



## **DIE SENTRALE BIBLIOTEK, SAW: 'N WIT OLIFANT?**

'n Opname gedurende Mei tot Oktober 1976 het getoon dat slegs 204 weermagslede boeke by die Sentrale Biblioteek, SAW uitgeneem het. En dit ten spyte van volgehoue reklamekamanjies waarin daar onder meer gereeld in agt weermagsgeboue dwarsdeur Pretoria uitstallings van nuwe boeke gehou word!

Die opname toon verder dat die getal van 204 opgemaak is uit 157 offisiere en 47 onder-offisiere. As nader na die offisiere gekyk word, blyk dit dat 76 offisiere, met die rang van kommandant en hoër, teenoor 81 offisiere met die rang van majoor en laer, boeke uitgeneem het.

'n Verdere ontleding van verkreeë statistiek dui daarop dat boeke wat as Sosiale Wetenskappe geklassifiseer kan word, die meeste gebruik word, naamlik 45%. Hierdie klassifikasie sluit boeke in oor onder andere die volgende onderwerpe: Statistiek (116 boeke uitgeneem), Politiek/Staatswetenskap (331 boeke uitgeneem), Ekonomie (35 boeke uitgeneem), Regspleging (51 boeke uitgeneem), Publieke Administrasie (958 boeke uitgeneem). Slegs 23% van die boeke wat uitgeneem is, handel oor Geskiedenis en Aardrykskunde en 22% oor Toegepaste Wetenskappe. Dit sluit boeke in soos Mediese Wetenskappe (58 boeke uitgeneem) Ingenieurswese (408 boeke uitgeneem) en Bestuurs-/Bedryfswetenskappe (249 uitgeneem en slegs drie oor Godsdiens.

Gedurende die finansiële jaar 1976/77 het die Sentrale Biblioteek ongeveer R8 800,00 aan boek-aankope alleen spandeer. Benewens dit, word opgeleide bibliotekarisse gebruik om die boeke vir die lesers toeganklik te maak. Tyd, geld en arbeid word ingespan om dit vir die navorser makliker te maak om verlangde informasie te bekom.

Die logiese vraag is dus of dit die moeite werd is om die Sentrale Biblioteek aan die gang te hou. Het biblioteke 'wit olifante' of blote statissimbole geword?

Binne die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag durf dit nie die geval wees nie. So 'n groeiende organisasie wat streef na net die beste se lede moet tog iets uit

boeke kan leer. Boeke moet tog waarde hê al is dit net om die eie-ek te verbeter. Om objektief te bly, moet aanvaar word dat daar wel lede in die Weermag is wat nie nodig het om te dink en te beplan nie. Diegene het 'n afgebakende roetinerwerk. Hulle werk net van 0800 tot 1630 uur. Maar, dit in ag genome, moet daar heelwat meer as 204 lede wees wat met beplanning en uitbouing van die Weermag te doen het. Dit help nie om te sê dat beplanning slegs die verantwoordelikheid van die Bevels- of Stafraad is nie. Dit help nie om te sê dat 'n goeie soldaat slegs opdragte uitvoer nie. Beplanning — of dit nou langtermyn, korttermyn of dag-tot-dag beplanning is — is deel van elke verantwoordelike weermagslid se plig.

As hierdie beginsel en die feit dat niemand ooit alles van alles kan weet nie, aanvaar word, dan is boeke noodsaaklik. Dan is dit noodsaaklik dat die Sentrale Biblioteek agter Verdedigingshoofkwartier in Pretoria deur weermagslede gebruik moet word. Die Sentrale Biblioteek sal in almal se behoeftes probeer voldoen, maar dan moet die gebruikers van die biblioteek nie negatief ingestel wees nie. Moet nie sê dat die biblioteek in elk geval nie het waarin u belang stel nie. Sê vir die bibliotekaris as u met 'n projek begin of beplan om te begin sodat hy vir u die nodige boeke kan kry — hetsy deur dit te koop of op 'n ander plek te leen.

