

# Colonel Jan Breytenbach – Military Historian or Storyteller?

## An Analysis of Breytenbach’s Work using a Military History Conceptual Framework

Carl Punt<sup>157</sup> 

*Department of Military History, Stellenbosch University, Saldanha,  
South Africa*

---

### Abstract

Books on the South African Border War have flooded the popular market in the last two decades. Historians, journalists, and particularly ex-soldiers – often amateur writers – have tapped into the market. The genres of books include, but are not limited to, personal accounts, autobiographies, regimental histories, journalist accounts, and academic books. Jan Breytenbach was one of the first South African Defence Force officers to write about the Border War. He published seven books, and paved the way for many writers to follow in his footsteps. Most of his books focus on the history of 32 Battalion. Against this background, the study on which this article is based, aimed to analyse Breytenbach’s writing using a conceptual framework put forward by military historians.

**Keywords:** Jan Breytenbach, SADF, South African Border War, Angola, South West Africa, Conceptual Frameworks, Military Historian

### Introduction

Colonel Jan Dirk Breytenbach was a well-known officer of the South African Defence Force (SADF). He earned a reputation for being an excellent and sometimes controversial soldier while fighting in the South African (SA) Border War. He turned full-time writer after retiring from the SADF, and has published seven books. The study, reported on in this article, aimed to analyse the literary work of Jan Breytenbach critically using mainly the conceptual framework put forward by Morillo and Pavkovic in *What is Military History?* as a lens.<sup>158</sup> The aim was not to assess Breytenbach as a soldier, but as a writer of military history.

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

- Who is Breytenbach?
- About what does he write?
- Where does his work fit into the historiography of SA military history?
- What did he aim to achieve with his writing?

- Which style does his writing take?
- Where does his work fit into the theory and practice of military history?
- What are the limitations of his work?

The contextual framework used to answer these questions focuses on the different types of narratives, philosophical views, and writing styles used in military history. According to the framework, narrative types can fall into one of three groups: 'Portrait of the age', the 'Career of a subject', or 'Genetic'.<sup>159</sup> Alternatively, narrative types can also be determined through 'Storytelling' or 'Statistical analysis'. The framework puts the philosophical view of a writer within one of three categories: 'Great man'/'Decisive battles', 'Chance'/'Contingent history', or 'Structured contingency'.<sup>160</sup> The framework is not uniformly used but provides a starting point to analyse the literacy work of authors.

## Personal Background

Colonel Jan Breytenbach was a career soldier who served in various branches of the military throughout his career of nearly four decades. His military career started in 1950 when he joined the armoured corps of the SADF. He left the SADF after serving it for five years, and joined the British Royal Navy Fleet Arm as a navigator. He re-joined the SADF in 1961, and became a paratrooper.

His career took him to great heights. Breytenbach became famous for forming three of the SADF elite units: 1 Reconnaissance Commando ('1 Recce'), 32 Battalion ('Buffalo Battalion'), and 44 Parachute Brigade ('44 Para Bde'). He also formed the SA Army Guerrilla School, which he commanded until his retirement in 1987. He did not only create these elite units, but also served with them in South West Africa (now Namibia) and Angola. He was involved in many battles, and saw plenty of action during the Border War.<sup>161</sup> Breytenbach received seven service and merit medals,<sup>162</sup> as well as four decorations (the Van Riebeeck Decoration [DVR], the Southern Cross Decoration [SD], the Southern Cross Medal [SM], and the Military Merit Medal [MMM]) for bravery and leadership in action.<sup>163</sup> He became a well-known soldier who earned the respect of many men who served with him, and developed a reputation for being a superb soldier and fearless officer.

Breytenbach pursued a career as a full-time writer after retirement.<sup>164</sup> His writings expound his experiences of battle. Breytenbach published seven books over a period of about twenty-five years: *Forged in Battle* (1986), *They Live by The Sword* (1990), *Eden's Exiles: One Soldier's Fight for Paradise* (1997), *The Plunderers* (2001), *The Buffalo Soldiers* (2002), *Eagle Strike! The Story of the Controversial Airborne Assault on Cassinga 1978* (2008), and *The Tempered Sword: Forged in Battle Revisited, Operation Savannah and the Birth of 32Bn* (2011).

## Motivation for Writing

There are many reasons for writing military history. Military historian Peter Grey classifies these reasons into four categories: entertaining, critical, educational, and prescriptive.<sup>165</sup> Financial incentives apply to all these categories. Breytenbach mainly writes to entertain. Firstly, he became a full-time writer after retirement from the army, and writing books

earned him an income. Writing military-themed books thus became his second career, although he was not a trained historian. General Jannie Geldenhuys, former Chief of the SA Army, and Chief of the SADF, describes Breytenbach's writing in the foreword to *Forged in Battle*, 'it is as if one is sitting under a camel-thorn tree listening to interesting stories told by this extraordinary and sometimes controversial man'.<sup>166</sup>

Soldiering is not Breytenbach's only passion in life. He has a deep love for nature and conservation. Breytenbach initially planned to become the park warden of the Western Caprivi Game Park, which fell under the South West African Conservation Department. His job offer was however withdrawn due to what he calls 'security reasons' and 'stepping on the wrong political and military toes'.<sup>167</sup> He did not let the disappointment and setback of being turned down for the position discourage him from becoming involved in conservation. Breytenbach decided to investigate large-scale wildlife poaching and smuggling via a clandestine military intelligence supply route to Savimbi's UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola).<sup>168</sup> He eventually published his findings in *Eden's Exiles: One Soldier's Fight for Paradise* (1997) and *The Plunderers* (2001). These two books are his only writings that are not purely combat-orientated.

Breytenbach's second motivation for writing is to be critical. He wishes to tell his story and experiences to the world, and wants to shed light on events that are unknown to the public. Breytenbach has a strong personality, is not easily intimidated, and will speak his mind and share his opinions. According to Mike MacWilliams, who served under Breytenbach, Breytenbach's primary reason for writing *Eagle Strike* was:

[T]o counteract and refute the barrage of propaganda launched by a variety of people who had political or personal motives to paint a false picture of what actually happened on Ascension Day in 1978 (Battle of Cassinga). The Colonel's indignation at the lies and half-truths directed at his Paratroopers and the South African Air Force is the reason why he put aside other projects in order to complete this book (Eagle Strike!) in time for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle.<sup>169</sup>

## **The Historiography of the South African Border War**

Breytenbach's books fall in the military history genre. More specifically, they all share the same topic: the South African (SA) Border War.

Writings about war are usually produced in a specific order. Journalists and war correspondents are typically the first to write about and report their experiences during or after a war. They are often employed by governments to record events, sometimes to produce propaganda. Appointed historians soon follow with instructions to write the official history of a country. These writings have a top-down view, and neglect personal experiences. Regimental histories and personal stories appear a few years after the official histories. These histories are usually written by ex-soldiers who served in a particular war. They might have a biased and one-sided view in favour of the regiment. The regiment and its soldiers are often portrayed as the "heroes". Personal accounts appear next. These have a bottom-up view, and adopt a more informal approach. Lastly, many years later, scholars

write about wars in an academic way. Most of the soldiers that fought in those wars had by then retired or passed on, leaving academics to analyse certain topics critically from a distance. Popular writing usually appears at the same time as academic writing. These books are often written by academics and writers who turn their research into a more “readable” popular work with the goal of selling books.

The historiography of the SA Border War however does not follow the same trend. The Border War, also known as the Bush War, lasted from 1966 to 1990. South Africa experienced a radical political transition in the early 1990s, leading to a democratic dispensation in 1994. The then SADF was transformed into the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) that same year. No fewer than eight forces, including Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA), were integrated into its ranks.<sup>170</sup> The Border War became a controversial and somewhat taboo topic. No official histories appeared. Most official documents were classified, and it was nearly impossible for historians to get access, especially in the first two decades after the war. A few personal accounts appeared during the war and shortly after it had ended. Some of these accounts are a mixture of autobiographical and regimental histories. Breytenbach’s work falls into this latter category. He and others opened the door for a flood of personal accounts that appeared later.

