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THE UNION WAR HISTORIES AND THE BATTLE FOR THE HISTORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA


ABSTRACT: Military History has three primary audiences: the general public, academe, and the armed forces – each has its own beliefs regarding the purpose and utility of the military past. Recognising the value of a war history for South Africa, Jan Smuts created the Union War Histories section in 1941. Yet the men appointed to write this history realised that they would never be able to satisfy all three competing readerships. This paper examines the research production of the Union War Histories section as well as the official and public response to their work, which is placed within a wider historiographical process. The notion of a historiographical progression – of an intersecting chain of counter narratives – is posited: accounts by journalists, official historians, personal narrators and regimental historians, leading to a post-participant historiography. This is a progression that seems to hold true for South Africa’s other wars, and indeed the wars of other countries.

KEYWORDS: historiography, war literature, official history, soldier narratives, memory

INTRODUCTION

The literature on the Second World War has mushroomed since the firing of the first shots in Asia and in Europe. In South Africa, the writing of the war’s history was for long conducted inconsistently – and at irregular intervals – and only came into its own in the last twenty years.¹

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¹ J. Grey, “*Standing humbly in the ante-chambers of Clio: the rise and fall of Union War Histories*,” *Scientia Militaria* 2000, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 253-66; and I. van der Waag, *Contested histories: official history and the South African military in the 20th century*, [in:] *The Last Word? Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth*, ed. J. Grey, Westport, Connecticut and London 2003, pp. 27-52.

The war, of course, produced a flood of writing: by poets, memoirists, writers of fiction and non-fiction, and, of course, by writers of the “History of the War”. This literature comprises several, often overlapping, mostly misunderstood categories: these include the official histories written within government offices; the memoirs and personal accounts of commanders and ordinary soldiers; the regimental histories written largely as memorials; and, more recently, a post-participant historiography.

Political controversy and military complexity had marked South Africa’s war effort from the start. The Union Defence Force (U.D.F.) was expanded dramatically after September 1939 and – in response to pressure from opposition groups within the country – was reorganised on an entirely voluntary basis. Three divisions were raised and orange tabs were worn by all who took the oath to serve anywhere in Africa. Numerous combat and support units were formed, the air force was expanded rapidly, and Smuts – making early political capital – wrested control over the naval assets in South Africa from the British Admiralty. Two infantry divisions left South African shores: the 1st SA Division (1, 2 and 5 Brigades) was sent to East Africa and then, following the defeat of the Italian armies in Abyssinia and Somalia, was ordered to Egypt, where it was joined by the 2nd SA Division (3, 4 and 6 Brigades). In North Africa they suffered disaster at Sidi Rezegh (November 1941) and Tobruk (June 1942), where practically the whole of the 2nd Division went ‘into the bag’. This left the 1st Division to engage in the battles around Alamein before returning to the Union in early 1943, while the SAAF’s fighter and bomber squadrons and SAEC companies operated throughout North Africa and the Middle East and later Italy. In the meantime, during the second half of 1942, 7th SA Brigade – part of the reserve 3rd Division – took part in the operations against Vichy-governed Madagascar. The 6th SA Armoured Division was formed on 1 February 1943 to serve in Italy and it drew servicemen from the returned 1st Division; all took the general service oath to serve anywhere in the world until the war’s end. Throughout the war, the opposition National Party, extra-parliamentary movements and paramilitary groups attempted to undermine the government’s war policy.² Inevitably, the nature of this “complicated” and highly-politicised war influenced the history writing process.

General J.C. Smuts, South Africa’s wartime prime minister, had recognised the importance of creating a record of his country’s role and participation in the Second World War. A section called War Records, later War Histories, was created within the Military Intelligence Branch

² I. van der Waag, *A Military History of Modern South Africa*, Cape Town and Johannesburg 2015, chapter 5.

and placed under the watchful eye of John Agar-Hamilton. The histories they produced were aimed at three different audiences: the general public, an academic readership, and the military. As an audience, the general public reads largely for pleasure; they want a good story, one of bravery, persistence in adversity, and resilience in overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds. Such narratives might earn support and respect for the armed forces, and, more widely, meet goals in nation-building, particularly at difficult times in a nation's national path. The academic audience, comprising scholars most of whom are university-trained and possibly also university-based, is critical and engages with the past in order to gain a better understanding of its complexity and significance and in a wider context. They are often quick to note that the story – if written by official war historians – is often sanitised. A third audience, the military, is often uncritical in a scholarly sense and focuses on what is called professional military development. Often battle-oriented, theirs is the quest for objective knowledge and the distillation of easily understood “lessons”, which might be objectively used to improve efficiency and battlefield performance. For this audience there are definite, hard, military outcomes. If not, the effort in writing the history may be deemed a waste of time.³

This paper uses South Africa's official history programme of the Second World War to examine these oft-competing domains. It broadly outlines the South African historiography of the war as rendered by the Union War Histories section; examines the official and public response to their work, highlighting its meaning and longer-term significance; and places their work within the wider historiographical process.

THE UNION WAR HISTORIES AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE WAR

The writing of the history of South Africa's war started early. In June 1941, Agar-Hamilton first mooted the idea of producing a small history telling the story of the Springboks' part in the East African campaign. He proposed a small booklet – something similar to *The Battle of Britain* that had appeared recently in London. Agar-Hamilton was prepared 'to have a shot at it'.⁴ But, with the publicity potential immediately recognised – 'It must be a publication for the masses, not a treatise for the select few'⁵ – the work was given to the public relations function

³ S. Morillo and M.F. Pavkovic, *What is Military History?* Cambridge 2018, pp. 6-7.

⁴ Department of Defence (DOD) Archives, Pretoria, UWH Admin, box 2, file P.M.H. 20 Proposal for Short History, Memo by Capt J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton, 7 Jun 1941.

