



R.B. EDGERTON. *Like lions they fought : the Zulu War and the last black empire in South Africa*. Southern Book Publishers : Bergvlei and Cape Town, 1988. 244 pp. Illus. R44,95 (exclusive). ISBN 1 86812 151 8.

The editor of *Soldiers of the Queen*, the Victorian Military Society journal, recently called *Like lions they fought* 'undoubtedly the most disappointing book on the Anglo-Zulu War published in recent times'. I can only agree with him, for this book fails to live up to its stated intention of examining the war afresh from the Zulu perspective.

New sources are not tapped, notwithstanding Edgerton's claims to have done so. He relies exclusively on printed contemporary sources (excluding the *British Parliamentary Papers*) and on a fairly comprehensive and reasonably up-to-date collection of modern secondary sources. Yet there is much, especially in journals, that he has missed. Vital private and official unpublished papers in various collections here and in Britain are ignored. Nor are the footnotes he provides always adequate, for the page references are sometimes left out. As for the maps, I wonder if he obtained Donald Morris's permission to adapt his maps of Rorke's Drift and Hlobane? He certainly did not receive mine to make a travesty of those of Isandlwana and Khambula which I have published elsewhere.

More disturbing, perhaps, than plagiarized maps are the extraordinary number of errors which the book contains. It was Elaine Unterhalter, rather than Peter Colenbrander, who wrote the article on the people of Nquthu during the war. It is quite untrue to say that by 1879 most Zulu warriors had rifles: they had muzzle-loaders of various kinds. At Isandlwana, Durnford's orders were to reinforce the camp, not to support Chelmsford's force. It was his disastrous initiative which led to Pulleine having to over-extend his defensive perimeter.

At a more general level, the discussion on confederation and the causes of the war does not take the most recent scholarship into account, while the section on post-war Zululand simply displays ignorance. Zululand was not quiet after the death of Cetshwayo as is airily proclaimed. And why the many misleading generalizations? Why imply, for example, that the British were blowing up caves full of Zulu civilians all over Zululand, when the incident applies specifically to Manyonyoba's adherents in north-western Zululand?

It must be accepted, of course, that this is a book apparently aimed at an American general readership normally unacquainted with 19th century Africa, and which is predisposed to condemn the imperial power out of hand while waxing sentimental about the exotic indigenous people resisting it. Doubtless this is why the author finds it necessary to labour the comparison between the Zulu and the more familiar Indians of the Great Plains, and to tack on a generalized chapter about colonial wars in Africa. It does not explain, however, why he treats his subjects (whether Zulu or British) as curious specimens to be examined from the astonished perspective of the present in precisely the manner of the arrogant ethnocentrics he so strongly condemns. For even though he does come to terms with Zulu society, their military system and the political structure of the kingdom (not empire, surely!), as well as with British military organization, he does so with little historical empathy, choosing to titillate a modern readership through dwelling in sensational detail on aspects such as Zulu sexual habits and the effect of flogging in the British Army. Despite the lurid descriptions of the dismal gore of the battlefield, his handling of military encounters is superficial, with no analysis in any depth of Zulu strategy and tactics.

For a book purporting to be about the Zulu war effort, there is remarkably little about the extensive and protracted Zulu attempts to reach a negotiated end to the war, and even less about the political consequences in the kingdom of military defeat and the collapse of royal authority. It is here that Edgerton would find an answer to his speculation why the Zulu stopped fighting. The chapter on 'The experience of war' was potentially the most

interesting part of the book, but even there the discussion is hardly innovative or incisive.

In all, this is a popular work that differs from some of its predecessors through its attempt at a Zulu perspective, but it has little to offer the historian or serious student of the Anglo-Zulu War.

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