Esterhuysen argues that there are two main reasons why the literature on SA military history, particularly the Border War, is currently enjoying reader popularity. Firstly, most men and women who served in the SADF during the Border War are now retired. They have time to read, to do introspection and reflection, and to write about their experiences. Secondly, there is a specific interest in special operation forces. According to Esterhuysen, “[t]he daring nature and cloud of “we cannot talk about our operations” are precisely the reasons why the public are more interested in what these kind of soldiers have to say.”<sup>171</sup> Esterhuysen is also of the opinion that ‘in most cases, Special Forces literature contains all the basic elements of a good story: adventure, excitement, courage, unprecedented hardship, secrecy and heroes’.<sup>172</sup>

Between the 1980s and the early 2000s, a few historians and journalists published books about the war. Military historian Willem Steenkamp’s *Borderstrike: South Africa into Angola* (1983), *Suid-Afrika se Grensoorlog: 1966–1989*, and military commentator and analyst Helmoed-Römer Heitman’s *South Africa’s Armed Forces* (1985), *War in Angola: The Final South African Phase* (1990), and *South Africa’s War Machine* (2001) are examples. Their books reflect a type of overview approach that differs in that regard from Breytenbach’s work. Military correspondent Al J Venter’s *War in Angola* (1992) appeared in the same period. Venter’s impressive list of publications relating to the Border War grew in the last fifteen years: *Barrel of a Gun: A War Correspondent’s Misspent Moments in Combat* (2010), *War Stories: Up Close and Personal in Third World Conflicts* (2011), *Gunship Ace: The Wars of Neall Ellis, Helicopter Pilot and Mercenary* (2012), *African Stories* (2013), *As the Crow Flies: My Bushman Experience with 31 Battalion* (2015), *Battle for Angola: The End of the Cold War in Africa 1975–89* (2017), and *Takka Takka Bom Bom: A South African War Correspondent’s Story* (2022).<sup>173</sup> Venter writes from a unique angle on the war as a military correspondent. Like Breytenbach, much of his work is also autobiographical.

Historian Francois Spies wrote a campaign history on Operation Savannah, the first large-scale cross-border operation by the SADF into Angola. In 1989, he published *Operasie Savannah, Angola, 1975–1976* – alas, only in Afrikaans.<sup>174</sup> Military historian and journalist Leopold Scholtz made a remarkable contribution to the historiography of the Border War. He published four well-researched books about the war between 2013 and 2022: *The SADF in the Border War, 1966–1989* (۲۰۱۳), *The Battle of Cuito Cuanavale: Cold War Angolan Finale, 1987–1988* (2016), *Ratels on the Lomba: The Story of Charlie Squadron* (۲۰۱۷), *The SADF and Cuito Cuanavale: A Tactical and Strategic Analysis* (2020). Jeremy Black is of the opinion that battlefield accounts are very popular in all major military history markets.<sup>175</sup> The same is true of the SA market, and Scholtz tapped into the market. He wrote about the conventional battles fought by the SADF around Cuito Cuanavale in 1987–1988. He analysed the outcomes of the battles on operational and strategic level from an academic perspective.<sup>176</sup> Scholtz used primary archival sources to research the topic, something most other writers on the Border War, including Breytenbach, did not do.<sup>177</sup>

The work of historians differs greatly from that of Breytenbach. Not only did they write in a more academic way and use especially primary sources in their research, but they also considered the outcomes and the consequences that the battles and operations had on the development of the Border War. Breytenbach tends to be more descriptive and less analytical.

Geldenhuis published his autobiography in 1993, *Die Wat Wen: 'n Generaal se Storie uit 'n Era van Oorlog en Vrede*. An English version was published two years later. Geldenhuis also wrote *Dié Wat Gewen Het: Feite en Fabels van die Bosoerlog* (2007), *We Were There: Winning the War for Southern Africa* (n.d.), and *At the Front: A General's Account of South Africa's Border War* (2009). General Magnus Malan, also a former Chief of the Army, Chief of the SADF, and Minister of Defence, published his autobiography in 2006, *Magnus Malan, My Life with the SA Defence Force*. Historian Gary Baines criticises Malan's autobiography for its lack of insight into his personality or character when he says, '[t]his work is not a conventional autobiography or memoir. Even after more than 500 pages, General Magnus Malan's private life remains a closed book.'<sup>178</sup> Although Geldenhuis and Malan set the example, not many high-ranking officers of the SADF followed their example by producing autobiographies. The gap in literature remains. Although Breytenbach's work shares a few similarities with Geldenhuis' work, it is only semi-autobiographical in nature.

Quite a few semi-official regimental histories saw the light. Many of them have a similar style to that of Breytenbach's work, although each of them is unique in its own way. It can be argued that Breytenbach set the example and paved the way for similar works to follow. Piet Nortje's books on 32 Battalion act as examples. He writes about his time spent in the notorious and sometimes controversial unit, *32 Battalion: The Inside Story of South Africa's Elite Fighting Unit* (2003), *The Battle of Savate* (2015), and *The Terrible Ones: A Complete History of 32 Battalion* (2012).<sup>179</sup> Although the last title makes a very ambitious claim, as no historical writing is ever complete, this two-volume edition boasts comprehensive content. A regimental history also worth mentioning is

Steenkamp and Heitman's *Mobility Conquers: The Story of 61 Mechanised Battalion Group, 1978–2005* (2016). At the forefront of most conventional operations in Angola, 61 Mech, as the Battalion Group was commonly referred to, was the premier conventional fighting unit of the SADF.<sup>180</sup> Major General Roland de Vries also wrote about 61 Mech indirectly. His books, *Mobiele Oorlogvoering: 'n Perspektief vir Suid-Afrika* (1987), *The Eye of the Firestorm: Strength Lies in Mobility* (2013), and *Mobile Warfare for Africa: On the Successful Conduct of Wars in Africa and Beyond – Lessons Learned from the South African Border War* (2017),<sup>181</sup> have a “lessons learned” approach. He analyses the SADF doctrine of mobile warfare by using 61 Mech as a lens to study the Border War. Peter Stiff's *The Silent War: South African Recce Operations, 1969–1994* (1999) can be considered the first semi-official history on South African Special Forces Operations. Paul Els followed in Stiff's footsteps with *We Fear Naught but God: The Story of the South African Special Forces, “The Recces”* (2000).<sup>182</sup> More recently, Douw Steyn and Arné Söderlund made a contribution with *Iron Fist from the Sea: South Africa's Seaborne Raiders 1978–1988* in 2015. This latter book tells the story of 4 “Recce” Commando, later named 4 Reconnaissance Regiment, and its secretive and daring missions during the Border War. The Regiment was arguably the most elite Special Forces unit of the SADF.<sup>183</sup> The book is best described as an unofficial regimental history.<sup>184</sup>

Most books on the Border War revolve around elite units, such as 32 Battalion, 1 Parachute Battalion,<sup>185</sup> Koevoet,<sup>186</sup> the “Recces”, and 61 Mech. The last decade, however, has seen an explosion in memoirs and popular writing by “ordinary soldiers” flooding the market.<sup>187</sup> Baines suggests why many low-ranking SADF veterans have ‘found their voices and the silence well and truly shattered’,<sup>188</sup> and have published their memoirs in recent years:

Alongside these military histories, memoirs by former national servicemen about their experiences in the SADF, and especially about the “Border War”, have recently proliferated. No sooner had I suggested that veterans had been “silenced” by a combination of political circumstances and self-imposed restraints, than the floodgates opened and the pent-up stories grew from a trickle to a stream. Like WG Sebald, who reckoned that German writers failed to engage with the issues of suffering and trauma after World War II, I probably overstated my argument that ex-conscripts were caught up in a cycle of guilt and shame that made them reluctant to tell their stories. If such a “taboo” ever existed, it has been overturned. Indeed, the subject of the war has become commonplace in artistic, literary, dramatic and visual representations.<sup>189</sup>

A brief overview of Breytenbach's books is required to understand where his work fits into the historiography of the Border War. Breytenbach published seven books over twenty-five years, from 1986 to 2011.

