

Neil Orpen: **The History of the Transvaal Horse Artillery 1904-1974.**

Johannesburg, 1975, pp xii, 275.

With the publication of its Regimental History, the Transvaal Horse Artillery has rendered a valuable service. The book is a welcome addition to works on South African military history.

The Transvaal Horse Artillery is one of the older Citizen Force regiments. It was established in 1904 as an artillery unit of the Transvaal Volunteers under the name Lys Volunteer Corps, in honour of its first Commanding Officer. During the same year the name was changed to Transvaal Horse Artillery Volunteers, and in 1907 it became simply Transvaal Horse Artillery. The present book looks back on the Regiment's first seventy years, often in considerable detail.

It would be tedious here to summarize the Regiment's service in war and peace. Let it be said only that the Transvaal Horse Artillery was 'blooded' in 1906 when four gunners went to Natal to assist with suppression of the Zulu Rebellion, and thereafter served during industrial disturbances on the Rand in 1914 and during both World Wars. While its spells of peacetime existence have been less eventful, they have not been dull, as the reader will discover for himself.

The book is clearly written and is sure to appeal to the military and the non-military man. It succeeds in placing the Citizen Force Regiment in the context of public life, a fortunate achievement which emphasizes the intimate link between the two in a citizen army.

A few comments will be in order concerning the style of the book. Colonel Neil Orpen has

concentrated on writing a narrative history, and while this style makes less demands on the reader, it is not altogether adequate for wartime chapters. The narrative tendency is manifest in other works by this author, (and indeed in fairness one must admit that the book under review is more analytical than those others), but the South African historian of war is going to be continually hampered unless writers start to produce work which enquires more deeply into fundamentals. For instance, we are told that the Transvaal Horse Artillery was part of 5 SA Infantry Brigade Group in North Africa, but the nature of the infantry brigade group is not explained, nor is its efficiency in the context of desert warfare examined. The time has come when problems of this type **must** be tackled if South African military-historical writing is not to stagnate.

Concerning an entirely different matter of style, the use of abbreviations is unfortunate. Readability suffers through the use of abbreviations, and provision of a glossary at the front of the book is not adequate compensation for the inconvenience of having to refer to it in the first place.

The points raised above should however not deter any prospective buyer or reader. With its wealth of detail, excellent historical illustrations and informative appendices, this book is easily one of the best publications of its kind to appear in recent years.

—R. J. Bouch

(The History of the Transvaal Horse Artillery 1904 — 1974 is available from booksellers at R15.00. However, the Regiment has met a high proportion of publication costs itself, and it will be of benefit to the Regiment if copies are bought directly from THA History Fund, 23 Dovedale Road, Cheltondale, Johannesburg, 2192).