⁵ DOD Archives, UWH Admin, box 2, file P.M.H. 20 Proposal for Short History, lc (111) to lc, 10 Jun 1941.

at General Headquarters (G.H.Q.). The result was *Vanguard of Victory*: a magazine-type publication, profusely illustrated, and with a story told in laudatory terms. Its authors, Conrad Norton and Uys Krige, were the Bureau of Information's war correspondents in East Africa, while Dixon Keartland, the official war photographer – and also attached to the Bureau – had taken the photographs that were used.⁶ *Vanguard of Victory*, billed in its subtitle as 'A Short Review of the South African Victories in East Africa', appeared towards the end of 1941. It carried the government's hallmarks: it was issued by the Bureau, printed by the Government Printer, and Smuts wrote the foreword – 'It is with affection and pride that this booklet is dedicated to the officers, men and women of the South African Army and Air Force who in East Africa struck this mighty blow for victory and freedom.'⁷ The booklet was produced expressly for the public and to meet the demand for details and "personalities". But *Vanguard of Victory* was a remarkable deviation from the initial feeling that 'anything that smacks of the official publication will miss the mark.'⁸ Smuts had created the Bureau in October 1939 to inform public opinion; working with the public-relations functionaries at G.H.Q. in Pretoria, they would sponsor or produce further publications as the war progressed.⁹

Agar-Hamilton is an interesting figure. Born in Cairo, he moved with his parents to South Africa, where he studied and later taught in the History Department at the University of Pretoria. He exchanged his gown for a military uniform in 1940, when he was asked to head the Union War History Section at G.H.Q., and he soon surrounded himself with a group of hand-picked, fellow historians, whom he recruited from the universities. Commissioned, these men worked under him in Pretoria or were attached as historical recording officers (H.R.Os) to each of the South African formations in the war theatres. Agar-Hamilton's small section – comprising an assortment of historians, archivists, translators, and research assistants – became the first fully-fledged history section in the UDF and included men like Major Eric Axelson, Major L.C.F. Turner, Commander H.R. Gordon-Cumming, and Captain J.E. Betzler.

The responsibilities of the H.R.Os were threefold: they had to ensure that every unit in the Division kept a war diary, as fully as possible, and that these were submitted to formation

⁶ C. Norton and U. Krige, *Vanguard of Victory; A Short Review of the South African Victories in East Africa, 1940-1941*, Pretoria 1941. JS Gericke Library, Stellenbosch University (S.U.), Uys Krige Collection, 225.NB.OC(6/1), Telegram from Dechief to Krige, 20 Mar 1941.

⁷ J.C. Smuts, 'Foreword', to C. Norton and U. Krige, *Vanguard of Victory*, *Op.cit.*, p. 1.

⁸ DOD Archives, UWH Admin, box 2, file P.M.H. 20 Proposal for Short History, lc (111) to lc, 10 Jun 1941.

⁹ F.L. Monama, *South African Propaganda Agencies and the Battle for Public Opinion during the Second World War, 1939-1945*, "Scientia Militaria" 2016, vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 145-167.

headquarters every month; they had to collect historical information (local newspapers, propaganda pamphlets, photographs) and supplement the war diaries whenever possible with interviews; and they had to 'make history' for the formations to which they were attached.¹⁰ In essence they had to rake in historical material, and the work up this material into a first history – a kind of framework from which later historians would benefit. Of South Africa's H.R.Os, Eric Axelson was the most prolific; he not only drafted several manuscript histories of the 6th SA Armoured Division, but also kept an activity log for his section – which was later reworked into a memoir – and he maintained a lively, informative correspondence with Agar-Hamilton and fellow recording officers, which extended well into the post-war years. Notwithstanding, while they enjoyed agency, the H.R.Os faced a range of environmental and organisational constraints. From May 1945, they were additionally tasked to assist the various units and formations with the compilation of their respective unit and formation histories. As a group, they accomplished a remarkable amount of work.

However, for much of its life, the staff of the Union War Histories found themselves at odds with their principles at G.H.Q. and the senior commanders of the divisions and other formations at the warfronts. The problems they encountered varied considerably and seemingly grew with each succeeding year of the war. At first, this contretemps was at a practical level. Agar-Hamilton, when raising the question of the keeping of historical records, was mostly 'shooed gently away.'¹¹ When raising the question of historical surveys, he faced the widely held belief that *History* might be produced quickly and by any soldier ordered to write it. Writing along these lines in February 1944, Agar-Hamilton expressed his frustration:

That is what makes me despair when people ring me up and say 'I'm sending Sapper so & so or Sgt Blank to do our history. Just show him what you want done and he will do it.' Give me so & so or Blank for three years and I might do something – provided, of course, he has the natural aptitude.¹²

¹⁰ Jagger Library, University of Cape Town (U.C.T.), BC1263 Eric Axelson Papers, C2, Axelson, 'Preface', Taranto to the Alps.

¹¹ DOD Archives, UWH Admin, box 2, file P.M.H. 20 Proposal for Short History, Agar-Hamilton to D.M.I., undated.

¹² U.C.T., BC1263 Axelson Papers, C4, Agar-Hamilton to Axelson, 18 Feb 1944.

Rank was also an issue. Captain W.A. Bellwood, who worked on the historical surveys of the headquarters sections, noted that the people with whom he dealt were 'all fairly highly placed'; he was only able to do his work 'because of [his] private friendly relations'.¹³ Much depended on senior officers, and their individual understanding of and support for the work of Agar-Hamilton's team.

The H.R.Os experienced a greater range of problems: they were at the warfronts, far from Pretoria, and at the mercy of more senior officers whom often did not understand the necessity or the intricacies of historical recording work. Understandably their immediate concern was the warfighting – the winning of the war. Writing from his brigade's headquarters in Italy, Axelson noted: 'Historical ruminations and abstract philosophisings are so completely foreign to our immediate world.'¹⁴ But it went further. The H.R.Os battled constantly to secure material of historical value and they encountered bureaucratic obstacles and tribal jealousies, which manifested in different ways: in the difficulties faced in scrounging equipment, transport, cameras and reels of film, and in securing billets. The competitive undercurrent between them and the publicity staffs highlighted the differences between their occupations.¹⁵ Agar-Hamilton invariably had to appease his principals in Pretoria, while mollifying his staff in the war theatres.¹⁶ Things would reach a head towards the war's end.

Against this background, the staff in Pretoria started with the writing of the history of the war. Agar-Hamilton had envisaged a dual approach: 'a popular single-volume treatment aimed at a general readership [what he termed a 'people's history'] and a collection of more technical monographs written by and for those with expertise in various fields [which he termed 'military college' histories]'.¹⁷ In 1943, wanting to advance the process for the writing of a 'people's history', Smuts had offered the job of editor-in-chief for a 'War History of South Africa' to Professor Eric Walker, a well-known South African historian, who was then Vere Harmsworth Professor of Imperial and Naval History at Cambridge University. Walker, however, was only

¹³ DOD Archives, UWH Admin, box 2, file P.M.H. 20 Proposal for Short History, Capt. W.A. Bellwood to Agar-Hamilton, 19 Feb 1942.

¹⁴ DOD Archives, UWH Admin, box 5, file P.M.H. 32 6 SA Armd Div Correspondence, Axelson to Agar-Hamilton, 26 Sep 1944.

¹⁵ UCT, BC1263 Axelson Papers, C2, Daily log, 1 June 1944.

