

Ovamboland. Die Herero's is ook nie deur die Duitsers "uitgedelg" nie – sowat een-derde het die slagting ontkom (p. 10).

In die publikasie is 39 waardevolle foto's ingesluit. Die geografiese oriëntering van die leser word egter nagelaat, aangesien geen kaart van Namibië in die publikasie opgeneem is waarop byvoorbeeld die besoekpunte van Mudge aangedui word nie. Die publikasie bevat 'n handige register, bronnelys, asook verwysings (endnote) - laasgenoemde aan die einde van elke hoofstuk.

Die mark vir 'n publikasie van die aard is die breë leserspubliek wat geïnteresseerd is in die geskiedenis van Namibië in besonder en die staatkundige verwickelinge in Suider-Afrika oor die algemeen. Die skrywer slaag daarin om baanbrekerswerk te verrig waarop akademici *via* diepgaande navorsing met vrug kan voortbou.

Gerhard Oosthuizen

PUCHO

Russian perspective of the Anglo Boer War

APOLLON DAVIDSON AND IRINA FILATOVA

The Russians and the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902

Human and Rousseau

Cape Town, Pretoria and Johannesburg

1998

287 pp. including bibliography

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The South African War centenary commemoration has given rise to a considerable industry involving mementoes, exhibitions, tourism, some historical revisionism (to reflect the new social realities of South Africa) and publications. The work under review strikes one as yet another attempt to tap into the reading market created by the centenary. Admittedly the perspective that the authors have taken, that of Russian involvement, appears to hold a lot of potential in reviving palates that have become somewhat jaded by seemingly unending servings of an increasingly boring dish.

The prologue to the work provides some fleeting insight into the problems that confronted Davidson and Filatova in locating their sources and the all-pervasive influence of the Soviet system that persuaded participants in the war and their heirs to destroy their records in order to obscure their aristocratic origins or links with the imperial army and security services. It also offers some insight

into the problems confronting the Soviet academic undertaking politically incorrect research.

The limitations on archival resources are clearly evident in part one of the text, *In the Crucible of War*. If the authors were frustrated by the fragmentary nature of personal records, bar the few that were obtained from descendants of participants in the war, then the reviewer was equally frustrated by the rather fragmentary nature of the first part of the work. Occasionally one gains an insight into the motives for involvement of the Russian volunteers in the war, as well as their reactions to and evaluations of their comrades in arms. At the same time there is also some indication of Boer reaction to the volunteers. With some exceptions it does not appear to have been a mutual admiration society. Those Russians whose comments are extant had little respect for the Boers' inability to conform to Russian military standards, which they believed were essential for a successful conclusion to the war.

The Russians' comments regarding the Boer attitudes towards and treatment of Africans are also interesting. As the authors point out there is some irony in these comments as the Russian volunteers showed themselves to be extremely anti-Semitic. Nevertheless, these prejudices were momentarily suppressed when Russian Jews who had fled from the pogroms in Russia to South Africa sought to help their fellow Russians in a foreign land. However, the Russians were, at times, equally scathing of some of their countrymen who had not volunteered out of any noble motives. Rather they had come for booty or to exploit the gullibility of the Boers. It also has to be borne in mind that the evaluation of one Russian by another may have been influenced by the individual's political allegiance in his mother country. The Boers were not unaware of the sometimes shady characters that the war had attracted and their doubtful commitment to their cause.

Overall, part one left the reviewer with the distinct feeling that a lot of time and trees would have been saved had this book not been published. Against this background the second part, *The Anglo-Boer War in the Russian Context*, was approached with some trepidation. Fortunately an undertaking had been given to review the book and so part two had to be read. The misgivings arising from reading the first part were soon overcome. Suddenly the rather tedious first part was forgotten as the Anglo-Boer War was not only placed in the Russian context but also in the broader European context.

The Byzantine intrigues of Russia's bureaucracy, further complicated by the conflicting impulses at work in Russian foreign policy, are clearly outlined and explained. The contradictions between popular support and official aloofness and distance become glaringly apparent. The ambivalent position of the Czar is perhaps best reflected in the photo of a Romanov prince clad in a "Boer costume". The Czar carefully avoided official recognition of the Boers but was

quite willing to exploit popular support for the Boers to advance his own interests. Just as interesting was the lingering memory of the war that is still evident in Russian popular culture. Therefore, while the first part of the book is largely a “drum and trumpet” type of history the second part comes far closer to being a “war and society” history.

Part two of the book also makes it apparent that then, as now, minor powers like South Africa serve no useful purpose other than as pawns in the power plays of major powers, and that should the game plan require it, the pawns can be sacrificed. It is also apparent that the motives of some of the Russian volunteers had little to do with supporting the Boers but rather with observing new military strategies and technology and textiles used in the manufacture of uniforms. This information was garnered through both official channels such as the military attaches/observers deployed on both sides of the war and the more clandestine activities of some of the volunteers. The opportunity was also taken to see how the conflict could be exploited to advance Russian interests in a broader international context and Russian expansionist ambitions in other parts of the world, particularly into British spheres of influence.

From a technical point of view, despite the concerns expressed by the authors regarding editing, it is felt that the book could have done with rather more diligent editing. There are some spelling errors and inconsistencies in spelling used in the text and the maps, *viz.*, Plat Amerika and Plaatz Amerika on pages 47 and 76.

Wolf Gebhard

Vista University

Mamelodi Campus