

Simon van der Stel en Constantia sal in my gedagtes bly. Die byfigure sal nie vervaag nie en bo dit alles is, vir almal wat in die boeiende verhaal 'n rol speel, die vraag aangaande die lotsbestemming van die mens gestel, 'n vraag waarop die skrywer Monica Dacosta laat antwoord:

"Dutchmen never speak about destiny" [p. 5]. Waarop Simon van der Stel sé: "Father never mentioned that word when he taught me history and geography on the island."

Dié leser wat die verskil in bogenoemde benaderings van die verlede verstaan en dié verskille eerbiedig, raai ek aan om **Man of Constantia** te lees en te herlees. Dit bring terselfdertyd ook weer die ou vraag te berde wanneer geskiedskrywing, in die ruimste betekenis van die woord, 'n wetenskap of 'n kuns, of albei behoort te wees.

— Jan Ploeger

**DAVID BEVAN, FRGS, FBSC: Drums of the Birkenhead**, Purnell: Cape Town, Johannesburg, London, 1972, pp. 190, met afbeeldings. Prys: R5,50.

"She was entirely alone in her agony, just as much isolated by the suddenness of her ruin as if wireless telegraphy had not existed." Hierdie gedagtes, deur die redakteur van "The Times" uitgespreek in 'n hoofartikel wat hy na aanleiding van die "Titanic"-ramp (15-16 April 1912) geskryf het, bly — wat die eerste gedeelte betref — steeds deur die leser van **Drums of the Birkenhead** se gedagtes flits.

Nog 'n punt van vergelyking wat, in dieselfde verband, die leser tref, is die groot mate van lojaliteit, moed, kameraadskap en selfbeheersing wat, sowel ten tye van die sink van die "Birkenhead" (1852) as tydens die ondergang van die "Titanic" (1912) geopenbaar is en sowel oorlewendes as tydgenote diep getref het.

In sy voorwoord tot **Drums of the Birkenhead** het brig. G.R.P. Roupell, V.C., C.B., D.L., in dieselfde verband opgemerk:

**It is interesting to realise that those qualities which are so essential for a soldier to possess on the battlefield, namely loyalty, courage, comradeship**

**and self-control, may be, and often are, equally essential at sea, either in combat with the enemy or in facing a natural disaster.**

Hierdie begeerlike eienskappe, wat ongetwyfeld in elke mens sluimer, kom, in die uur van gevaar, sterk tot uiting en kan, soos die skrywer tereg opmerk, tot die hoogste trap van heldemoed, t.w. selfopoffering, lei.

Van hierdie soort heldemoed getuig die skrywer soos volg:

**For men who do this, there is no chance and no hope. They have time to think and they are perfectly aware of the deed they are doing. This is heroism that is impossible to equal. Heroism whose shining light wears the years with undiminished brightness** (p. 3).

Hierdie boek is gedeeltelik in die lig van hierdie opvatting van heldemoed geskryf. Dit het as 't ware die fondament geword waarop die skrywer sy verhaal gebou het, maar ver bokant sy verering van die held styg die algemeen menslike uit. Dit is 'n verhaal van 'n groep soldate wat, wanneer hulle plotseling in 'n noodtoestand geplaas word, op 'n bepaalde wyse, doelbewus reageer en bereid is om — soos een man, hul lewens op te offer opdat hul medemense, hul medepassasiers, die kans sal kry om voort te lewe, om verder dié lief en leed, dié vreugdes en dié verdriet te smaak wat die lewensloop van elke sterweling kenmerk.

Die „Birkenhead”, 'n yster-wielstoomskip, het in 1845, op die skeepwerf van die firma Laird, Birkenhead, van stapel geloop en was een van die modernste skepe wat gebou is op 'n tydstip waarop die stryd in verband met die voor- en nadele van hout- en ysterskepe kort vantevore tot 'n oorwinning vir laasgenoemde soort uitgeveg is.

Aanvanklik bedoel as 'n oorlogskip, is die „Birkenhead” as 'n Britse troepeskip ingerig [tekening : pp. 28—29].

