



**Fred R van Hartesveldt.** *The Boer War: Historiography and Annotated Bibliography.* Bibliographies of Battles and Leaders Series. Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2000. vii + 255pp. \$79.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-30627-3.



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## Almost Everything You Might Want To Read On The South African War 1899-1902

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The centennial minor boom in writing on the Anglo-Boer War continues. Fred R. van Hartesveldt's literature guide, a book almost as meaty as Lord Kitchener's mess table, appears in a Greenwood press *Battles and Leaders* series, and at a pretty imposing price. This is a volume clearly aimed at the reference library market or at the kind of Anglo-Boer buff who would want to devote an afternoon to finding the 8th Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry (p. 203), rugby or no rugby. Not that this is in any way to be held against this useful book. For to anyone who already knows the significance of the war, this volume is renewed confirmation; to anyone who has never happened to give the conflict much thought, it may well come as some sort of literary revelation.

Fred R. van Hartesveldt's historiographical and bibliographical source book focuses mostly on the military side of the story, although its extensive listings include useful works with political, economic and social themes. *The Boer War* provides a compact introductory narrative of the war and its imperial context, and

a fairly comprehensive assessment of its developing historiography. These forty-odd pages of crisp and sober prose contain some nice touches, as when Professor van Hartesveldt reminds readers that while the Boers had fought the war 'for ideology-nationalism and freedom (though not necessarily freedom for all)', the British 'had defined the war in terms of geography' (p. 31). The remainder of this volume comprises an annotated bibliography of 1,378 entries, drawn from the principal English, Dutch, Afrikaans, French and German sources, and a well-crafted index which runs to almost forty pages.

There can be little doubt that this volume will provide a mine of reference information on South African War literature and a trail of out-of-the-way writing for many years to come. Professor van Hartesveldt has been successful in sniffing out and identifying, through little pen sketches, a great mass of printed material on the conflict, ranging from early twentieth-century regimental histories, to Eric Walker in the 1940s on the Jameson Raid, to Thomas Pakenham and late-1990s war centenary literature. Even so, despite its obvious merits, *The Boer War* is not an altogether satisfactory product.

While an annotated bibliography can be expected to offer no more than tidbits of information, at times these are so abbreviated that they fail to mark the classic quality or larger historiographical significance of listed works such as Abbott's 1902 *Tommy Cornstalk* (a key text on Australian war identity) or Roland Schikkerling's *Commando Courageous* (eminent Boer republican war narrative). The development of modern Afrikaans academic historiography is also given rather short shrift. Readers may be left with the general impression of there being little beyond a corpus of dated nationalist evocation of

campfires, moral purpose, and the all-powerful hand of Christian redemption, riding out on a horse. And it must be said that the author's wide sweep ends up lumping together major works (such a Hobhouse or Hobson) with a good many studies of indifferent quality or of limited scholarly value to studies of the South African War. The result of all this is a reference work which is a bit of a mixed bag, but is certainly well-produced and useful to anyone with a strong interest in the 1899-1902 conflict in South Africa.

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