
Not only in South Africa and Great Britain there is an increased interest for the second Anglo-Boer War 1899–1902, but also in other countries for whom this war was far away and of limited importance. It is a matter apart to explain the remarkable interest in this colonial war fought long ago. Recently in Vienna the fifth Austrian doctoral thesis regarding this war since World War II has appeared. It is the work of Erwin A. Schmidl, a very thorough thesis, based on archival research in Austria, Britain and South Africa, visits to family of veterans in Austria and a tour of the museums and war memorials in South Africa.

The author begins with a sketch of South African history which cannot please all South Africans. I read on p. 21 regarding the Great Trek that the black population was subdued with brutal force; no mention is made of the preceding unprovoked attacks of the Matabeles and Zulus on the Voortrekkers. On p. 23 we find the misconception that in 1890–99 the foreigners – mainly Britishers – outnumbered the burghers in Transvaal. On p. 146 lord Roberts is called as popular with the Boers as with the British soldiers, but I regard the opinion that the Boers hated Roberts even more than Kitchener more acceptable. On p. 150 I read the often quoted British reproach that Boer women in concentrations camps painted their sick children green; a proof of their ignorance; the British did not know the green blue-gum ointment, house medicine of the Boers, used because of lack of medicine in the ill-supplied camps.

Writing objectively and well-informed about South African history appears to remain difficult. For the rest Schmidl’s work is objective and correct in detail.

He continues his book with a survey of consular representatives of the Danube monarchy, much later followed by diplomats in South Africa. More interesting is his description of the volunteers and military attaches from Austria-Hungary in the South African war. A book of this kind contains mainly a collection of more or less complete biographies, most of these of colourful characters. Schmidl has done for the Austrians and Hungarians what Alan H. Winquist did some years ago for the Scandinavians in the war 1899–1902. The characteristics which they ascribe to their fellow countrymen in the war are also to be found in other foreigners in South Africa in 1899–1902. Schmidl states that the immigrants and war volunteers came from all population classes in Austria-Hungary. They are to be distinguished into immigrants who had arrived before the war and were more or less acquainted with the men and circumstances in South Africa, and the freshmen from Europe and America.

He points out the variety of motives to volunteer in the South African war for one of the contesting parties. I am of the opinion that these motives occurred with all foreign volunteers who turned up in this war. Schmidl correctly assumes that only a minority of them was animated by idealism to help the small heroic Boer nation against the overwhelming might of British imperialism. I suppose that unemployment in the republics during the prevailing depression moved many young immigrants to enlist in the British or the Boer army in 1899 because they received free clothing, food and horses and as British recruits a few shillings per day.

Schmidl also refers to the fin-de-siècle feelings with some European intellectuals which drove them to South Africa because they were dissatisfied with European civilization and esteemed the Boers as a simple, morally pure agrarian people. Examples are the Austrian military attaché Robert Trimmel (p. 218), the Austrian count Adalbert von Sternberg (p. 258) and the French colonel Georges de Villebois-Mareuil.

The idealistic pro-Boers however experienced severe disappointment because of the cool reception by the rank and file of the Boers. There were so many selfish adventurers and fortune hunters among the foreign volunteers that the burghers soon mistrusted them. Moreover they despised their lack of knowledge of veld-life.

Another category of foreign volunteers consisted of the black sheep of distinguished European families who had failed in their own country. Among them we find several army officers.
Schmidl mentions the Austrians and Hungarians Robert Birnbacher, Anton baron von Goldegg, leader of the small Austro-Hungarian corps, Felix baron Lüszensky and Tibor Péchy, nephew of pope Leo XIII. Since 1871 Europe and the USA had not waged a major war and some officers were bored, spent too much money, misbehaved or ran into high debts. Some of them left for the war in South Africa as 'Beurlaubte' to seek adventure and escape their creditors. Many of them expected the Boer government to give them the command of a division and high pay, but they had to serve as common burghers and the Boers ignored their military advice. After their return to Europe some of these black sheep distinguished themselves in World War I, eg Von Goldegg and Birnbacher.

Thanks to the service reports regarding officers in the military archives Schmidl is better informed about the officers than the civilian volunteers among the Austrians and Hungarians. Some of these were journalists, eg Franco Seiner, whose lively book of the war is often quoted by Schmidl. He mentions on p. 298–308 also Austrians and Hungarians as volunteers with the British army in South Africa, namely the officers August J. Meyer and Viktor baron Ramsnegg and private Lájos Vádász.