Met 'n lengte van 210 voet, 'n tonnemaat van 1 400 en geriewe vir 500 troepe, was die „Birkenhead”, 'n ysterstoomboot [fregat] een van die grootste stoomskepe waarvoor die Britse regering beskik het.

Met 'n grensoorlog in die Kaapkolonie aan die gang, het die Britse regering besluit om

militêre versterkings aan die Kaapse goewerneur, tewens opperbevelhebber aan die Kaap, luitenant-generaal sir Harry Smith, te stuur. Hierdie troepemag, wat in Januarie 1852 aan boord van die „Birkenhead” ingeskeep is, was onder bevel van luitenant-kolonel Alexander Seton en het aan nege verskillende eenhede behoort. Kaptein van die „Birkenhead” was Robert Salmond. Die eindbestemming van die „Birkenhead”, met in totaal 693 bemanningslede en troepe aan boord, was Algoabaai.

Op 23 Februarie 1852 het die „Birkenhead” op Simonstad aangekom om twee dae later die reis na Port Elizabeth voort te sit. Ongeveer agt uur later het die skip in die omgewing van Danger Point aangekom en daar, op 34° 48' Suiderbreedte en 19° 16' Oosterlengte, op 'n onsigbare rots, wat nie op die seekaarte aangedui was nie, vasgeloop.

Dit was, in die loop van 'n somernag en op 'n afstand van ongeveer twee myl van die kus, die begin van die einde van die „Birkenhead”. Agt bote, van verskillende grootte, was beskikbaar en heeltemal ontoereikend om al die opvarendes in veiligheid te bring. Na ongeveer twintig minute, terwyl die vrouens en kinders in die bote was, het die „Birkenhead” in die golwe verdwyn. Soldate het bevel ontvang om te bly staan waar hulle was. Sommige het die ramp oorlewe, ander het saam met die „Birkenhead” in die diepte verdwyn en van hulle het sir Francis Hastings Doyle getuig:

**They sleep well! and, roused from their wild grave,  
Wearing their wounds like stars, shall rise again,  
Joint-heirs with Christ, because they bled save  
His weak ones, not in vain.**

Die skrywer het hulle geëer wat heengegaan het: 415 uit 'n totaal van 638 [p. 62]. Hy het amptelike verslae en berigte van oorlewendes nagegaan, die oorlewendes vergesel na die beroemde Britse admiraalskip „Victory” waar hulle voor 'n krygsraad verskyn het en vrygespreek is [hoofstuk 4] en in hoofstuk 5 die argiewe van dié eenhede nagegaan waarvan lede aan boord van die rampspoedige „Birkenhead” die onvoltooide reis na Port Elizabeth onderneem het en eer bewys aan

hulle wat so ontydig heengegaan het.

In ons eie land, te Danger Point, is 'n gedenk-teken opgerig waarop die volgende woorde vermeld is:

**In memory of those who perished / H.M.S. BIRKENHEAD / 26th February, 1852. The ship, carrying reinforcements / for the Eighth Kaffir War, struck / a sunken reef approximately / 1½ sea miles South-West South / from this point. / Nine officers, three hundred and / forty-nine of other ranks and / eighty-seven of the ship's / company lost their lives. / Every woman and child was saved. / Erected by the Navy League of South Africa 1936.**

Op Sondag 24 Januarie 1952 het ongeveer 300 belangstellendes 'n gedenkdienst te Danger Point bygewoon om die droewige gebeurtenis van 1852 op 'n gepaste wyse te herdenk.

