

A.P. SMIT and L. MARÉ (eds.). *Die Beleg van Mafeking: dagboek van Abraham Stafleu*. Human Sciences Research Council: Pretoria, 1985. 285 pp. Illus. R19,70 (exclusive). ISBN 0 7969 0191 0.

Few episodes of the Second Anglo-Boer War have attracted as much notice from contemporary and later writers as the siege of Mafeking. War correspondents, diarists, biographers and historians have focussed on it from many angles and it might be tempting to think that the topic had reached saturation point. However, the editors of this volume have detected an imbalance; the impressions of those who served under Baden-Powell have predominated whilst eyewitness accounts from within the Boer ranks have been rare. Once more posterity has reason to be thankful for the diary-jotting habit that was characteristic of so many of the participants.

Abraham Stafleu's contribution in Dutch is unusual for he was a non-combatant, voluntarily attached to the Red Cross section which accompanied the Marico Commando. He was a Netherlander who had come to the South African Republic in 1897 to take up a teaching post in the Marico district. The Boer methods of waging war at Mafeking were mystifying to Stafleu's orderly mind and he deplored the lack of organisation and discipline that he experienced in his own sector. His likes and dislikes are expressed robustly. Set against the bravery and initiative of some of the junior officers, is the Boer commander, General Kootjie Snyman, with whom Stafleu had several brushes. Snyman's dismissal of the value of services offered by foreign volunteers made Stafleu's hackles rise and he wrote scornfully of Snyman's obstinacy, rudeness and tendency to hold endless councils of war that produced no results. As the siege of Mafeking dragged on the besiegers were disheartened. At the humiliating conclusion, by which time Stafleu had returned to his teaching and was relying on information from others, he noted sarcastically that second only to Baden-Powell, Snyman deserved the V.C. and the gratitude of the English people! Stafleu's sharp comments enhance the value of his diary. At times the siege had aspects of a picnic or of comic opera, but harsh death was a periodic attendant.

Stafleu's first wife died shortly before the war leaving him to care for an infant son. This child was a concentration camp victim in 1901. After these black experiences he was to marry again, and father eight children by his second and third wives and to live to the age of 72.

The editors have been very conscientious in their cross-references, and in identifying ordinary burghers mentioned by Stafleu have almost-gone beyond the call of duty. A well-illustrated and professionally produced volume is a credit to the Human Sciences Research Council and a worthy addition to the documentation of the war.

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