

BOOK REVIEWS

SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY BUILDINGS PHOTOGRAPHED; AN HISTORICAL HERITAGE

Paul Alberts

1992

The Gallery Press, Cape Town

125 pages

Geïllustreerd

Inleidend vind die leser 'n kort biografiese oorsig oor die samesteller en titels van sy vorige publikasies. Die voorwoord is gelewer deur J.M.R. de Kock, voorsitter van die Raad vir Nasionale Gedenkwaardighede. Soos blyk uit die voorwoord is die doel met hierdie publikasie die bevordering van die bewaring van Suid-Afrika se militêre argitektoniese nalatenskap. Hierdie is 'n tydige publikasie gesien teen die feit dat die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag weens ekonomiese redes moet afstand doen van sommige van sy eiendom wat geskiedkundige persele insluit (byvoorbeeld Fort Klapperkop).

Soos die titel aandui bevat hierdie publikasie juis foto's van militêre geboue verteenwoordigend van verskeie tydperke in die land se militêre geskiedenis. Die inhoudsopgawe agterin dui aan dat die publikasie alfabeties georden is volgens die name van die geboue. Dit vergemaklik die proses van naslaan aansienlik.

Die publikasie bevat talle foto's waarvan sommige geboue vanuit verskillende hoeke fotografies toegelig word. Alhoewel die visuele aspek goed verteenwoordig word, ontbreek daar beskrywende inligting by die meeste foto's. Dit laat die leser wat nie vertrou is met die uitleg van die geboue wonder watter deel van die gebou nou eintlik vertoon word. Ook geen aanduiding van die datum waarop die verskillende foto's geneem is, word gegee nie.

Elke gebou wat gefotografeer is, word vergesel van 'n bondige historiese oorsig. Behalwe vir die verwysing na J.J. Oberholster se *The Historical Monuments of South Africa* (1972) gee die

samesteller ongelukkig nie 'n aanduiding van die bronne of instansies waar hy sy inligting en foto's gevind het nie. Vir die leser wat dalk meer oor sekere aspekte (kultuur-histories, geskiedkundig, argitektonies) van die geboue sou wou weet, ontbreek voldoende bibliografiese verwysings.

Ter afsluiting word melding gemaak van die Raad vir Nasionale Gedenkwaardighede se missie asook 'n algemene oorsig oor wetgewing en nasionale monumente.

Mej A. van der Westhuizen, Direktoraat Dokumentasiediens SAW, Privaatsak X289, Pretoria 0001.

A COUNTRY AT WAR, 1939-1945; THE MOOD OF A NATION.

Jennifer Crwys-Williams.

1992.

Ashanti Publishers, Johannesburg.

430 pages

Illustrated

R84.00

"A Country at War" is the tenth release in the South Africans at War series which is published under the Ashanti label. The book is an account of the attitudes and conditions which characterised South Africa as a nation during the Second World War. A quick glance at the contents pages will reveal that the publication covers a wide variety of aspects concerning South Africa's involvement in the conflict. The book comes in a hardcover edition and is illustrated with plenty of photographs, many of which have not been used in previous publications, as well as reproductions of the posters that were printed by the Union Government for recruitment, security and other war effort purposes. The book is ordered in a chronological fashion and runs from 1938 through to the end of the war in 1945. The writer, Jennifer Crwys-Williams, is a freelance journalist and broadcaster. Crwys-Williams has written three previous books and is the editor of numerous other publications.

"A Country at War" commences with a description of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the ensuing political turmoil present in South Africa immediately prior to the outbreak of World War Two. The political theme continues to resurface throughout the book and topics such as the leadership of General Smuts, the Ossewabrandwag and Black nationalism are discussed. Crwys-Williams also goes to great pains to highlight the sense of loyalty which English speakers supposedly felt toward the British Empire. The net result of her attentions is that an overwhelming sense of the polarisation of the country's population is conveyed.

Social history is also brought into focus. The contribution of women to the war effort is discussed, which is important, bearing in mind that they formed a significant portion of the work force once many men had volunteered for service. In addition, women played host to the thousands of foreign troops passing through the country as well as volunteering for service themselves. There are many sympathetic accounts of the difficulties experienced by women who often suffered losses or had to raise their families singlehandedly amidst the hardship of wartime.

Another theme which receives a good deal of attention is the role of people who were concerned with entertainment, whether it was to raise money for the war funds, to entertain visiting troops, or the special entertainment groups who performed for the many South African troops doing service outside the Union. Other topics which are explored include the mobilisation of the Union Defence Force, the training of recruits in South Africa and their eventual departure for the battle theatres. The last part of the book is sensibly focused on the homecoming of the troops and the repatriation of POW's, and, finally, the joy of the victory celebrations.