*Forged in Battle* (1986) tells the story of 32 Battalion during Operation Savannah in Angola in 1976. The narrative revolves around key battles fought by the battalion, each covered in a short chapter. Breytenbach also dedicates chapters to answer some key topics, such as, ‘Is UNITA the enemy?’, ‘Courage and Cowardice’, and ‘Making Time’.

*They Live by The Sword* (1990) provides an overview of the actions of 32 Battalion during the Border War, from 1975 to 1989. Chapters have catchy titles, such as ‘Baptism of fire’, ‘Orphans of war’, ‘Jacks of all trades’, ‘And masters of war’, and ‘Tangling with tanks’. The book comprises only 271 pages. In this case, Breytenbach could have delved deeper into the content and produced a two-volume series.

*Eden’s Exiles* (1997) does not fall in the military history genre. Breytenbach investigates large-scale looting of wildlife in Southern Angola during the war. He describes how he discovered that Military Intelligence was involved in illegal wildlife trade with Jonas Savimbi of UNITA, and how his attempts to stop the looting and bring the perpetrators to justice were ignored and derailed. Breytenbach wrote *The Plunderers* (2001) next. This book is also about ivory and rhino horn poaching in Angola, and aims to create awareness for conservationism. It is, however, a work of fiction, and therefore very different from Breytenbach’s other books.

*The Buffalo Soldiers* (2002) is a compilation from *They Live by The Sword* (1990) and *Forged in Battle* (1986). The first 16 chapters of *The Buffalo Soldiers* comprise a verbatim repetition of *Forged in Battle*. Breytenbach only made a few minor changes in sentence constructions. He added a retrospective chapter on Operation Savannah. Chapters 18 to 31 comprise the contents of *They Live by The Sword*. Breytenbach added four chapters to explain the move of the unit to Pomfret at the end of the Border War, and their whereabouts until their eventual disbandment in 1993. *The Buffalo Soldiers* presented an opportunity to remarket and republish the previous two books.

*Eagle Strike!* (2008) tells the story of the airborne assault by 1 Parachute Battalion on Cassinga on 4 May 1978. The book comprises 23 chapters, stretching over 587 pages. Breytenbach spends 16 chapters on the build-up to the assault by referring to the background and development of the airborne capabilities, political developments, as well as planning by and training of the SADF for the assault. The assault itself is then covered in six chapters.

Breytenbach’s latest book was published 2011. *The Tempered Sword: Forged in Battle Revisited; Operation Savannah and the Birth of 32Bn* draws heavily on Breytenbach’s previous books. Twenty-five years have passed since the first publication of *Forged in Battle* (1986). As in the case of *The Buffalo Soldiers*, this book was an opportunity for Breytenbach to remarket his literature. The inclusion of accurate battle maps is arguably the best contribution to the new edition of the book.

Breytenbach was one of the first and few authors to write about the Border War, especially between the year the war ended in 1989 and 2000. His books are best described as a mixture between semi-autobiographical and campaign history, as they include elements of both. One can argue that Breytenbach was ahead of his time, as most other personal accounts appeared much later. It can, however, also be argued that Breytenbach paved the way by encouraging other soldiers to write about their experiences. Many of these authors write in a style similar to that of Breytenbach. Breytenbach’s work therefore deserves a central place in the historiography of the Border War.

## Determining the Audience of Military History

According to Morillo and Pavkovic, there are three audiences for whom military writers cater: popular, academic, and military. The first group, the **popular** audience, refers to readers who find military reading interesting and recreational. They want a good story or angle on a specific military topic or event. Writers focus on this group to sell books for financial gain, and therefore write military-themed books due to their marketability. Academics, military personnel, professional authors, and popularisers can all cater for this group to sell a “good story”. The second group is the **academic** audience. Academics cater for their peers or students who want to do research or keep up with academic developments. The writing is more formal than for the popular audience, and academic in nature. This writing therefore does not appeal to the public, and is limited to academic institutions. The third group is the professional **military** personnel. This audience consists of military staff who want to learn lessons from past events to apply them in the future. Literature that caters for military personnel is usually written specifically for military institutions, such as staff colleges or military faculties.<sup>190</sup> The boundaries between the three audience groups, as described by Morillo and Pavkovic, are sometimes vague and often overlap. Writers who cater for a specific audience could therefore attract readers from the other audiences.

Jessup and Coakly argue that the ‘professional military personnel’ group can be further divided into three categories:

Operational: combat or military aspects; encompasses logistics, tactics, military strategy and leadership includes campaign studies and operationally oriented biography.

Administrative and technical: generally functional and professional activities of armed forces; includes studies of doctrine and organisational structure, procurement and training of manpower, and weapons developments; involves both peacetime and wartime developments.

The military and society: in an historical sense, considers the entire spectrum of military affairs throughout the cycle of war and peace; deals with institutional problems, solutions, and developments; explores the relationship between civil and military authority.<sup>191</sup>

Breytenbach caters mostly for the popular audience. He wants to sell books to generate an income, and wants to share his stories and experiences in a semi-autobiographical way. His writing on 32 Battalion and 44 Para Bde also has an element of regimental and operational history. Using the parameters set by Jessup and Coakly, Breytenbach’s writing therefore also overlaps with the “operational” group of military history.

Breytenbach writes in a semi-formal way, which makes his work easy to read; hence, widening his potential audience base. His writing comprises a mixture of opinions, experiences, and personal memories. He mainly caters for people interested in the Border War and related military topics. His biggest audience is former soldiers who served



during the same war and who can relate to his stories, but he also aims to attract readers from the public who did not serve in the military, and he says, '[a]s far as possible I have unfolded the story against the historical backdrop of the times, to lend understanding to those not familiar with the war.'<sup>192</sup>

Writers, including academics, often cite Breytenbach's work, although his books are not of an academic nature. This proves that he is considered a respected and reliable source of information among academics and other writers alike. It might, however, also indicate that there is a limited number of academic sources available to use as references and that Breytenbach is one of the few authors to write about the Border War.

Breytenbach's work however falls into a specific genre, and therefore it has a limited potential audience pool. In the last few years, popular writing about the Border War has become quite popular, based on the number of publications that have appeared. The market is flooded with similar military-themed books, especially those relating to the Border War. It is unfortunately unclear how many of Breytenbach's books have been sold so far. One could argue that he would not have been able to publish seven books if there had not been a demand for such books and if they did not sell. The audience – despite being relatively small and limited – therefore has consumer potential.

### **Types of Narratives of Military History**

According to Suganami, historical work falls within one of three types of narratives. The first type is called the 'Portrait of the Age'. This type is cross-sectional with respect to the passage of time. It characteristically takes a narrative form. The second kind of narrative is called 'the Career of a Subject'. In this case, the historian decides which events are worth mentioning and whether they had an important influence on the career of the subject. This narrative type aims to explain what happened to the subject during a given period by focusing on key events. The third kind of narrative is called 'Genetic'. This type explains how the end state came to be by going back in time. It focuses on the origins of an event or an institution.<sup>193</sup>

Breytenbach writes in a semi-autobiographical way about the history of 32 Battalion and his own experiences serving with the unit. In this case, the narrative style can be described as a mixture between 'Portrait of the Age' and 'Career of a Subject'. He explains the birth and growth of the unit in a cross-sectional way. He however does not explain the history of the unit by going back in time, such as in the case of the 'Genetic' narrative. He starts at the beginning, and then tells the narrative all the way to the end of the war. The narrative is thus connected to the passage of time. Breytenbach does not focus much on specific dates, although the events unfold in a chronological order. He focuses especially on important events that took place, for example battles in which the battalion fought. These battles were paradoxically important to the development of the Border War, and Breytenbach's narrative can be seen as 'the Career of a Subject'.

