

All the colours in history

Wessels, André. 2011. **The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902: white man's war, black man's war, traumatic war.** Bloemfontein: Sun Media. 213 p. Price: R215,00. ISBN: 978-1-920383-27-5.

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Prof André Wessels, the author of *The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* states that even though a large number of publications dealing with various aspects of the Anglo-Boer War have appeared, certain terrains remain unresearched. This publication makes a positive contribution to one such aspect, namely the role played by non-whites during the war. Traditionally, the Anglo-Boer War is viewed as a white man's war, but in reality it involved and affected all the different population groups in South Africa.

This book builds and expands on an already impressive list of accredited publications by the author on the war, making it a valuable

and reliable source for researchers. The succinct manner in which the facts are presented, however, make it accessible to a much wider audience

Part 1 of the book gives an overview of the main military events of the Anglo-Boer War. This concise summary can serve as an excellent introduction to people wanting to familiarise themselves with the war. It is, however, not merely a “blow-by-blow” rendering of the various battles and sieges. The author also points out the mistakes made on both sides and the effect these had on the course of the war.

In the introduction to this section the different terms used for the war are discussed, as well as a very brief overview of the causes of the war, the main role players, the military strengths of the two opposing forces in terms of manpower and armaments, as well as their initial tactics.

The course of the war is explained in four phases, namely the Republican offensive (the two Boer republics), the first British offensive, the second British offensive, and finally the guerrilla phase. The initial battles between the two forces took place on the borders of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek and the Orange Free State, which covers a large area. Therefore, each of these four phases is further analysed in the different geographical areas where the war was waged. This makes it possible to get a clear understanding of the tactical changes that took place as the war progressed, as well as the difficulties faced by both sides, having to deploy men over such a vast area.

In the second part of the book the military role played by black, coloured or brown people, as well as people from Asian origin, both in a combatant and a non-combatant capacity, is discussed in depth. Although neither the Boers nor the British were prepared to cede control to the black majority, they had very different life- and world-views. This influenced the way in which they saw and treated non-whites – an aspect that is thoroughly addressed in this section. Not only is the military significance of the use of non-whites discussed, but the impact it had on the non-white population. Although the war afforded them an opportunity to improve their economic position, the hope that a British victory would bring greater political freedom was dashed after the peace treaty was signed – an aspect that would play a role in future race relations in the country.

In the third part of the book, the far-reaching economic, political and social consequences of the Anglo-Boer War are discussed as it affected all South African inhabitants, as well as the implications for intergroup relations during the course of the previous century and into this century. The author traces how the trauma and collateral damage suffered during the war would become a vicious cycle of reprisal still felt today. This discussion will give the reader insight in the current situation in South Africa in terms of race relations and a better understanding of events of the past that have shaped the country's history.

The book is supplemented with maps to illustrate and explain the different phases of the war. An appendix is also provided listing the different phases of the war and the respective battles and sieges. A comprehensive source list and endnotes makes it an excellent reference source and the author also indicates sources pertaining to specific aspects of the war in the text. Photographs of the main role players, black combatants used by the British, as well as the scorched-earth policy and the internment camps further enhance the value of the book.

One cannot help to agree with the author that debates on South African history should be stimulated so that the historical amnesia that too many South Africans suffer from, is replaced with an acceptance of responsibility and forgiveness.