¹⁶ For more on the work of the historical recording officers, and the troubles they faced, see I. van der Waag, *Eric Axelson and the History of the Sixth SA Armoured Division in Italy, 1943-1945*, [in:] *Sights, Sounds, Memories: South African Soldier Experiences of the Second World War*, ed. I. van der Waag, Stellenbosch 2020, chapter 5.

¹⁷ J. Grey, "Standing humbly in the ante-chambers of Clio": the rise and fall of Union War Histories, "Scientia Militaria" 2000, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 256-57.

prepared to return to South Africa for a six-month period during which time he would 'map out the history and speak authoritatively on such things as lay-out, staff and so on, and get us over the chief of our hurdles.'¹⁸ Walker's illness delayed matters – and, in the end, this 'War History' never appeared.

In the meantime, Sidi Rezegh and Tobruk – South Africa's military disasters in North Africa – had become the primary focus of Agar-Hamilton's staff in Pretoria and the first of the technical monographs. Of Tobruk, which was immediately smeared with allegations of treachery, Smuts had said:

There is nothing in these cruel rumours of fifth column activities. ... These rumours if they gain currency may wound the pride of South Africa beyond repair and cause a breach which time itself may not heal. They must, therefore, be scotched as soon as possible.¹⁹

Tobruk therefore provided the starting point for Agar-Hamilton and his team. And they started immediately: war diaries and personal narratives were examined; participants were interviewed; and a range of secondary sources were scrutinised. They worked under the supervision of an advisory committee, which was appointed in November 1943 and chaired by H.B. Thom, a professor of history at Stellenbosch University. Other distinguished historians and government archivists served on the committee at different times – including Professors I.S. Fourie and Alan Hattersley, and chief archivists Lt Col Colin Graham Botha, Dr Coenraad Beyers, and Dr A. Kieser. Moreover, there was a measure of international cooperation in writing the national official histories, although this at times was rather competitive.²⁰ An Advisory History Conference – representing the official historians from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States – convened in Washington, in February 1948, and established

¹⁸ UCT, BC1263 Axelson Papers, C4, Agar-Hamilton to Axelson, 21 June 1944. On the role and place of Walker in South African history writing, see C. Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past; Major historians on race and class*, Cape Town and Johannesburg 1988, pp. 112-115; and K.W. Smith, *The Changing Past; Trends in South African historical writing*, Johannesburg 1988, pp. 121-131.

¹⁹ UCT, BC631 S.F. Waterson Collection, A3.9.51, Smuts to Waterson, 10 Jul 1942.

²⁰ J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton and L.C.F. Turner, *Crisis in the Desert, May-July 1942*, Cape Town, London, New York 1952, p. x; J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton and L.C.F. Turner, *The Sidi Rezeg Battles, 1941*, Cape Town, London, New York 1957, p.vi. N. Orpen, *East African and Abyssinian Campaigns*, Cape Town and Johannesburg 1968, p. iii. The designation was changed in 1945 to the War History Advisory Committee. Reconstituted several times, after overviewing the *South African Forces World War II* series, it was eventually disbanded on 31 May 1979. See Anon., 'n Kort geskiedenis van die Militêre Informasieburo, "Archives News" Jul 1983, p. 41.

some guiding principles: most importantly they acknowledged that reliable, comprehensive, official histories would require 'freedom of research' in each other's national archives as well as in the captured enemy documents.²¹ But "openness" remained a problem – 'the British continued to argue that the Combined records be excluded from the other national historians'²² – and heightened the competition between the official historians of the Commonwealth, who were wont to share but, at the same time, were inclined to guard national sensibilities. Agar-Hamilton had told Axelson in November 1951 that the Australians had been treating the South African war effort 'with lordly disdain' and were asking for narratives of the Desert air war.²³ However, their quest for comprehensive, reliable narratives – that would constitute a published history of South Africa's war – was ended prematurely when the Union War Histories was closed in 1961. Only three volumes had appeared.

Crisis in the Desert (1952) was the first of these publications. The Union War History report on Tobruk, never published in its original, unabridged form, had been followed by work on the German offensives on the Gazala Line, Rommel's offensive against Egypt, the German victory at Mersa Matruh, and the halting of the offensive at Alamein. Again the official archives were supplemented by personal narratives and oral history: South African, British, Italian, German and Australian.²⁴ *Crisis in the Desert* was presented in three parts: the Gazala Line, Tobruk, and Alamein. It enjoyed a print run of only 4 000.²⁵ The second publication, *The Sidi Rezeg Battles 1941*, appeared five years later and covered the actions of the 1st S.A. Infantry Division, with the great desert offensive of November 1941 as background. This too was based on the official documents of the 8th Army as well as the *Panzergruppe Afrika*: the main objective being the solution of the burning questions regarding the Crusader battles.²⁶ The third and final publication was *War in the Southern Oceans*. Gordon-Cumming provided the overview of the Navy; Turner made an extensive strategic study on the naval activity at the Cape of Good Hope and in the southern oceans; while Betzler had conducted research in London and Germany. The information

²¹ T. Cook, *Clio's Warriors; Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars*, Vancouver and Toronto 2006, p. 150. See also The National Archives of the United Kingdom, CAB 140/50 Advisory Historical Conference, Washington, 4-6 Feb 1948.

²² T. Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, *Op.cit.*, p. 150.

²³ UCT, BC1263 Axelson Papers, B1(A), Agar-Hamilton to Axelson, 17 Nov 1951.

²⁴ For the kinds of sources Agar-Hamilton had outlined see: DOD Archives, UWH Admin, box 2, file P.M.H. 21 Material and Sources of Information, Memo on 'South African War History: Sources', undated (c. 1943).

²⁵ J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton and L.C.F. Turner, *Crisis in the Desert, May-July 1942*, Cape Town, London, New York 1952, pp. vii, 368.

²⁶ J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton and L.C.F. Turner, *The Sidi Rezeg Battles, 1941*, Cape Town, London, New York 1957.

on the SA Air Force, generated by Axelson, was also used. The writers commenced their story with the crusade against the *Admiral Graf Spee* and the sinking of the *Watussi* and followed with the series of German raids in the shipping-lanes of the Atlantic and Indian oceans. They included appendices on the German submarines as well as the South African vessels and crews seconded to the Royal Navy.²⁷ The result was the best, single piece of official military history ever produced by South Africa.