According to Suganami, narrative types can also be explained by using a scale that has "facts" at one end of the scale, and "theory" at the other. "Storytelling" lies at one end of the scale, although the concept is ambiguous. The emphasis is on providing factual

evidence to support a story. This type of narrative can be used in both fiction and non-fiction. The inclusion of military fiction in the model complicates matters, since “factual evidence” strengthens the narrative. The lack of “factual evidence” might bring the reliability of the narrative into question. The writer tells the story by giving as many facts or detail as possible. He or she might, for example, give specific names and numbers of troops and weaponry, and the exact locations and times of movements. These facts might be historically correct and well researched, but they might overwhelm the reader, and the writers do not give their own views or interpretations of the events. Their personal interpretation of the events might only become clear in the compilation of facts that they have produced to tell the story. This form of writing has a very narrow and focused viewpoint. Reynolds is of the opinion that ‘ideally, a historical narrative or interpretation is a process of reasoning based upon a selection from surviving evidence of past events or “facts” which is organised into a logically consistent argument, rendering its subject both intelligible and communicable’.<sup>194</sup>

“Statistical analysis” falls on the other end of the narrative scale. The emphasis is on theory building. Writers use graphs and statistics to interpret events. They focus on the picture they wish to paint to the audience, they try to build a general view of events, and their opinions come through strongly in the narrative. This writing style runs the risk of being too general or wide-angled. Humanity studies, such as political studies, often use statistical analysis in their narratives. Writers readily approach their research questions by using models that attempt to isolate and quantify the variables of a problem. According to Morillo and Pavkovic, historians are mostly suspicious of political science models due to their ‘inclination to see the particulars and exceptions embedded in specific narratives clashes with the generalisations and simplifications necessary for constructing broad schemes and models’.<sup>195</sup>

## **Analysing the Conceptual Framework**

Military historians use a wide variety of philosophical and methodological perspectives when they practice military history. According to Morillo and Pavkovic, ‘the conceptual core of military history lies at the intersection of specifically military ideas and methods increasingly common to many areas of contemporary historical inquiry’.<sup>196</sup> The authors are of opinion that there are three possible philosophical viewpoints that military historians can take. These are ‘Great Man’ or ‘Decisive Battles’, ‘Chance’ or ‘Contingent History’, and ‘Structured Contingency’.<sup>197</sup> In the first viewpoint, the ‘Great Man’ perspective, the victories of great generals are studied. The actions of these “great men” changed history. They put history on a new path with their ‘decisive battles’.<sup>198</sup> The focus of the writing revolves around a main character. This “traditional” view of history offers a view from above.<sup>199</sup>

The second viewpoint falls on the other end of the conceptual scale. It can be described as one of “chance”. According to the ‘Contingent History’ view, the actions of leaders are virtually irrelevant to the course of a battle.<sup>200</sup> Battles are complex and impossible to control or predict. There are multiple paths that they could take. These different possible paths are dictated by chance. Paths should not be seen as random because they can be traced backwards. Battles and the actions of commanders are therefore not decisive.

There are other factors that could have influenced the outcome, or the path history takes. The “contingent” view of causation views war as a complex scenario that can be studied, but not predicted.<sup>201</sup>

Lastly, ‘Structured Contingency’ forms a paradox with ‘Great Man’ and ‘Contingent History’. Over the last sixty years, social inputs and views have had a considerable influence on military history. These social inputs cannot be defined and they do not fit into the previous perspectives. According to the ‘Structured Contingency’ view, social factors, demographics, historical experiences and the agency of common people, and deep constraints imposed by the environment and modes of production, must influence the outcome of events.<sup>202</sup> A single person or event “great man” or “decisive battle” alone cannot be responsible for change. This theory brings the “contingent” view into question.<sup>203</sup>

Furthermore, within ‘Structured Contingency’, there is a view that military technological advances are the most important factors in shaping history. This view is known as ‘Technological Determinism’.<sup>204</sup> Historians adopting this view tend to overemphasise the importance of technology in the outcome of a war. They believe weapons are more important than leaders and social influences. Social historians disagree with the view, and believe that technology is shaped by social and cultural factors. Social historians have therefore undermined both technological determinism and the ‘Great Man’ view.<sup>205</sup> According to Black, historians focus too much on the ‘weapons used in conflict, with far less attention devoted to machinery and other systems important in logistics, communication and other aspects of war’.<sup>206</sup>

Breytenbach’s work falls mainly within the first category of ‘Great Man’ or ‘Decisive Battles’. It is important to understand that Breytenbach wants to tell his story. He does not attempt to interpret or explain the outcome of events in the bigger picture. He does not explain the overall consequences; he merely describes events as they unfolded. Yet, his stories revolve around units, such as 32 Battalion and 1 Parachute Battalion. These units became the “great men” whose actions and decisive contacts with the enemy influenced history, even if was only on a regional level. It can be argued that, since Breytenbach’s work is largely semi-autobiographical, he himself becomes the “great man”. It can further be argued that Breytenbach does not try to explain the outcome of battles or skirmishes as random and complex events with many possible routes of development, as stipulated by the “contingent” view. According to Breytenbach’s narrative, the protagonist’s aggressive tactics and superior firepower will determine the same outcome in the battle, namely victory. Breytenbach’s work also does not have a ‘Structured Contingency’ view either. Although he had much social interaction with the men of 32 Battalion, and the unit formed a brotherhood, his work is not social in nature. His writing therefore does not focus purely on social aspects of the war, such as how the men experienced the war, and how it affected them and society in general.

Breytenbach gives credit to the SADF for procuring certain technological developments during the Border War. He explains, for example, the impact that Russian aircraft had on the battlefield. He claims that the South African Air Force lost air superiority in 1987, and could not provide adequate air support to ground forces.<sup>207</sup> This loss of air superiority influenced and limited the SADF ground campaign. The ground forces worked around these limitations. Breytenbach mentions the advantages of certain weapon systems, for example G5 and G6 artillery units destroying FAPLA (People's Armed Forces of Liberation of Angola) targets,<sup>208</sup> or Ratels equipped with ZT3-missiles destroying Russian T55 tanks.<sup>209</sup> Although Breytenbach gives credit to these and many other systems for their influence on the battlefield, this does not suggest that they were responsible for changing the outcome of the war. The 'Great Man' view is therefore most applicable to the conceptual framework of his writing.

## Style of Writing

Breytenbach's writing style can be described as semi-formal storytelling. In the context of the conceptual framework, this classification refers to his style of creating a narrative of events. Most of his work is military non-fiction. He would, for example name soldiers who were involved in a battle, where and how they tactically fought, the number of casualties would be given, and long lists of weaponry used. His writing is thus very factual. According to Black and MacRaidl, books written in the narrative form have two advantages over other writing styles: firstly, they sell best; and secondly, they are most accessible to the general reading public. They explain why the narrative form is so popular:

Narrative history is especially popular. This can be seen in child, adolescent and adult reading patterns, and there is an interesting parallel in literature, where the continued preference for stories, and a narrative approach, defies powerful academic literary fashions. The persistent popularity of the detective novel is especially noteworthy. This genre stresses the role of individuals and chance, has little directly to say about social background, and thrives on strong narrative structure. It offers exciting, often exemplary, stories, which are precisely what are sought by most readers of history ...

Narrative, of course, has the advantage of being readable. At the same time, narrative often overlooks causation, and, more specifically, there is a risk that the narrative of events becomes the history of many biographies, and that colourful characters of little historical importance might obscure our overall view.<sup>210</sup>

The narrative style of writing comes naturally to Breytenbach. His stories are exiting and readable, and he successfully keeps the attention of his reader. Breytenbach sketches the role of the individual (he often uses a military unit as the protagonist) in the described events without focusing on the social background surrounding the events. In the foreword to *Forged in Battle* (2015), Geldenhuys says, '[Breytenbach] starts at one point and work his way systematically through a series of events to arrive at another point. He succeeds masterfully in refraining from a cold and impersonal discussion of this segment of history.'<sup>211</sup> Breytenbach's personal imprint is indeed clear in his writing.