'n Diens wat nie gebruik word nie is nutteloos, maar 'n diens wat effektief gebruik word, kan slegs deur gebruik verbeter word.

W. Otto.

### **PLACES OF HONOUR**

In *Militaria* 7/3 Captain J.H.T. Johnson made some very interesting remarks about a certain want of balance in the general presentation of South African history; these remarks were almost totally ignored by the editors in their reply. Captain Johnson, for those who missed reading his contribution, argues that the 'official' version of South Africa's history focusses on the achievements of the Afrikaner and is virtually blind to those of the English-speaking folk. He maintains that this is the result of a highly selective and subjective reading of the past, and that many aspects need re-telling ... in a different way from that presented in school history books, so

that each of our two major white population groups can take its own rightful place of honour in the history of our country'.

Captain Johnson might well have supported his argument in the military field by referring to a book review in the *Militaria* 7/2 in which the 46 858 volunteers from the South African colonies who participated on the Imperial side in the South African War of 1899–1902 were referred to as a fifth column. This remark may be laughable, but it also indicates that an irrelevant partisanship still intrudes into the serious study of South African history. It is quite possible that the author of that remark will never begin to understand the South African War, for he obviously regards it simply as a struggle between Britain on the one hand and South Africa on the other, whereas it was the very element of 'civil war' which lent the conflict so much of its bitter character.

There are more common cases of mythologising about the South African War, however, and these are the more deceptive for being somewhat less extreme than the example quoted above. These include the concept of the conflict as a purely 'white man's war'.

Donald Denoon has warned of the faults which result from dividing into discreet historical compartments the various communities which make up South African society. Even in a 'white man's war' such as that of 1899–1902, he wrote, it would be an error to suppose that the Africans behaved like 'an animated geographical background' and he went on to show various ways in which the nature of the war itself was determined by the African presence. More recently the work of Peter Warwick has driven home this point. By analysing the participation of the black peoples in the war and by looking at the impact of the conflict on the economy and society of the African, Warwick has shown that a purely Eurocentric view of the war fails to provide a comprehensive picture and neglects some of the most important social, economic and political results of the conflict.

This is merely one field where Captain Johnson's remedy for the imbalances of South Africa's official historiography would prove inefficacious.

Even in the area of purely military studies, we already have a plethora of unit histories for the largely English-speaking volunteer regiments of South Africa; and these 'drum and bugle'

chronicles, for with rare exceptions this is what they are, advance our understanding of South Africa's history precious little. Indeed, one of the factors which has brought military history into some disrepute among academics is the uncritical acceptance by so many of its practitioners of the contemporary official interpretation of events and situations: in this case of the 'colonial' interpretation.

Perhaps after all Captain Johnson's remarks do bring us, indirectly, to the whole vexed question of the legitimacy of military history as a subject for serious discussion. In the Defence Force itself military history is seen quite naturally as a tool in the education of the professional officer, by study of military command and operations, and in the motivation of troops through instilling *esprit de corps*.

But the study of military history has a greater potential than this. For example, what attempt has yet been made in this country to look at the effect of the professional military leadership on the formulation of national policy. At the 'grass-roots' level of political and social history, no unit historian has yet discussed the impact of his regiment on the locality in which it was raised. Nor has anyone yet tried to analyse the effect of military service in two world wars on the political perceptions of the non-European peoples of South Africa.

These are some of the problems to which South African military historians ought to be addressing themselves, not to the irrelevant business of allocating places of honour to Englishmen or Afrikaner. We should never lose sight of the fact that the essential task of the historian is to understand and explain, not to become involved in the handing down of value judgments or the dispensation of honours.

Those who would pursue the other course would do well to consider first the question posed in 1944 by the historian Marc Bloch ...' Are we so sure of ourselves and of our age as to divide the company of our forefathers into the just and the damned?'

Richard Cornwell