The Union War Histories, for so long under attack by the Nationalist government, which had come to power in 1948, was forced to closed its doors in 1961. The staff, so carefully assembled from 1940, dispersed to history departments, research institutes and archives repositories around the world: Turner left in 1947 for a university position in Australia; Axelson, returning to his original interest in the history of Portugal in Africa, accepted a position at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1955 and then the King George V chair at the University of Cape Town²⁸; Betzler died of a heart attack in 1960; and Michael Roberts 'went on to a distinguished career as Professor of History at Rhodes followed by twenty years at Queen's University, Belfast as the foremost scholar of early modern Sweden and the age of Gustavus Adolphus'.²⁹ Agar-Hamilton, the last to leave the bridge, took up a position at Rhodes University in 1961. Most of them flourished after leaving War Histories.

Together, they had accomplished a tremendous amount of work; the three published volumes represented but a small amount of the research they had done. Their documentary legacy – accessioned as the Union War Histories Narratives and Reports collection at the Department of Defence Archives – comprises literally hundreds of boxes of unpublished manuscripts, transcripts of interviews, copies of personal accounts, maps, and photographs in addition to original war diaries and general correspondence files. Yet, their work – done while in the employ of the Department of Defence and later the Prime Minister's Office – was criticised, and severely so, in the South Africa of the 1940s and 1950s. They could satisfy one, sometimes two, but never all three audiences.

²⁷ L.C.F. Turner, H.R. Gordon-Cumming and J.E. Betzler, *War in the Southern Oceans, 1939-1945*, Cape Town, London, New York 1961, p. 288.

²⁸ P. Harries and C. Saunders, *Eric Axelson and the history of Portugal in Africa*, "South African Historical Journal" 1998, Vol. 39., pp. 167-175. UCT, BC1263 Axelson Papers, B1(A), Agar-Hamilton to Axelson, 26 Feb 1962.

²⁹ J. Grey, "Standing humbly in the ante-chambers of Clío", *Op.cit.*, pp. 253-66.

THE OFFICIAL AND PUBLIC RESPONSE

Today, we adopt a broad definition of Military History, which, in the words of Morillo and Pavkovic,

encompasses not just the history of war and wars, but any historical study in which military personnel of all sorts, warfare (the way in which conflicts are actually fought on land, at sea, and in the air), military institutions, and their various intersections with politics, economics, society, nature, and culture form the focus or topic of the work.³⁰

This means that the study of Military History has to do with the conduct of military operations, the nature and design of armed forces, the development and allocation of technologies, from the development of weapons systems to the growth of medical science, as well as the constraints placed on warfare by factors such as culture, the environment, climate, geography, and patterns of economic production. At its best, Military History crosses many abstract academic boundaries and benefits from methodological advances and insights of related disciplines. British historian, Sir Michael Howard, urged the soldier to study Military History in depth (to uncover the patterns of seeming orderliness imposed by historians on a complex past); in breadth (to understand the sequence of events, of causality, and the existence of continuities or discontinuities); and in context (to appreciate the impact of significant political, social, and economic factors on the military domain).³¹ Anything else, Howard argued, would constitute an abuse of the military past. This definition, and the views regarding Military History's relative uses, has of course changed over the past century, in South Africa as elsewhere.

Military History is not monolithic, immovable and uniform; it is in a permanent state of flux. Dutch historian, Pieter Geyl, spoke of History as a debate without end; historians interrogate the past, interrogate their sources, and interrogate each other, in their quest for an ever elusive historical truth. Even within armed forces – where there may be a presumption of uniformity in what Military History may be – military scholars speak of the levels of war to explain activities that happen at different strata in defence organisations. These levels – ranging from grand strategy to minor tactics – and their connection to historical analysis are explained in simplified fashion in

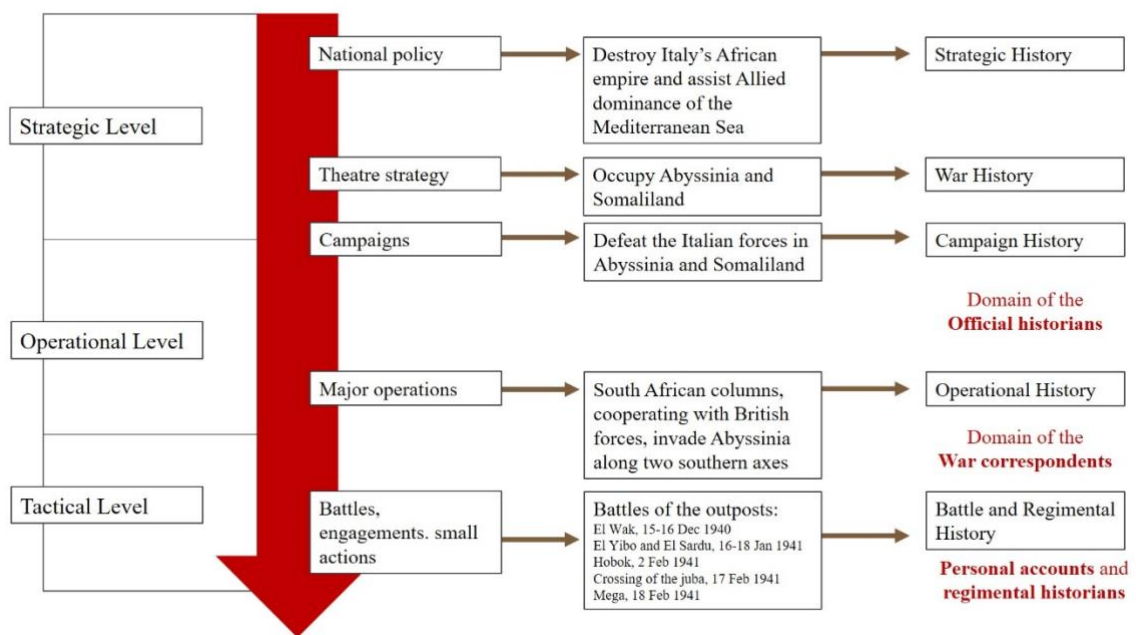
³⁰ S. Morillo and M.F. Pavkovic, *What is Military History?* *Op.cit.*, p. 5.

³¹ Michael Howard, *The Use and Abuse of Military History*, "Journal of the Royal United Services Institution" 1962, vol. 107, no 625, pp. 4-10.

Figure 1. Important to note, however, is the connection between these levels of war and the flow of historical analysis from battle and regimental history at the tactical level, through the operational level (operational and campaign history) to the strategic level (strategic history and war history).

Fig. 1.

The levels of war and their connection to historical analysis, using the start of the East African Campaign to illustrate.