Breytenbach writes about events in a chronological order by starting with one discussion point and working to the next point or chapter. He does not often use specific dates but rather vague timeframes, for example ‘from the middle of 1977’,<sup>212</sup> ‘during 1979 and 1980’,<sup>213</sup> and ‘during December 1987’.<sup>214</sup> This tendency can make it difficult for the reader to form a specific timeline and cross-reference with other sources. This writing style corresponds with what is said in the foreword to *Forged in Battle* where Geldenhuys gives an almost warning-like expectation, ‘[w]ith material like this, an author can easily fall into a trap of “and then this happened, and then that happened”’.<sup>215</sup> In general, Breytenbach reflects a more informal writing style rather than an academically “correct” approach.

Geldenhuys also comments on Breytenbach’s writing style in the foreword to *Forged in Battle*, ‘[t]he excellent way in which the author uses language lends finesse to the book’.<sup>216</sup> Academics and authors might disagree with Geldenhuys’ assessment. Black and MacRailld provide history students with some general points on proper writing style of history literature:

How you write is as important as what you write. Badly constructed sentences, errant punctuation and poor spelling will prevent the award of high marks ... The language you use in history essays is very important. Try to use the correct language, but not the slang, of everyday speech. Do not try to be clever with your writing style just for the sake of it ... It is worth bearing in mind the nostrums of political correctness when you are writing.<sup>217</sup>

Breytenbach’s literature can be criticised based on Black and MacRailld’s guidelines if judged from an academic perspective.<sup>218</sup> He uses “proper” English, and his grammar is correct, but that is expected of any writer hoping to publish and sell books. There is, however, a very informal side to Breytenbach’s writing. He uses language such as ‘the noisiest crap I have ever heard’,<sup>219</sup> ‘[s]hoot, you bastards! Look at the enemy you dumb idiot’,<sup>220</sup> ‘our crapped-out three inch mortars’,<sup>221</sup> ‘what the hell are you doing? ... the bloody Portuguese army’,<sup>222</sup> ‘there were bodies lying around ... begin to add a rather “pongy” contribution’,<sup>223</sup> ‘[w]hooooo-ooop! Whooooo-ooop! The sound was rapidly drawing closer.’<sup>224</sup> At one point, he refers to a certain captain as ‘moronic’.<sup>225</sup> The use of language like this could grab the reader’s attention and add excitement to the story. It might, however, also bring the formality and quality of Breytenbach’s writing into question. It is therefore necessary to understand that Breytenbach makes no claim to produce academic literature or to receive “high marks”, and he does not pretend to be a professional writer. The writing guidelines and criticism set forward by Black and MacRailld should therefore not be used as the sole judgement of the quality of Breytenbach’s writing. It merely underscores the view that Breytenbach is not a formal writer and military historian, but rather a good storyteller that caters for the general public.

## **The Use of Humour and Nicknames**

Breytenbach has a good sense of dry humour, which makes his books enjoyable to read. He sometimes tells jokes between describing action scenes, for example:

Well, I personally never received a bottle and sometimes had to make do with an Angolan whiskey which was, believe it or not called “Shell” whiskey. It tasted more like petrol than whiskey. Presumably the “distillery” filled their bottles at the refinery in Luanda.<sup>226</sup>

He would also write, ‘[w]hile no recommendation for the stopping power of the R5 rifle, it was unqualified proof of the protection that army bully beef can provide against rifle fire’,<sup>227</sup> and ‘[t]he FAPLA troops, as a whole, were thus never too keen to face the uncertainties of a lead-polluted battlefield.’<sup>228</sup> Breytenbach also used humour in the third person. In *The Plunderers* (2001), he describes, for example, a dialogue between a “Bushman” (nowadays “San person”) named Shuttle Foot and a Major Richard:

When I was in Pretoria I was taken to see the rugby between Northern Transvaal and Western Province. There was one man who kept on kicking the ball. He was called Naas Botha, probably a son of Mr Botha (Prime Minister) because every time he touched the ball everyone either cheered or booed. Rugby is a stupid game that only the Boers can understand.<sup>229</sup>

Breytenbach also uses sarcasm in his writing. He writes for example, ‘[f]or supper we were served the treat of warmed-up tinned peas, tinned green beans, tinned mystery balls and, horror of horrors, large dollops of cold smashed spuds. An over-sweetened cup of cold coffee finished of this gourmet feast’,<sup>230</sup> and ‘I think particularly of the Cubans who always left the battlefield first, in fact deserting their black FAPLA allies to our not-so-tender mercies.’<sup>231</sup> Breytenbach further comments on the name given to Operation Reindeer:

I learned that the operation had been given the code name ‘Bruilof’ (Wedding in English). What a stupid code name it was to allocate to a “gung-ho” parachute assault! Later the code name was changed to ‘Reindeer’ by someone with a warped sense of humour. Was it to be Christmas time with the paratroopers taking some really nasty “presents” to SWAPO [South West Africa People’s Organisation]?<sup>232</sup>

The use of humour is a clear attempt to entertain his audience. It also underscores the idea that he uses an informal writing style, and installs his personal touch in his writing.

Breytenbach likes to use first name or even nicknames when talking about his fellow soldiers. Names, such as Toom, Dries, Schalky, Corkey, Piet, Willie, Jack and Shuffle Foot, are used instead of calling the soldiers on their surnames or ranks. In the back of *Forged in Battle* (1986), there is a list with the full names and ranks of the characters in the book. The primary reason for using first names and nicknames instead of ranks, surnames, or titles is most likely to connect with the reader and to give the story an informal touch.

## **Interpretation of the “Art of War”**

Marillo and Pavkovic are of the opinion that a military historian can explain the art of war in many ways:

The historian can look at war in terms of how it fits into larger political aims of a country or leader, what strategies leaders adopted to fit their larger aims, and how these strategies were executed, or what the results were ... The focus at any of these levels might be on the decisions made by leaders, the institutions that put those decisions into operation, the experience of individuals far from decision-making but close to the action generated by the decisions, or the world of ideas, beliefs and ideologies, including religious beliefs and practices, that shaped the plans, decisions, and actions of individuals and groups.<sup>233</sup>

Breytenbach has a very clear idea of how to use guerrilla tactics to achieve strategic outcomes. He is not afraid to speak his mind, and diplomacy is not his forte. For example, Breytenbach describes an encounter with Jonas Savimbi, leader of UNITA:

Suddenly, across the border stepped the emaciated and exhausted Dr Jonas Savimbi and four or five of his high command. I rescued them, just in time, from being lynched by one of my FNLA [National Front for the Liberation of Angola] patrols. Perhaps I should have arrived an hour or two later, because Savimbi was destined to become a big, and very bad apple in the future conservation barrel, exerting a baleful influence on rhino horn and ivory smuggling in particular.<sup>234</sup>

Breytenbach often criticises officers' lack of vision for the use of guerrilla tactics. He also criticises the tactical and strategic decisions made by both generals and lower-level officers during the conventional battles fought by the SADF in 1987–1988. Breytenbach is of opinion that too many generals gave unwarranted orders and advice, '[a]s Napoleon put it: "There is only one thing worse than one bad general and that is two good generals."' <sup>235</sup> Breytenbach also criticises the orders and actions of the commanding officer of Battle Group Charlie during Operation Modular, '[t]he commander of Battle Group Charlie, for reasons best known to him, had given 16-Brigade the opportunity to escape to lick its wounds', <sup>236</sup> and '[i]t was a pity that the commander of Battle Group Charlie had not been made of sterner stuff. A better leader would not have allowed FAPLA to escape.' <sup>237</sup> He is very outspoken about this officer, but he never reveals his name. Breytenbach's opinion on the art of war is mostly limited to the tactical and operational levels of war. He does not focus much on strategy or grand strategy of generals and politicians. The aim of his writing is not to analyse the Border War in the way academics do, but to talk about experiences.