Some foreigners fought bravely and lost their lives or health; losses of the foreign brigades were much higher than in the Boer commandos. Other foreigners however behaved like parasites, chaffered and stole – be it partly because the Boers did not feed and clothe them and looked for loot. The British press called them 'wild goose' which describes them. The British press overestimated the role of the foreigners in the Boer ranks or underestimated them as black sheep distinguished themselves in World War I, eg Von Goldegg and Birnbacher.

The last category of foreigners were the military attaches with the British and Boer armies. They were professional, selected officers sent by their general staff to the war in South Africa to report as had become usual in Western armies in the course of the 19th century. Most of them were excellent observers and some did good journalistic work and published good reportages. We know the careers and characters of most of them. Schmidl mentions most of them and of course devotes his attention largely to the Austrian, Robert Trimmel, with the British army. He gives a biography of this intelligent officer.

I may add that Trimmel had the same experiences as other young military attaches after their return from South Africa, namely the Dutchman lieutenant L.J.K. Thomson and the Norwegian captain J. Allum. This war taught them to deprecate parade gymnastics and to recommend accurate shooting-practice, seeking of cover on the soldier's own initiative, avoidance of attacks in closed ranks and quick-firing guns. Their new-fangled ideas found little response among elder senior officers who had participated in European wars long ago, such as in France in 1870–71 and the Balkan in 1877–78, and in colonial wars against primitive people. The attaches' extensive reports were provided with comments showing adhesion or doubt because warfare in Europe was thought quite different from war in South Africa. Guerrilla warfare was practically ignored. Lively discussions in meetings and military journals ensued but for few years. Thereafter the much more important Russo-Japanese war in 1904–05 overshadowed the South African war and the reports about this war were shelved in the archives. It is an open question whether and how much European general staffs have learned from the war in South Africa; I fear not much. Only since the last few years historians undig the attaches reports, dust them off and publish them with comments.

Schmidl relates that Trimmel's very extensive report shared the fate of most reports. Despite the personal interest of the emperor and the archduke as commander-in-chief the highest army officers practically ignored Trimmel's remarks and discouraged the continuance of his cordial contact with the British army. Trimmel served bravely as a major in World War I, was distinguished several times and died at the age of 88 in Vienna.

Schmidl does not analyse Trimmel's unpublished report, perhaps because it is too long.
and because Schmidl did not want to add to his
thesis of 400 pages. A microfilm of Trimmel's
report of towards 1000 pages is in the archive of the
South African Defence Force and of the State
archive in Pretoria.

Schmidl had written an excellent work and I
hope that it will be soon generally available, if
possible with a translation in English.

Dr C. de Jong
(University of South Africa)

'Ragtime Soldiers: The Rhodesian experience in
the First World War' deur Peter McLaughlin.
Books of Zimbabwe, Posbus 1994, Bulawayo,
Zimbabwe, 1980 (pp. 159 met foto's, kaarte en
register).

Hierdie werk, wat deur 'n jong akademikus ge-
skryf is, sal aan die verwagtings van hulle te-
leurstel wat 'n wetenskaplik-verantwoorde mili-
têre-historiese publikasie verwag. Dit was nie die
doel wat die ouerle boeoog het nie. Hy wou,
omdat hy getref was deur die mate van onbe-
del wat die outeur beoog het nie. Hy wou,
dat hy vetree na deelnemers aan
die uitputtingsoorlog in Oos-Afrika en die worstelinge in die loopgrawe
aan die westfront in Europa. Dit is 'n boek vol
atmosfeer en wissellende stemmingsbeelde, po-
litiek en militêr aan die tuisfront, militêr aan die
onderskele fronte waar Rhodesiërs geveg het.