The work of the Union War Histories may be placed within this framework. The first two of the published volumes – *Crisis in the Desert* and *The Sidi Rezeg Battles* – are clearly operational histories analysing the role played by South African forces in the North African campaign; while the third volume takes a wider, longer view and treats the maritime war in the Southern Oceans over a six-year period. Axelson’s history of the 6th Division adopted an even wider approach: using official documents, interviews, and his own personal observation, his narrative had remarkable context and depth – he placed the South African operations within the wider campaign and included the impact of the war on the civilian population in Italy. It was essential, Axelson argued, ‘to view the whole Italian battlefield from sea to sea [in order] to view the South African contribution in correct perspective’.³² But the response from the divisional headquarters was crushing. Axelson, they believed, was ‘looking at the war from the wrong end of the telescope’.

³² UCT, BC1263 Axelson Papers, C2, Daily log, 12 Jul 1944.

Axelson summarised the position: 'they wanted to see it from forward patrols [instead of] from a proper perspective'.³³ Axelson, the professional historian, wanted to write a war history; the senior officers of the division wanted an operational history – in which names would be forged and reputations cemented. Their reaction caused Axelson considerable humiliation and it depressed him: it 'knocked me into nearly three weeks of silence'.³⁴

The official and public responses to the work of the Union War Histories illustrates the contest between the three audiences – popular, military, academic – outlined in the introduction to this article. High-ranking military officers did not like the more "academic" brand of history, which was, in many respects, the opposite of the more traditional, institutionalised "drum-and-trumpet" type. For the historical recording officers, the truth was theirs and not sanitised; their approach was broad rather than parochial; and, tending to avoid individual and regimental ephemera, the H.R.Os told a larger story that also touched on the war's impact on civilian people. Moreover, their history was no memorial to fallen comrades, for those that did not return – this they left to the regimental historians – but rather a broader sweep, telling the story with width and context. Much military history is produced by soldiers. By the men *who were there*. The H.R.Os had been there. But they were not *fighting* soldiers and, for officers, they seemingly did unorthodox things. They did not steer away from distasteful details, they did not fanfaronade high-ranking officers, and they interviewed men and women regardless of role or rank. For these military moguls, the H.R.Os mostly did not speak with an *authentic* voice.

The battle for the history of the war also played out in the design and roll out of the military history curriculum at the South African Military College. Turner, in consultation with Agar-Hamilton, drew up the military history module for the new cadet course starting on 1 April 1947; this was the first post-war cadet course in the newly demobilised U.D.F. Three points had to be borne in mind: cadets had to have a factual knowledge of the great campaigns of the past, they had to understand the fundamental principles of strategy, and they had to be able to explain the evolution of the art of warfare. Colonel H.S. Cilliers, the college's commandant, reasoned that if this could be accomplished the syllabus would be 'entirely adequate'.³⁵

³³ UCT, BC1263 Axelson Papers, C2, Daily log, 21 Jul 1944.

³⁴ DOD Archives, UWH Admin, box 5, file P.M.H. 32 6 SA Armd Div Correspondence, Axelson to Agar-Hamilton, 26 Sep 1944.

³⁵ DOD Archives, UWH Admin, box 39, file P.M.H. 117 vol. 1 Military History Course, Col H.S. Cilliers to Agar-Hamilton, 14 Jan 1947.

However, problems – that tested the relationships between the college staff, the lecturers from the U.W.H., and the course cadets – soon arose: the pass-rate was low and there were calls to reduce the reading to a minimum, provide a synopsis of each lecture, and examine only the précis. Agar-Hamilton had to remind his counterparts of their purpose: ‘the chief object of the course is to teach the cadets to study war.’³⁶

Still more fundamental problems arose in terms of the Military History module offered to officers qualifying for promotion to captain and major. Here the focus was on contemporary warfare with a heavy emphasis on the South African operations of the Second World War – with a ‘strong tactical bias.’³⁷ However, the narratives – covering operations ranging from East Africa to the final offensives in Italy – were still being written and, although the main facts were available, Turner felt it necessary to avoid controversial subjects: most notably Sidi Rezegh and Tobruk. Turner and Axelson, who co-wrote the précis, took care to avoid direct criticism of the conduct of operations, but still felt great unease. Many of the personalities were still living and occupied important posts at D.H.Q. They were, Turner told Agar-Hamilton, ‘not yet in a position to write an impartial account of these actions from which lessons of value could be derived.’³⁸ They prepared their narratives principally from the war diaries, which they were able to supplement with interviews and personal narratives. ‘Alterations and corrections’, Agar-Hamilton told the Director of Military Training, would ‘be inevitable’. He continued:

This account, therefore, is not, and does NOT pretend to be, a military history in the true sense. None the less, although criticism has been avoided, it is more than probable that some officers may take offence at the way their operations have been described. This Section has done its best to produce an impartial and accurate narrative, but it cannot foresee all possible human susceptibilities. It should be pointed out, therefore, that your distribution of these precis to a large

³⁶ DOD Archives, UWH Admin, box 39, file P.M.H. 117 vol. 1 Military History Course, Agar-Hamilton to Cilliers, 16 Jun 1947.

³⁷ DOD Archives, UWH Admin, box 39, file P.M.H. 117 vol. 1 Military History Course, Turner to Agar-Hamilton, 29 Sep 1947.

³⁸ DOD Archives, UWH Admin, box 39, file P.M.H. 117 vol. 1 Military History Course, Turner to Agar-Hamilton, 29 Sep 1947.

number of junior officers may result in a considerable “backwash” from their indignant seniors.³⁹

The initial battles for the history of the war had been waged between the official historians and senior officers who had reputations to protect; after May 1948, the contest entered the political arena. The National Party came to power following the general election in May 1948. Rabidly anti-British, it had opposed South Africa’s entry to the war on 6 September 1939. The new government instituted a flood of change – also for the Union Defence Force, and the history-writing programme. Frans Erasmus, the new defence minister, brought a refocus in the approach to the study of military history in South Africa. He and other members of the National Party had been opposed to South African participation in the Second World War, which they had considered Britain’s war: then not worth fighting, now not worth researching.

A WIDER HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PROCESS

As a result, the whole orientation changed. Erasmus had first attempted to control the Union War Histories; but, when this failed, he worked for its disbandment. In 1950, he and his protégé, Colonel R.C. Hiemstra – whom he rapidly promoted – established a military archives based upon the *Sectie Krijgsgeschiedenis van de Generale Staf* of the Netherlands. In effect, a new organisation – again within the Department of Defence – was created as a rival to the Union War Histories. Again, the staff of this new section were both archivists and historians, but their research field now covered the period since the establishment of the first permanent European settlement at the Cape in 1652. Erasmus appointed Afrikaner historians, who were instructed to concentrate on the military history of the Afrikaner and specifically on the two Anglo-Boer wars (1880-1902).⁴⁰ But, significantly, Erasmus’s attack on the Union War Histories, and on the traditional regiments of the Citizen Force more widely, provided new spurs for a variety of lay and professional historians. Their writing took three forms: personal narratives, regimental history, and the semi-official histories published by Purnell from 1968.