### **Comments on Reliability**

Geldenhuys comments on Breytenbach's excellent memory in the foreword to *Forged in Battle*:

Jan has an eye for detail and he must have an excellent memory. I have never seen him taking notes and am not aware of him keeping a diary at all, but the precise detail with which he describes the circumstances, environment

and incidents is almost unbelievable. This becomes more stunning if one bears in mind that many of these incidents took place under severe pressure, leaving little time for taking down notes for a book. When one reads the book, however, it is amazing how vividly one is able to remember the actual scenes and events.<sup>238</sup>

Breytenbach thus shows an amazing ability to remember events in detail, especially given the time-lapse of many years between the events taking place and the writing of the books. There are, however, a few critical points to raise. Firstly, he does not use any footnotes in his writing. It is therefore not easy to compare the information he gives with other sources. Secondly, Breytenbach could not have been present during all the events, for example, the deployment and battles of 32 Battalion. The reader is left with questions of where and how Breytenbach obtained his information. Breytenbach gives some credit to writers, such as Fred Bridgland, Helmoed-Römer Heitman, and Peter Stiff, for using the books that they had written about similar topics to gain background knowledge and to get insights.<sup>239</sup> He provides a few 'top secret' handwritten notes on Operation Reindeer and flight manifests as examples of sources,<sup>240</sup> but nowhere in his books does he use footnotes to acknowledge sources. There is no way to determine which information is his personally, or to verify the authenticity of the sources. Thirdly, Breytenbach hints at a lack of memory, '[i]f memory serves me right ...'<sup>241</sup> and 'I cannot remember which route was which colour, but for the purpose of this narrative we will call the southernmost road the green route and the northern one the blue route.'<sup>242</sup> This brings the reliability of his experiences, together with not taking notes (as mentioned by Geldenhuys) into question. Fourthly, Breytenbach sometimes contradicts himself. For example, after calling a misfire from an RPG-7 rocket a 'dud', he later refers to the same incident, and says, '[i]n fact, the reason why the RPG-7 rocket that hit him never exploded was because it was fired from less than 15 meters, the distance it had to travel before it could arm itself.'<sup>243</sup>

Is this contradicting or correction a case of poor memory or sloppy writing? It is perhaps a little bit of both. Breytenbach can however be forgiven for "sloppy writing" as he does not claim to be a professional writer or a military historian. The way in which he narrates battlefield experiences underscores his unique style of writing. Breytenbach clearly has a great memory, and his narrative is mostly reliable. Unfortunately, due to a lack of evidence, the reader cannot be completely sure about the facts or to what extent they are reliable. The reader might also ask from where Breytenbach obtained the information. Breytenbach claims to have conducted and recorded personal interviews with members of 32 Battalion but provides no further detail.<sup>244</sup> Personal interviews can be conducted formally but they may also be informal conversations. Both types of sources fall under the wider category of "oral history". The oral history classification is broad, and generally refers to stories carried over through generations. This is, however, not the type of oral history that is applicable to Breytenbach's research. He made use of what is referred to as 'personal reminiscence'. This latter type refers to oral evidence specific to the life expectations of the informant.<sup>245</sup> Oral sources might have questionable reliability as evidence. Prins has a negative opinion about oral source:



Historians in modern, mass-literate, industrial societies – that is, most professional historians – are generally pretty sceptical about the value of oral sources in reconstructing the past ... But historians are literate people, *par excellence*, and for them the written word is paramount. It sets the standard and methods. It downgrades spoken words which are rendered utilitarian and flat compared to the concentrated meaning of text. The nuances and types of oral data are not seen.<sup>246</sup>

According to Prins, historians look for three qualities in sources and oral sources, and Breytenbach's work conspicuously lacks all three:

They demand precision in form. It is important to see the stable nature of the evidence. A document is an artefact. There are no doubts about what the testimony is, physically: the form is fixed. It can also be tested in various ways, physically (again) but also by a battery comparative, textual, structural and other means. This gives the second quality its sought: precision in chronology.<sup>247</sup>

Oral sources – especially if interviews were not conducted under formal conditions and transcripts had not been made – have limited reliability as historical evidence. This does not mean that all oral sources should be disregarded as evidence, as there are various factors that contribute to their reliability and usefulness, for example, the number of interviews, the conditions under which they were undertaken, and their format could influence their reliability. It would have been better if Breytenbach had provided specific information about the interviews he conducted.

It is difficult to assess the accuracy of numbers reported by Breytenbach, as he is not consistent in the way he provides evidence. It is also difficult to compare the data that he provided with other sources, since his books have no footnotes to indicate where he had obtained the data. Breytenbach would sometimes be very specific. He would, for example, indicate exactly how many enemy soldiers had been killed. At other times, however, he is vague. He would, for example, write, 'SWAPO lost 201 men killed' during Operation Super.<sup>248</sup> Heitman provides the exact number in his book *South African Armed Forces* (1990), '201 terrorists were killed ...'.<sup>249</sup> Nortje writes in *The Terrible Ones* (2014) that the number of enemy soldiers killed during Operation Super is estimated, and that no one can know for sure how many died, since the SADF soldiers never counted the bodies due to these being spread out over a wide area. Nortje is of opinion that the claim of 201 was only a 'psychological number', presumably for propaganda purposes.<sup>250</sup> Similarly, Breytenbach reported on another battle, '[r]esults were monitored and confirmed by Recces on the ground, so the figures can be regarded as accurate. More than 400 tanks and soft-skinned vehicles were destroyed during this period.'<sup>251</sup> Breytenbach describes the aftermath of the airborne assault on Cassinga, '[w]e killed more than 600 guerrillas and wounded another 1 000 in the base that was brimming with between 2 000 and 3 000 armed Swapo Cadres.'<sup>252</sup> No references are given, and therefore it is difficult to compare the data to other sources. Why does Breytenbach not give a specific number here as well instead of saying 'more than' or 'between' if the figures are accurate?

There are also numerous vague descriptions of smaller skirmishes, while it would in fact have been easier for Breytenbach to give an accurate account. It seems that Breytenbach provides specific “big numbers”, such as 400 tanks destroyed, but then he cannot give details on the “small numbers”. He would write, for example, ‘shortly afterwards Double 0 led Danny and some of his men into an ambush. Some were killed’,<sup>253</sup> ‘[h]e [a “Bushmen” named Kampembe] took a toll almost every day, killing at least one guerrilla with either his rifle or his poisoned arrows’,<sup>254</sup> ‘[t]he next morning we cleared the battlefield, collecting 75mm and B10 guns and some 12,7mm heavy machine guns’,<sup>255</sup> and ‘FAPLA tanks knocked out several Ratel-20s’.<sup>256</sup>

Tosh is cautious about the use of historical “facts”:

Objection is sometimes made to the idea of “facts” in history on the grounds that they rest on inadequate standard of proof: most of what pass for the “facts” of history actually depend on inference. Historians read between the lines, or they work out what really happened from several contradictory indications, or they may do no more than establish that the writer was probably telling the truth. But in none of these cases can the historian observe the facts, in the way that a physicist can. Historians generally have little time for this kind of critique. Formal proof may be beyond their reach; what matters is the validity of the inferences.<sup>257</sup>

Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. provide a few critical ideas on evaluating the reliability of research:

Reliability is linked to the findings of research. When assessing if a research method or instrument is reliable, you need to ask whether the same results would be produced if the research were to be repeated by a different researcher at a different time using the same method or instrument. Therefore, reliability is about the credibility of your research, will it stand up to this scrutiny? In other words, reliability is if someone else is able to retest your data and obtain the same results.<sup>258</sup>

Using the aforementioned authors’ guidelines, the reader is left with a few critical questions about Breytenbach’s work:

- To what extent can the data and facts Breytenbach delivered be considered reliable?
- Will the data and facts remain the same when retold by another researcher?
- One might imagine Breytenbach sitting next to a campfire and telling his war stories to his friends and ex-colleagues. Will the stories be told and re-lived consistently, or will the action “grow bigger and more intense” when retold?