Die frontie in Oos-Afrika, weliswaar 'n vergete front
in 1914–1918, maar van die uiterste belang vir
toeomkoms van deelnemers aan die Tweede Wêreldoorlog, waaronder – in
albei gevalle – van ons eie weerbare Suid-Afrika
sowel as Rhodesiërs het albei as buurlande en
gekoppel aan die destydse Britse wêreldryk in
de Eerste Wêreldoorlog betrokke geraak in 'n
tydperk waarin aldus die skrywer 'n Britse oorlog
'n ryksoorlog was. Suid Rhodesië is deur 'n
aatskappe, die British South Africa Com-
pany(BSAC) bestruier. Suid Rhodesië se blanke
bevolking het, en ons haal weer aan – daarna
gestrewe 't out-British the British' terwyl Suid-
Afrika vir die eerste maal na 1902 deur die deel-
name aan die oorlog op die pad na innerlike
verseurkheid geplaas was. Rhodesië het oor
twee verdedigingseenhede, die British South
Afrika Police (1 150) en die Southern Rhodesia
Volunteers (2 000) beskik. Hierdie eenhede was
nie in alle opsigte slaggereed nie. Die opleiding
en samestelling was van 'n twyfelagtige waarde
vir deelname aan die gewapende konflik in Eu-
ropa. Waar die geesdrif hoof opgevlam het en
Rhodesiërs tot die stryd wou toetree, het 300 by
Britse eenhede aangesluit. Met die uitbreek van
die rebellie in Suid-Afrika het 'n verdere 200
vrywilligers in Salisbury, wat in die voetspore van
hulle voorgangers wou volg, in militêre diens van
Suid-Afrika-afranse op te help om te help om die Rebellie te onderdruk. Hierdie eenheid, bekend as 1 Rho-
desia Regiment, het te Bloemfontein aangekoms.
Te laat om die Rebellie te help onderdruk is die
eenheid te Tempe gestasjoneer om daarna oor-
geplaas te word na Maitland. Daarna is die Rho-
desiërs, aan boord van die Monarch na Walvis-
baai verskeer. Hulle aandeel in die veldtog in
DSWA is in hoofstuk 2 beskryf. Terug in Kaap-
stad is die eenheid ontbind. Die lede van 1 RR
het of by Britse eenhede of by SA eenhede aan-
gesluit. Hulle bestemming was die oorlogsterrein
in Wes-Europa.

Hoofstuk 3 (pp. 19–47) bied die leser 'n lewen-
dige oorsig oor dié Rhodesiërs se militêre op-
trede wat hom in Duits Oos-Afrika afgespeel het
tot Februarie 1917. 2 Rhodesia Regiment het
vvoeg in 1915 op die oorlogsterrein verskyn. In
dierdie hoofstuk verkry die leser 'n uitstekende
oorsig oor die bosoorlog met al sy probleme,
sos dikwels ontoereikende rantsone, menig-
vuligheid, klimatiese toestande, vervoervraagstukke en mediese toestande. 2 RR het 2 272 hospitaal- en 10 626 siektegevalle getrok in 1917 na Rhodesie teruggekeer.

2 RR is ontbind en die gewilliges wat nog kon
geveg het tot die einde voort-
trede wat hom in Duits Oos-Afrika afgespeel het
tot Februarie 1917. 2 Rhodesia Regiment het
vvoeg in 1915 op die oorlogsterrein verskyn. In
dierdie hoofstuk verkry die leser 'n uitstekende
oorsig oor die bosoorlog met al sy probleme,
sos dikwels ontoereikende rantsone, menig-
vuligheid, klimatiese toestande, vervoervraagstukke en mediese toestande. 2 RR het 2 272 hospitaal- en 10 626 siektegevalle ge-
naal in DDA onder genl J.C. Smuts. Smuts
gevolgen het, by Britse eenhede aangesluit. Dié Rhodesia
Native Regiment het die stryd tot die einde voort-
gesit. een van die redes was dat hulle gewoon
geveg het, by Britse eenhede aangesluit. Dié Rhodesia
Native Regiment het die stryd tot die einde voort-
trede wat hom in Duits Oos-Afrika afgespeel het
tot Februarie 1917. 2 Rhodesia Regiment het
vvoeg in 1915 op die oorlogsterrein verskyn. In
dierdie hoofstuk verkry die leser 'n uitstekende
oorsig oor die bosoorlog met al sy probleme,
sos dikwels ontoereikende rantsone, menig-
vuligheid, klimatiese toestande, vervoervraagstukke en mediese toestande. 2 RR het 2 272 hospitaal- en 10 626 siektegevalle ge-
naal in DDA onder genl J.C. Smuts. Smuts
gevolgen het, by Britse eenhede aangesluit. Dié Rhodesia
Native Regiment het die stryd tot die einde voort-
trede wat hom in Duits Oos-Afrika afgespeel het
tot Februarie 1917. 2 Rhodesia Regiment het
vvoeg in 1915 op die oorlogsterrein verskyn. In
dierdie hoofstuk verkry die leser 'n uitstekende
oorsig oor die bosoorlog met al sy probleme,
sos dikwels ontoereikende rantsone, menig-
vuligheid, klimatiese toestande, vervoervraagstukke en mediese toestande. 2 RR het 2 272 hospitaal- en 10 626 siektegevalle ge-