³⁹ DOD Archives, UWH Admin, box 39, file P.M.H. 117 vol. 1 Military History Course, Agar-Hamilton to Director Military Training, 31 Mar 1948.

⁴⁰ See the archives of the Minister of Defence, Erasmus and Fouché Collection, Box 120, file MV78 Krygsargief; J.A. Combrinck, *Die ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die SAW Argief*, “Argiefnuus” Sep 1976.

The personal narratives – published as the reminiscences, memoirs and autobiographies of soldiers – is the first of these.⁴¹ Building on a long tradition in the British world of telling and receiving veterans' stories, South African service personnel produced a range of personal accounts during and after the Second World War.⁴² Perhaps thousands of such accounts, often partial in nature, were left by men of all ranks. Some were written by men who were, or would later become, established professional writers – men like Guy Butler, Uys Krige, and Eric Axelson; but there were many more one-book men, like Captain W.L. Fielding, the 6th Division's intelligence officer, who having written *With the 6th Div*, returned to Barberton to resume his career in the cotton and sugar industry in the Eastern Transvaal.⁴³ Fielding's replacement as 'I' Officer was Laurence Gandar, later editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*.⁴⁴ But most were not such luminaries. The test, Hynes argues, should not be how 'literary' a book is (and the term 'literary' is itself problematic), 'but whether the book speaks with a voice that is stubbornly distinct, telling us what it was like, for *this* man, in *his* war'.⁴⁵ For Harari, military memoirs 'are synthetic narrative texts, ... written retrospectively, ... written to a considerable extent on the basis of personal memory, deal with a considerable time-span, have their authors appear as protagonists, and devote considerable attention to martial affairs in which their authors participated as combatants'.⁴⁶ These narratives are largely written for their families. But, in post-war South Africa, they sometimes took a political flavour. Personal narratives, by their nature, might indeed be a little like travel writing, largely autobiographical and something like history, and they are often all of these things at once. For this reason, personal narratives are also quite unlike regimental history, even when these regimental histories were written by active participants.

Regimental history is the second genre that Erasmus inadvertently spurred in the 1950s and 1960s. The rapid Afrikanerization of the defence force – supposedly to acquire a more 'South African' character – resulted in the closure of English-medium regiments, the breaking

⁴¹ For a discussion of the South African personal narratives of the Second World War, see I. van der Waag, *Literary imaginings: Personal narratives and the "Springbok Tale"?* [in:] *Sights, Sounds, Memories: South African Soldier Experiences of the Second World War*, *Op.cit*, pp. 16-43.

⁴² F. Houghton, *The Veterans' Tale: British Military Memoirs of the Second World War*, Cambridge 2019, pp. 1-26.

⁴³ S. Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale; Bearing Witness to Modern War*, London 1998, p. xiv. W.L. Fielding, *With the 6th Div: An account of the activities of the 6th South African Armoured Division in World War II*, Pietermaritzburg 1946.

⁴⁴ G. Butler, *Bursting World; An Autobiography 1936-45*, Cape Town and Johannesburg 1983, p. 250.

⁴⁵ S. Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, *Op.cit*, p. xiv.

⁴⁶ Y.N. Harari, *Military memoirs: A historical Overview of the Genre from the Middle Ages to the Late Modern Era*, "War in History" 2007, vol. 14, no. 3, p. 290.

of regimental alliances with British counterparts, the lapsing of honorary colonels-in-chief, and the imposition of a new nomenclature. This accelerated the production of regimental histories; the traditionally 'English regiments' of the Citizen Force rushed to have their histories compiled and published, so that their war service would be venerated under their historic, regimental names.⁴⁷

All regimental histories conform to a recognisable profile. Roger Perkins, who compiled a bibliography of the regiments of the British Empire, speaks to their common features:

[Regimental history] contains details of the battles or campaigns in which the unit participated. Ideally, it makes abundant reference to individual officers and men who distinguished themselves in one way or another. The inclusion in the narrative of anecdotes and the minutiae of day-to-day soldiering gives the reader an insight into the spirit of that regiment which is not found in any other type of publication.⁴⁸

Regimental histories – significantly different to official history – are written at unit level and are often dismissed as sanitised, parochial accounts that are mostly concerned with ephemeral minutiae. But they have a place; compiled, or revised and updated, after wars they serve as memorials to fallen comrades – for those of the regiment that did not return. They include, for this reason, lists of the fallen, the details of casualties, and the battle honours earned. Equally important, they are often written by an officer of the regiment, or somebody who was entrusted with the writing. Major B.G. Simpkins, of the Rand Light Infantry, returned to Egypt and Libya in September 1958. He went for two reasons: he was compiling a history of his regiment and he wished to re-visit the battlefields and take photographs; and, having left friends behind in the desert, he had come to realise that a part of him had been left there too. His visit was a journey of remembrance, while his book became a memorial for what he and his mates had been through.⁴⁹ Men like Simpkins wrote for their families and for their fallen comrades, whose names did not appear in the larger, official histories. It is written by the

⁴⁷ I. van der Waag, *A Military History of Modern South Africa, Op.cit*, chapter 6.

⁴⁸ R. Perkins, *Regiments of the Empire; A Bibliography of their Published Histories*, Newton Abbot 1989, p. 3.

⁴⁹ DOD Archives, UWH, box 164, file Narep Unfo 18, Report by Major Simpkins, 1958. His book was published in 1965. Major B.G. Simpkins, *Rand Light Infantry*, Cape Town 1965.

survivors as an explanation to the families of the regiment, of what their men had endured and suffered. It touches the notion that one cannot write the history if one was *not there*.⁵⁰ And, for this reason – while regimental histories are a response to other histories and specifically to the often-sanitised, top-down, official accounts – they also steer away from distasteful, harder side of soldiering: drinking, prostitution, gambling, looting.⁵¹ They are much less frank than some of the more revealing personal accounts.

Despite the spate of personal narratives and regimental history published during the 1950s and 1960s, ex-servicemen and other public sectors continued to decry the closure of the Union War Histories. A general account of South Africa's war was still needed: the call came from a general public that wanted such a record – not in the least to parry growing criticism of the government's policy of apartheid.⁵² Attempts to re-launch the Union War Histories and see through the publication of the next four volumes⁵³ – which were planned when the section was closed in 1961 – came to nought and the U.W.H. archives was transferred to the Military Archives where it was made accessible to researchers. This meant effectively that, in South Africa, the official study of the Second World War would come to an end.