The themes covered in "A Country at War" are very varied, to the extent that one often wonders whether all of them are relevant. Certainly one is inclined to question whether or not the title is an apt description of the contents of the book. For example, re-

counts of the London Blitz, the Augsburg Raid, the D-Day landings as well as various stories set in East Africa, the Western Desert and Italy. These have little or nothing to do with the "mood of a nation" and any connections which may surface are usually purely incidental. From an historical perspective, "A Country at War" is probably not a work of any great academic importance as most of the information conveyed in the book is derived from oral sources as opposed to archival material. The bibliography is neither extensive nor comprehensive. It should be acknowledged that some of the topics would be difficult to research from archival material. However, the testimony of people often tends to be subjective and distorted by the passage of time. Efforts should, therefore have been made to corroborate oral sources with written evidence. The bibliography indicates that the overwhelming majority of written sources were secondary material. This is unfortunate as most of the books and articles which cover this period tend to be written from the same viewpoint. These views are ultimately carried through into new works which are often based almost entirely on existing secondary sources, thereby hampering new contributions from being made to current historical perspectives and knowledge.

It is disappointing that Crwys-Williams fails to convey her own thoughts and perspectives on World War Two and its effect on South Africa in this work. This is largely due to the fact that the bulk of the book's text consists of interviews, speeches and letters. These were loosely arranged in a chronological and thematic order and then combined with photographs so as to constitute the final product. Crwys-Williams wrote the various introductory and interlinking paragraphs which helped to integrate the text but did not manage to convey a sense of having made any great effort. Indeed, it is common to find huge chunks of text, and even pages, appearing in inverted commas. The overall effect is subsequently one of a collection of stories gathered from various individuals rather than a cohesive whole. The writer was perhaps a little ambitious in having claimed authorship of this book as her role seems

to fit the profile of an editor rather better instead. This book has been described as a "work of fundamental importance", yet it offers no basic hypothesis, conclusion or opinion. Furthermore, the overall product lacks synthesis.

Placing the book's flaws aside, it nevertheless makes for interesting and light reading. "A Country at War" will appeal to a broad section of the reading public as it is not purely military in its orientation. Women, in particular, will enjoy many of the stories, which usually manage to convey a sense of the wartime atmosphere in South Africa. Those who are unacquainted with South Africa's military past will find the book to be quite informative and ideal for an introductory read on South Africa's involvement in World War Two.

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1992

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125 pages
Geïllustreerd

Hierdie werk lyk aanvanklik baie aantreklik vir iemand wat van ou geboue hou, maar by nadere ondersoek ondervind mens 'n gevoel van teleurstelling.

Die samesteller het die potensiaal van hierdie baie interessante tema grootliks onontgin gelaat. In der waarheid word die informasie sô oppervlakkig aangebied dat hy werklik nie veel navorsing kon gedoen het nie.

Die indeling is ook onbevredigend - dit sou na my mening beter wees om al die geboue van een area saam te groepeer en af te handel voordat na die volgende area oorgegaan word. 'n Alfabetiese indeks kon 'n maklike verwysingsmiddel gewees het.

Daar is geen byskrifte by die foto's nie

en dit is 'n groot leemte omdat 'n mens immers meer van die geboue wil weet.

Selfs die redigering en taalversorging is nie na wense nie - 'n drukfout het reeds in die Voorwoord deurgeglim. Die verhewe gedagtes wat uit die Inleiding spreek, strook ook nie met dit wat uit die teks te put is nie. Dit is na my mening verregaande om na die regering van president Paul Kruger as die *Kruger regime* te verwys.

A. van Heerden, Direktoraat Dokumentasiediens SAW, Privaatsak X289, Pretoria 0001.

SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY WHO'S WHO, 1452-1992

Ian Uys
1992

Fortress Publishers, Germiston
312 pages
R91-20

Over the past few years, Ian Uys has become known as a writer of popular military history. The *South African Military Who's Who, 1452-1992* is his seventh work in this field. Although in the past most of Uys' attention has been limited to the Battles of the Somme, this work is in fact his third biographical study. The first two, *For Valour* (1973) and *Cross of Honour* (1992), were biographical introductions to each of the South African recipients of the Victoria Cross and Honoris Crux awards.

The *South African Military Who's Who*, hard-covered with an attractive dust jacket, is firmly bound and will undoubtedly enjoy a long shelf life. It is furnished with a bibliography of only secondary sources; a handy 'General Index'; a list of Abbreviations, Cemeteries and a useful 'Glossary of Battles'. The last three would have been better placed at the front of manuscript, before all of the biographies.

However, it is the two contents pages (on pages v and viii) which come as a surprise. The first is a table of contents to the whole work, while the latter shows on which page each new letter of the alphabet starts. This, together