

Boekbesprekings / Book Reviews

Mars et Historia. Tweede lustrumnummer van de Nederlandse Vereniging ter beoefening van de militaire historie. Redaksie-adres: Heliotrooplaan 356L, 's-Gravenhage (Kijkduin), pp. 134 (met afbeeldings).

By geleentheid van sy tienjarige bestaan het bogenoemde Nederlandse vereniging 'n voortreflik versorgde jubileumaflewering van *Mars et Historia* laat verskyn.

Daar is twee artikels wat ongetwyfeld ook in ons geleedere belangstelling sal opwek, te wete A.F. Lancker se bydrae 'Historische Nederlandse forten overzee' en M.J.L. de Ruyter se artikel oor Nederlandse militêre tydskrifte.

Lancker se artikel bied die leser 'n beknopte oorsig oor dié handels- en suiwer militêre versterkings uit die dae van die eertydse Nederlandse handelmaatskappye in die wêrelddele Asië, Afrika en Amerika. Ons bekende Kaapstadse kasteel val ook onder hierdie groep.

M.J.L. de Ruyter skryf oor hedendaagse en vroeëre Nederlandse militêre tydskrifte, waarvan 'n gedeelte suiwer militêre histories is en ander hulle op die militêre verenigingslewe, militêre eenhede, sport in militêre verband en dies meer, toespits. Van 1830–1900 het 25 van hierdie tydskrifte verskyn waarvan die inhoud aanvanklik suiwer krygswetenskaplik of oorlogstegnies was. In die begin het die leserskring tot offisiere beperk gebly, terwyl die tydskrif *Het Vaandel* (opgerig in 1851) hom na 1855 begin beywer het om, behalwe onder onder-offisiere, ook krygskennis en 'n krygsmansgees onder 'alle standen' te versprei. Van 1900–1939 het 56 nuwe periodieke, waaronder die eerste militêre sportblad (1907) verskyn, bewys dat sedert 1873 reeds pogings aangewend is om die burgerlike bevolking meer begrip vir die weermag by te bring.

Na die Tweede Wêreldoorlog het, aldus die skrywer, die Nederlandse militêre pers 'n ongeken- de hoogte gekry, 'n verskynsel waaromtrent die skrywer verklaar:

'De Nederlandse militaire pers biedt ook thans een keur van zeer uiteenlopende tijdschriften, waarin de vrije discussie nog in belangrijke mate is toegenomen, zodat zij in de ogen van andere landen een zeer benijdenswaardige positie inneemt, zij het dat men verdeeld oordeelt over de vele door Verenigingen van Militairen uitgegeven bladen.'

Ander artikels wat in hierdie besondere aflewering van *Mars et Historia* verskyn, is die volgende:

Dr F.G. de Wilde: *De uniformen van het legioen van Maillebois, 1785–1786.*

H.G. Meijer: *De oudste onderscheidingen van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden (1813–1815).*

B.C. Cats: *Nederlandse parachutistenemblemen van 1941 tot heden.*

Mr. R.A. Schimmel: *Muziek voor Nederlandse militaire kapellen.*

Drs PhiMi Bosscher: *Iets over de literatuur betreffende de slag bij Jutland.*

A.J. Weekenstroo: *De vooroorlogse speelgoed-soldaat in ere hersteld.*

Kl. Sierksma: *Militaire banistiek.*

Drs J.C. van Dijk: *De Eerste Wêreldoorlog en Nederland.*

L. Verhoeff: *Op de hei daar lag een dragonder. De signalen en signaalrijmen van de Koninklijke Landmacht.*

Ten slotte kan hier, met betrekking tot die bydrae van Kl. Sierksma opgemerk word dat onder *banistiek* (Eng.: *vexillology*), 'n Nederlandse woord wat deur Sieksma gevorm is, na analogie van heraldiek alles verstaan word wat te doen het met vlae, vaandels, baniere, wimpels en dies meer, sowel in die hede as in die verlede, burgerlik en militêr. In ander tale word hierdie wetenskap soos volg genoem: *Bannistique* (Frans), *Bannistik* (Duits) en *banneristics* (Engels).

— JAN PLOEGER.

THE AUSTRALIANS AT THE BOER WAR

BY R.C. WALLACE

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In all facets of life there are professional men who follow a career according to well-established principles, and others who attempt things for which they are not equipped. History writing is not short of amateur practitioners; perhaps this is because it seems so easy to describe a set of occurrences. All one requires is a few published sources, fair writing ability, and a publisher, and another history book is served up to the public. It is evident that the reading public is less selective in selecting history books than it is in the purchase of works on other subjects — for instance, no-one will buy a medical book un-

less it is written by a doctor, and a book about sport will only sell if it is written by someone well-known for sporting achievements.

When one reads Mr Wallace's book, one sees clearly that here an amateur is at work. Mr Wallace is a retired post-office official who, according to the information on the dust-jacket, has been interested in British history all his life.

In the introduction to *The Australians at the Boer War* (p viii) the following words appear: 'In November 1904 the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr George Reid, told a returned soldiers' annual dinner in Melbourne, that he would do his best 'to see that some memorial of the campaign in the shape of an authentic history *from an Australian point of view* should be published' (reviewer's emphasis). My purpose in writing this book has been to carry out this promise to some degree'. In this paragraph the shortcoming of the book is revealed. Balanced history cannot be written from a predetermined viewpoint.

The author seldom commits himself to the expression of an opinion. Throughout the book, connecting paragraphs are used to link one quotation to another. Facts are not interpreted: '.....This letter throws a new light on this celebrated case and it must be left to the reader to draw his own conclusions after reading the relevant extracts in this book'. (p viii).

Of course the book is not without value. As a 'narrative', it collects the relevant facts into a single volume. This will make a proper evaluation of the Australians' role in the Anglo-Boer War easier.

The book re-emphasises important military precepts: no campaign should be attempted without proper maps (p 31); logistic problems must be anticipated and solved in advance where possible (pp 31–32); familiarity with the enemy's fighting methods will enable counter-measures to be devised (p 29 etc); everyday hygiene and health measures must not be ignored during a campaign (pp 4–6); and one must needs beware of the fifth column – the enemy in one's midst. 'No less than 46 858 volunteers from the South African colonies took part in the war' (p 39).

From this last-mentioned group, several units evolved which are today proud Citizen Force units of the South African Defence Force (p 39 etc). So, for instance, the establishment of the Imperial Light Horse (today the Light Horse Regiment) is well described.

In conclusion: South Africans have always respected the 'Aussies' as soldiers. They are not, and have not been, regarded as enemies of South Africa. Like the South Africans, they were forged by their country into hardened soldiers – something this book clearly demonstrates. Because of this background, they were often employed as scouts by British commanders, a task which they carried out with distinction because every Australian – like every Boer – was an individualist who could act independently of orders.

Despite the foregoing criticism, *The Australians at the Boer War* remains a readable book which illuminates a less-known part of the Anglo-Boer War. It is well presented, with a long and detailed index and a fairly comprehensive source list.

W. OTTO