Lieutenant General George Brink, who had commanded the 1st Division in the Desert, now took the lead as chairman of the Council of Corps, Regiment and Kindred Associations. He set about raising money by public subscription – an initial sum of ten thousand rand was collected. But his attempts to reactivate the Advisory Committee on Military History were less successful. Agar-Hamilton's advice, that a university be approached to sponsor the project and that Axelson be involved, was ignored. The University of the Witwatersrand, where Axelson was at the time, had been willing to 'release' him for the work but, unable to move Brink on the matter, Agar-Hamilton refused to join a reconstituted committee. The old battle-lines – between the senior officers and the former official historians – remained. Brink managed to patch together an advisory committee, and with sponsorships secured, but 'the twin tasks of

⁵⁰ S. Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, *Op.cit*, p. 25.

⁵¹ For an alternate view see J. Bourhill and F. Pretorius, *How the story of the South African experience in the Italian campaign was recorded – and distorted*, "Historia" 2012, Vol. 57, No. 2, p. 354.

⁵² I. van der Waag, *Contested histories: official history and the South African military in the 20th century*, *Op.cit*, pp. 27-52.

⁵³ These four volumes would cover the South African Air Force; the campaign in Abyssinia; the campaign in Italy; and the remaining part of the operations in North Africa not covered by *Crisis in the Desert* or *The Sidi Rezeg Battles*.

research and writing' remained problematic.⁵⁴ The new Advisory Committee would appoint veteran soldiers to do the writing.

This was not a particularly good choice. The veterans they approached were not university-based, and only one was university-trained; almost without exception their writing is uncritical, event-oriented and fact-packed. Neil Orpen, a Cape Town-based journalist, was appointed to cover the land war, starting with the East African campaign. Orpen had obtained an M.A. in English and Modern History at St John's College, Cambridge and was commissioned in the Cape Garrison Artillery in 1938, whilst working for the *Cape Times*. He served with 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in Egypt and Libya, and was captured at Tobruk. After the war, he returned to journalism, while continuing his part-time military career as commander of the coastal defences of False Bay and later as commanding officer of the Cape Field Artillery. Before long, he combined these interests and began a career in the writing of military history. He left journalism in 1964 and his first book – detailing the history of his own regiment, the Cape Field Artillery – appeared in 1965. This was followed by further regimental histories, which became his speciality.⁵⁵ Before his death, he had possibly become the leading South African military historian of his time.

However, Orpen's greatest contribution was his role as 'anchor man' in the *South African Forces World War II* series, which Purnell produced for Brink's Advisory Committee. Orpen contributed three sole-authored volumes: *East African and Abyssinian Campaigns* (1968), *War in the Desert* (1971) and *Victory in Italy* (1975). Then, together with Lieutenant General H.J. Martin – another veteran who had retired as Chief of Defence Staff in 1968 – he co-wrote a further four volumes for the series: *Eagles Victorious* (1977),⁵⁶ *South Africa at War* (1979),⁵⁷ and the two-volumes on the history of the South African Engineer Corps.⁵⁸ They rested heavily on the material

⁵⁴ UCT, BC1263 Axelson Papers, B1(A), Agar-Hamilton to Axelson, 26 Dec 1960.

⁵⁵ Orpen's regimental histories are: *Gunners of the Cape; The story of the Cape Field Artillery*, Cape Town 1965; *Prince Alfred's Guards, 1856-1966*, Cape Town 1967; *The Cape Town Highlanders, 1885-1970*, Cape Town 1970; *The History of the Transvaal Horse Artillery, 1904-1974*, Johannesburg 1975; *The Cape Town Highlanders, 1885-1985*, Cape Town 1986; and *The Dukes: A history of the Cape Town Rifles, 1856-1984*, Cape Town 1984.

⁵⁶ H.J. Martin and N. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious; The Operations of the South African Forces over the Mediterranean and Europe, in Italy, the Balkans and the Aegean, and from Gibraltar and West Africa*, Cape Town, Johannesburg and London 1977.

⁵⁷ H.J. Martin and N. Orpen, *South Africa at War; Military and Industrial Organization and Operations in connection with the conduct of the war, 1939-1945*, Cape Town, Johannesburg and London 1979.

⁵⁸ N. Orpen and H.J. Martin, *Salute the Sappers, Part 1; The formation of the South African Engineer Corps and its operations in East Africa and the Middle East to the Battle of Alamein*, Johannesburg 1981; and *Salute the Sappers, Part 2; The operations of the South African Engineer Corps in the North African and Italian theatres of war from the Battle of El Alamein to the end of World War II, with a brief description of subsequent developments*, Johannesburg 1982.

in the U.W.H. archives and on the war diaries, and they drew advice from the professional military historians at the Military Historical and Archival Service, as the Military Archives was then called.

James Ambrose Brown, who was initially appointed alongside Orpen – to cover the air war and the role played by the South African Air Force – was a man of quite different background. He had been a commercial artist before the war and kept a diary when serving with the Transvaal Scottish in North Africa. Parts of it were published during the war in *The Star* (Johannesburg) and the *Saturday Evening Post* (Washington) and he decided to become a writer after the war. He achieved some fame in 1971 when his novel – *The Return*, a dramatised piece of fiction set against the background of events in South West Africa in 1904 and 1922 – won a prize of twenty-thousand rand. But, why did the advisory committee approach him? If they were drawn by his writing skills, they would soon learn that being a writer of fiction and of history were two very different things.

Brown produced two volumes on the South African Air Force⁵⁹ for the Purnell series before Martin replaced him as the writer of the third volume – *Eagles Victorious* – which he co-wrote with Orpen. Brown had been repeatedly chastised for a number of transgressions: for underlining in the war diaries and other archives; for writing too superficially; and perhaps predictably for using literary licence. He was also reminded continuously that the length of the volumes was not unlimited and that he was to omit all matters that, to the mind of the controlling military historian, did not fall within the ambit of military history.⁶⁰ This sometimes meant the avoidance of controversy: including reference to conflict between English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, or any incident that might cause political embarrassment. Brown, for example, was forced to cut reference to the S.A.A.F.'s machine-gunning of Abyssinian bands that were burning villages and settling old scores. However, the main points of conflict related to his ignorance of the historical method and his damaging of archival records: Brown appealed for the 'CMH [(controlling military historian) to] please understand that [the] author has long ago ceased this

⁵⁹ J.A. Brown, *A Gathering of Eagles; The campaigns of the South African Air Force in Italian East Africa June 1940-November 1941 with an introduction 1912-1939*, Cape Town, Johannesburg and London 1970; and *Eagles Strike; The campaigns of the South African Air Force in Egypt, Cyrenaica, Libya, Tunisia, Tripolitania and Madagascar 1941-1943*, Cape Town, Johannesburg and London 1974.