There are, however, a few points to be raised in Breytenbach’s defence. One must acknowledge the difficulty of collecting accurate battlefield data on, for example, the number of weapons captured, the number of enemy encountered, and the number of kills and losses during a battle. The view of a battlefield is often obscured by the “fog of war”. The Border War is not special or unique in this regard when compared to any other war. Most official SADF documents that Breytenbach could have used to gather and confirm

data were restricted when he wrote his books. The other role players in the war, such as SWAPO, UNITA, FAPLA, the Russians, and the Cubans either did not keep accurate data, or have not made their data available to the public. Breytenbach was therefore left with a limited variety of sources, of which personal recollections and interviews were most likely the only available sources. There are also witnesses that could collaborate Breytenbach's stories. For example, Rifleman Mike McWilliams writes, 'I can vouch for every word written as I was witness to the events covered in this book.'<sup>259</sup> Lastly, Breytenbach made no attempt to produce evidence-based or academic-style writing, '[t]his book is not a detailed and strict military history, for it would have been impossible to cover all the operations, let alone the battles, the Battalion was engaged in.'<sup>260</sup> Questionable, incomplete, or inaccurate data therefore do not necessarily make the narrative unreliable.

## **Conclusion**

Breytenbach is not a trained historian, journalist, or writer. He does not mention any tertiary education, and he needed help typing the manuscripts.<sup>261</sup> He gives thanks to his wife for assisting him with his writing process, 'Ros, my wife, had the thankless task of continually calling up chapters from the computer to allow me to fiddle with them until I was satisfied. I am not at all computer literate!'<sup>262</sup> He did not let his lack of computer skills stop him from writing, and he produced his first books on the Border War at a time when professional writers and historians hardly dared to do so. Breytenbach paved the way and opened the floodgates for many ex-conscripts to tell their stories. His work could have motivated other soldiers, who were also not professional writers, to write about their wartime experiences. Breytenbach achieved what he had set out to do: to tell stories about the experiences of a few units and about developments during the Border War. He does this very well, and entertains and informs his audience. All his books follow the same writing style, and he writes consistently. His writing is not perfect, but there are many positives. His readers will keep on supporting him because he delivers on their needs. Breytenbach's writing deserves a place in the historiography of the Border War, since he provides unique angles, and sheds light on information that would otherwise remain unknown to the public. Breytenbach is not a military historian, but a very experienced soldier writing about South African military history.

## Endnotes

- <sup>157</sup> Carl Punt is a Subject Advisor for History (Senior Educational Specialist) at the Western Cap. Department of Education. He completed his MMil in the Department of Military History, Stellenbosch University, and is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Military History, Stellenbosch University.
- <sup>158</sup> S Morillo & MF Pavkovic, *What is Military History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018). The work of Black, Grey, MacRaidl, Suganami, Prins, Jessup, Coakly and Burke was also used to critically analyse the literary work of Breytenbach.
- <sup>159</sup> H Suganami, *On the Causes of War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 140–141.
- <sup>160</sup> Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 46–47.
- <sup>161</sup> J Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers: The Story of South Africa's 32-Battalion, 1975–1993* (Alberton: Calago, 2002), notes on author.
- <sup>162</sup> S Dunkey, 'Born Warriors', n.d. <<https://theywerebornwarriors.blogspot.com/2013/05/colonel-jan-breytenbach.html>> [Accessed on 12 September 2023].
- <sup>163</sup> J Breytenbach, *The Plunderers* (RSA: Covos Day Book, 2001), preface.
- <sup>164</sup> Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, cover.
- <sup>165</sup> PW Grey, 'Why Study Military History?', in G Sheffield (ed.), *War Studies Reader: From the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day and Beyond* (London: Continuum International, 2010), 24–30.
- <sup>166</sup> J Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle* (Pretoria: Pretoria Book House, 2014), foreword.
- <sup>167</sup> Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 295–296.
- <sup>168</sup> Breytenbach, *The Plunderers*, 15–16.
- <sup>169</sup> J Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike! The Story of the Controversial Airborne Assault on Cassinga 1978* (Sandton: Manie Grove, 2008), foreword.
- <sup>170</sup> IJ van der Waag, *A Military History of Modern South Africa* (Jeppestown: Johnathan Ball, 2015), 285–286; TJ Stapleton, *A Military History of South Africa: From the Dutch-Khoi Wars to the End of Apartheid* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 191.
- <sup>171</sup> A Esterhuysen, Book review, D Steyn & A Söderlund, 'Iron Fist from the Sea: South Africa's Seaborne Raiders 1978–1988', *Scientia Militaria*, 44, 1 (2016), 255–256.
- <sup>172</sup> A Esterhuysen, Book review, A Stratchan, '1 Recce: The Night Belongs to Us', *Scientia Militaria*, 46, 2 (2018), 128.
- <sup>173</sup> Also see works by British correspondent F Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi: A Key to Africa* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1987); *The War for Africa: Twelve Months that Transferred a Continent* (Gibraltar: Ashanti 1990); *Cuito Cuanavale: 12 Months of War that Transferred a Continent* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2017); *The Guerilla and the Journalist: Exploring the Murderous Legacy of Jonas Savimbi* (Johannesburg: Delta Books, 2022).
- <sup>174</sup> Spies was assisted by Lt Col SJ du Preez, who also published a book on Operation Savannah the same year: *Angola, Die Verhaal van Suid-Afrika se Soldate in Angola, 1975–1976* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1989). [*Angola, The Story of South Africa's Soldiers in Angola, 1975–1976*]
- <sup>175</sup> J Black, *Rethinking Military History* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 38.
- <sup>176</sup> Also see L Scholtz, 'The Lessons on the Border War', *Scientia Militaria*, 40, 3 (2012), 318–353.

