3032 men, only 144 men marched out of the wood on 20 July.

After a brief period of reorganization during which the Brigade was brought back up to strength, it entered the trenches at Vimy - a quiet area in comparison to Longueval and Delville Wood. However, it was not to last. The Brigade later served meritoriously in nu-

merous battles including the Butte de Warlencourt, Arras, Ypres and Marrières Woods; and still found itself in France at the time of the signing of the Armistice. Buchan does not mention the members of the Brigade who went on after the Armistice to serve against the Bolsheviks. This hiatus is, however, acceptable as the South Africans who served in Russia, did so as individuals.

Buchan does not touch on the 'inner life' of the Brigade : of the peculiar medical problems experienced, the lack of drugs, the queuing for rations, erratic canteen supplies, poor leisure time utilization programmes, pay problems and the want of just about everything, and the loneliness of the muddy trenches. Two quotations following page 75 do reflect the grimness of the battle and something of the life in the trenches. However, as Buchan recognized, "it is not easy to reproduce the circumstances of a battle so that a true impression may be made upon the minds of those who have not for themselves seen the reality of modern war" (page 73).

On this point, one must also bear in mind that the book was originally released in 1920, long before military history started its slow and painful progression along the road to broader scope and depth which cross-pollination with other avenues of history has brought. The fact that Buchan realized that he had not sufficiently covered these points, really says something for him as an historian. It is further true that this hiatus has also not been adequately addressed by later writers.

With the *History of the South African Forces in France*, John Buchan has won himself a prime spot on the bookshelf of any military historian. The book is firmly bound with a useful index, and is well-researched and well-written - a combination one does not often find in military history. After being so long out of print and only available to collectors, the reprint of this book by the Imperial War Museum in association with Battery Press, is most gratifying. No student of military history should be without it.

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