⁶⁰ DOD Archives, Archives of the Military Historical and Archival Service, box 36, file HWA/A16/1/3/1 Aantekeninge en kommentaar, History of the SA Air Force in WWII, deel I, J.A. Brown, various enclosures.

ignorant practise. In any fresh research permitted the sacrosanct nature of documents will be scrupulously observed.’⁶¹

Brown left the programme in 1974, after the appearance of the second S.A.A.F. volume. He, however, remained on the military-history scene as an author-veteran. His war-time diary, which covered the twelve-month period from the battle of Sidi Rezegh through to November 1942, appeared in 1980 ⁶² and he contributed three volumes to the *South Africans at War* series, published by Ashanti between 1990 and 1994. These were produced with some rapidity and bear his old hallmarks.⁶³

But the *South Africans at War* series also marked a transition: from author-veterans to a post-participant historiography. Where the Purnell series was written solely by veterans – Orpen, Brown, Martin – the Ashanti series was the last in which veterans would make any contribution. While both series, which appeared between 1968 and 1994, remain a lasting monument to South Africa’s participation in the Second World War, most of the writers were not historians by profession and their books contain no major reinterpretations. However, they did fill a gap – there were no definitive works penned by trained historians – and they enjoyed reasonable public acclaim.

Significantly, the writing of the war concurrently entered an academic phase. At first, as may be expected, the post-participant history writing followed a traditional approach: focusing on warfighting, diplomacy, military organisation, strategy and tactics, battlefield performance, and explanations of victory or defeat. The best of this genre was written by professional historians, including Andrew Stewart (*The First Victory*) and Jonathan Fennell (*A People’s War*) – although significantly both of them are British historians writing also on South Africa’s war. At the same time, following the wider developments of the 1980s, a new trend was seen; this is the “War and Society” approach, with its focus on social systems, and the impacts between warfare and belligerent societies. These historians seek explanations, not of military outcomes, but of social change. The main focus of this has been at Stellenbosch University and includes the work of Albert Grundlingh and Bill Nasson.⁶⁴

⁶¹ DOD Archives, MHAS, Box 36, file HWA/A16/1/3/1 Aantekeninge en kommentaar, History of the SA Air Force in WWII, deel II, J.A. Brown, enc. 22.

⁶² J.A. Brown, *One Man’s War: A Soldier’s Diary*, Cape Town 1980.

⁶³ *The War of a Hundred Days* (1990); *They Fought for King and Kaiser* (1991), and *Retreat to Victory* (1991). The last is a reworking of his war-time diary.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Albert Grundlingh, *The King’s Afrikaners? Enlistment and ethnic identity in the Union of South Africa’s Defence Force during the Second World War, 1939-45*, “Journal of African History” 1999, vol. 40, no. 3; B.

In the meantime, a further shift came from the 1990s. This was in the direction of what has been called the “New Military History”: the study of the conduct of war using a “bottom-up”, ordinary soldier approach. The emphasis now fell on matters like recruitment and maintenance, how soldiers fought, the experience of battle, and the consequences of that experience. Such historians, in the words of Nigel Penn, writing of a different period, seek to ‘recover the hopes and fears, the deeds and experiences of the hitherto nameless soldiers who suffered, deserted and died.’⁶⁵ As far as the Second World War is concerned, this remains very much an open field. An edited collection – emanating from a seminar convened at Stellenbosch University – appeared at the end of 2020⁶⁶: but there is no monograph with a focus on ordinary, often small groups of identifiable, individual citizens and soldiers.

CONCLUSION

The first attempts to write “A History of South Africa’s War” had been official and driven from the corridors of the General Staff. This writing was aimed at two specific audiences: the military, who might learn “lessons” from past campaigns; and the popular audience with a view to morale and nation-building. The writing commenced with the accounts written by war correspondents and ordinary soldiers attached to the advancing columns in East Africa. Notwithstanding, the government was pressed to start an official history programme, commencing in 1941, which overlay the personal narratives. This writing, which reflected the war-time narrative of the government, developed through to the closure of the Union War Histories in 1961. The policies of the National Party, which came to power in 1948, spurred the publication of a new round of personal narratives as well as a reasonable output of regimental history. While this work, taken as a whole, shared certain features – they are uncritical and lack source referencing – they were also thematically and methodologically at odds with one another. This was made most striking as the historiography entered its academic phase. This is, of course, to be expected. In South Africa, as elsewhere, there is no one narrative, but multiple lenses through which to view the past, and there have been – and will continue to be – multiple approaches toward unlocking and understanding that past. While much of this

Nasson, *South Africa at War, 1939-1945*, Johannesburg 2012. Grundlingh’s approach is innovative and straddles the “War and Society” and “New military History” approaches.

⁶⁵ N. Penn, *Murderers, Miscreants and Mutineers; Earl Colonial Cape Lives*, Auckland Park 2015, p. 91.

⁶⁶ I. van der Waag, *Wars are fought, and lived, by real people, [in:] Sights, Sounds, Memories: South African Soldier Experiences of the Second World War*, *Op.cit*, pp. 2-13.

literature, and particularly the early narratives, were generally praised, as a corpus of war literature, they are still in need of a serious historian.

This paper posits the notion of a historiographical progression: of an intersecting chain of counter narratives. This might be seen as a broad, intersecting and overlapping progression moving from the first accounts produced by journalists and ordinary soldiers, through the official history programme of the government of the day, to a fresh surge in personal narratives and regimental history, and on to the post-participant historiography. This progression would seem to hold largely true for South Africa’s other wars, and indeed the wars of other countries. Lenses and approaches necessarily change over time. We might look at these memoirs and histories more closely and think about them in new ways. This will open up many new areas for research. South Africa’s Second World War will continue to provide fertile ground for debate, posturing, and historical controversy.

Table 1: A historiographic progression

	War Correspondents	Official Historians	Personal Narrators	Regimental Historians	Post-participant Historians
Years active	1940-1945	1941-1961	1942-c.2000	1944-c.1970	Since 1990s
Background	Journalists attached to the military, uniformed war correspondents	Historians attached to the military, uniformed	Volunteer soldiers, all ranks	Volunteer soldiers, officers	Mostly civilian historians
Animus	Government-driven	Government-driven	Fighting formations	Fighting formations	University based
Audience	Wrote for public consumption	Wrote to meet a mix of objectives	Wrote largely for their families	Wrote largely for their comrades	Write largely for the discipline
Level	Operational and campaign history	Operational and campaign history	Sub-tactical: one man and his immediate circle of fellow combatants	Battle and regimental history	War history

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