- <sup>177</sup> W Gordon, Book review: L Scholtz, 'The SADF and Cuito Cuanavale: A Tactical and Strategic Analysis', *Scientia Militaria*, 48, 2 (2020), 151; see also I Liebenberg, J Risquet & V Shubin (eds.), *A Far-away War: Angola, 1975–1989* (Stellenbosch: Sun Media, 2015). The book provides an alternative perspective on the war, as the editorial team includes a South African academic, a Cuban government official and a Russian academic and government official. See also E Kleynhans & DB Katz, *20 Battles: Searching for a South African Way of War, 1913–2013* (Cape Town: Delta Books, 2023). The book investigates how South Africa's way of war has evolved over a 100-year period. The analyses include Operation Savannah, the Battle of Cassinga and the battles fought at Cuito Cuanavale.
- <sup>178</sup> G Baines, 'The Life of a Uniformed Technocrat turned Securocrat', *Historia*, 54, 1 (2009), 314.
- <sup>179</sup> See related books: LJ Bothma, *Buffalo Battalion, South Africa's 32 Battalion: A Tale of Sacrifice* (Bloemfontein: LJ Bothma, 2008); J Taylor, *A Whisper in the Reeds* (Solihull: Helion, 2012); M Scheepers, *Striking inside Angola with 32 Battalion* (Pinetown: 30 Degrees South, 2012). Scheepers also published *Move the Border: A History of the Greatest Battles of the Angolan Border War, 1966–1989* (Pinetown, 30 Degrees South, 2020).
- <sup>180</sup> DB Katz, Book review: W Steenkamp & HR Heitman, 'Mobility Conquers: The Story of 61 Mechanised Battalion Group, 1978–2005', *Scientia Militaria*, 44, 2 (2016), 173–177.
- <sup>181</sup> Burger and Steenkamp were co-authors with De Vries. See also J Szabo, 'Evaluating the Final Military Phase of the Border War in South-Eastern Angola, 1987–1988', *Scientia Militaria*, 47, 1 (2019), 37–54.
- <sup>182</sup> Els also published a revised and updated version in 2009 and a pictorial edition in 2014.
- <sup>183</sup> A Esterhuysen, Book review: 'Iron Fist from the Sea', 255–259.
- <sup>184</sup> Several publications about special forces operators appeared in the last two decades, for example J Greeff, *A Greater Share of Honour* (Ellisras: Ntomeni, 2001); A Diedericks, *Journey without Boundaries: The Operational Life & Experiences of a SA Special Forces Small Team Operator* (Durban: Just Done Productions, 2007); P Matthysen, M Kalkwarf & M Huxtable, "Recce": *A Collector's Guide to the History of the South African Special Forces* (Johannesburg: 30 Degrees South, 2010); K Stadler, *Recce: Small Teams Missions behind Enemy Lines* (Kapaastad: Tafelberg, 2015); A Strachan's three-volume series: *The Night Belongs to Us* (Kapaastad: Tafelberg, 2018), *1 Recce: Behind Enemy Lines* (Kapaastad: Tafelberg, 2020), *Through Stealth Our Strength* (Kapaastad: Tafelberg, 2022); S Botton, *We Dare* (N.P.: On-Demand, 2018); J Pittaway & D Steyn, *Special Forces: The Men Speak* (N.P.: Dandy Agencies, 2020), SW Fourie & GM James, *Sierra Whiskey: Ten Years in South African Special Forces* (Independently Published, 2021); P Coetzee, *The Story of Kloppies: A South African Recce Operator* (N.P.: Bush War Books, 2021); J Raath, *A Breed Apart: The Inside Story of a Recce's Special Forces Training Year* (Cape Town: Johnathan Ball, 2022).
- <sup>185</sup> See examples of memoirs: G Korff, *19 with a Bullet* (Johannesburg, 30 Degrees South, 2009); R du Toit & R Claassen, *Rooiplaas! 1 Valskerm bataljon* (Tygervallei: Naledi, 2015); M McWilliams, *Battle for Cassinga* (Solihull: Helion, 2011).
- <sup>186</sup> Koevoet was the counterinsurgency branch of the South West African Police and was actively involved in the Border War. See P Stiff, *The Covert War: Koevoet Operations Namibia 1979–1989* (Alberton, Galago, 2004); A Durant, *Zulu Zulu Golf, Life and Death with Koevoet* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2011), and the follow-up, *Zulu Zulu Foxtrot* (Cape Town: Zebra, 2012).

- 187 See for example R Andrew, *Buried in the Sky* (Johannesburg: Penguin Books, 2001); C Holt, *At Thy Call We Did Not Falter* (Cape town, Zebra Press, 2005); N van der Walt, *To the Bush and Back* (Published by Author, 2008), S Webb, *Ops Medic: A National Serviceman's Border War* (Alberton: Galago, 2008); F Nunes, *Altered States* (Published by Author, 2008); T Ramsden, *Border-line Insanity: A National Serviceman's Story* (Alberton: Galago, 2009); C Blake, *Troepie: From Call-up to Camps* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2009); JF Thompson, *An Unpopular War: From Afkak to Bosbepok* (Cape town: Zebra Press, 2011); A Feinstein, *Battle Scarred: Hidden Costs of the Border War* (Cape town: Tafelberg, 2011); D Williams, *Springboks, Troopies, and Cadres: Stories of the South African Army 1912–2012* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2013); P Morris, *Back to Angola: A Journey from War to Peace* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2014); HS Wroth & G van Tonder, *North of the Red Line: Recollections of the Border War by Members of the SADF and SWATF: 1966–1989* (Pinetown: 30 Degrees South, 2016); B Davey, *Smokeshell: Memories of a Secret War* (N.P.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018); A Heese, *Diensplig: Hoekom Stotter Ons Pa's So?* (Kaaopstad: Tafelberg, 2023).
- 188 G Baines, 'Confessions of a Conscript, Disclosures of a Historian: An Autobiographical Essay about the Border War', in IJ van der Waag & A Grundlingh (eds.), *Different Times: The War for South Africa, 1966–1989*, African Military Studies, Volume 2 (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2019), 252.
- 189 G Baines, *South Africa's "Border War": Contested Narratives and Conflicting Memoirs* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 18–19.
- 190 Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 5–7.
- 191 JE Jessup & RW Coakly, *A Guide to the Study and Use of Military History* (London: Dance Books, 1979), 31.
- 192 J Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword* (Alberton: Lemur, 1990), preface.
- 193 H Suganami, *On the Causes of War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 140–141.
- 194 Suganami, *On the Causes of War*, 147.
- 195 Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 66–67.
- 196 Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 44.
- 197 Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 44–46.
- 198 Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 46.
- 199 P Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing. Second edition* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 4.
- 200 Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 46–47.
- 201 Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 46–47.
- 202 Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 47–48.
- 203 Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 47–48.
- 204 Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 48.
- 205 Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 48.
- 206 Black, *Rethinking Military History*, 33.
- 207 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 272.
- 208 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 274.
- 209 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*.

- 210 J Black & DD MacRaid, *Studying History, Second edition* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 95–97.
- 211 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, foreword.
- 212 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 203.
- 213 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 213.
- 214 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 311.
- 215 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, foreword.
- 216 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, foreword.
- 217 Black & MacRaid, *Studying History*, 190–191.
- 218 Black & MacRaid, *Studying History*, 190–191.
- 219 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, 56.
- 220 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 41.
- 221 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, 59.
- 222 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, 51.
- 223 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, 77.
- 224 Breytenbach, *The Plunderers*, 252.
- 225 Breytenbach, *Eden's Exiles*, 111.
- 226 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, 192.
- 227 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 279.
- 228 Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike!*, 55.
- 229 Breytenbach, *The Plunderers*, 266.
- 230 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 129.
- 231 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, 118.
- 232 Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike!*, 112.
- 233 Morillo & Pavkovic, *What is Military History?*, 4.
- 234 Breytenbach, *Eden's Exiles*, 124–125.
- 235 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 306.
- 236 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 258.
- 237 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 298.
- 238 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, foreword.
- 239 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, bibliography.
- 240 Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike!*, 416–435, 445–452.
- 241 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, 173–174.
- 242 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, 184.
- 243 Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, 56–60.
- 244 Breytenbach, *They Live by The Sword*, acknowledgments.
- 245 G Prins, 'Oral History', in Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, 126.
- 246 Prins, 'Oral History', 120, 124.
- 247 Prins, 'Oral History', 125.
- 248 Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 233–234.

- <sup>249</sup> HR Heitman, *South African Armed Forces* (Cape Town: Buffalo, 1990), 166.
- <sup>250</sup> P Nortje, *The Terrible Ones: The Complete History of 32 Battalion: Volume 2* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2012), 744.
- <sup>251</sup> Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 312.
- <sup>252</sup> Breytenbach, *Eden's Exiles*, 127–128.
- <sup>253</sup> Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 150.
- <sup>254</sup> Breytenbach, *Eden's Exiles*, 98.
- <sup>255</sup> Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 78.
- <sup>256</sup> Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, 287.
- <sup>257</sup> J Tosh, *The Pursuit of History, Revised third edition* (London: Longman, 2002), 171.
- <sup>258</sup> F du Plooy-Cilliers, C Davis & R Bezuidenhout (eds.), *Research Matters* (Claremont: Juta, 2014), 254.
- <sup>259</sup> Breytenbach, *Eagle Strike!*, foreword.
- <sup>260</sup> Breytenbach, *They Live by The Sword*, preface.
- <sup>261</sup> Breytenbach also acknowledges the help of Cheney Lombard (daughter of ex-CO 32 Bat and Brigadier General Eddie Viljoen) and Elizabeth Laubscher to transcribe *The Buffalo Soldiers* onto a computer, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, acknowledgements.
- <sup>262</sup> Breytenbach, *The Buffalo Soldiers*, acknowledgements.