Met die aangrypende, noukeurige beskrywing van die „Birkenhead”-tragedie het, soos reeds gesien is, die skrywer sy taak nie as afgerond beskou nie. In hoofstuk 7 het hy kort geskiedkundige oorsigte van die eenhede weergegee waarvan lede tydens die „Birkenhead”-ramp aanwesig was. Hierdie eenhede is die volgende:

**2nd Foot [The Queen's, Royal West Surrey Regiment], 6th Foot [Royal Warwickshire Regiment], 12th Lancers [9th/12th Royal Lancers], 12th Foot [Suffolk Regiment], 43rd Light Infantry [1st Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire], 45th Foot [1st Battalion Nottinghamshire and Derby Regiment], 73rd Foot [2nd Battalion Royal Highland Regiment], 74th Foot [2nd Battalion Highland Light Infantry], 91st Foot [1st Battalion Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders].**

Vandag [1973], is hierdie eenhede, in dieselfde volgorde, bekend onder die volgende benamings: **Queen's Regiment, Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, 9th/12th Royal Lancers, Suffolk Regiment, Royal Greenjackets, Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment, Black Watch, Royal Highland Fusiliers en Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.**

**Drums of the Birkenhead** is 'n publikasie wat sterk aanbeveel kan word.

— Jan Ploeger.

**RAINER WOHLFEIL/HANS DOLLINGER: Die deutsche Reichswehr, Bilder, Dokumente, Texte Zur Geschichte des Hunderttausend — Mann Heeres 1919-1933.** Bernard und Graefe Verlag — Frankfurt am Main, 1972, pp. 258 (with fig(s)).

This authoritative, conveniently arranged and particularly detailed military historical publication, stems in the first place from the question which continues to attract the attention of German historians, namely how it could possibly happen that during the period of the Weimar Republic, the democratic parliamentary system could evolve into that of an absolute dictatorship under Adolf Hitler.

It is well-known that as far as loyalty to the Weimar Republic is concerned, there was some discord among the members of the German armed forces [D.: Reichswehr].

Based on this fact, Professor Rainer Wohlfeil has in the past done research and published his findings in the **Handbuch zur deutsche Militärgeschichte 1648-1939** [Freiburg im Breisgau].

The work with which we are here concerned, is the abridged, but richly illustrated reproduction of the aforementioned study by Prof. Wohlfeil.

The first part of this publication deals with the struggle which took place in Germany at the time of, and after the November collapse in 1918 and during the following year, to establish a new armed force on democratic lines known as the "Provisional Armed Force". The fact that this could take place, can be attributed to the military-political co-operation between the Quartermaster-General of the Imperial Armed Forces, Lieutenant-General Groener, and the subsequent President Ebert. The military leaders were striving for political influence, the soldiers were war weary and the subsequent struggle was mainly a straight fight between the politicians and the officers. The old leading combatants who participated in the struggle,

either assisted the Provisional Government to remain in power or combined forces to oust the Socialist Administration (Ehrhardt Brigade *et al*).

The Government, the Prussian Department of Defence and the Central Council of the Labour and Military Boards in turn combined forces to repel attacks such as those conducted by means of hostile free corps, riots and coups d'état [**Spartakus Revolt, Kapp Putsch**].

The Socialist Administration triumphed over its communistic, monarchistic and other competitors and during the second half of 1919 the establishment of the Provisional Imperial Force followed. Originally this consisted of an armed force comprising 300 000 men, but in terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany could only have at its disposal a maximum force of 100 000 men as at 1 January 1921.

Was the spirit of this force, which is described in detail in Chapter 2, in accord with the ideals which the Republican Administration cherished? The members of the youthful force were prohibited from political activities. General Hans von Seeckt, the head of the **Reichsheer** [Army] at that time admittedly declared that the armed forces serve the state because they comprise the state [p. 94] but the German Army leaders already saw as their prime objective, the abrogation of the Treaty of Versailles and the restoration of the ability of the armed forces to defend an independent German Realm. From the German Government's viewpoint the integration of the armed forces as a serving organisation of the German Republic was seen as the accepted ideal.

There were thus deep-seated differences of opinion between the German political and military leaders. The Socialist majority in the Cabinet had a peace-loving aim in regard to the armed forces, and this consequently also applied to the Army. The Communists detested both a "civilian" government and a "civilian" armed force. Later Hitler, as the representative of the extremist right wing, asserted that the armed forces had earlier carried the monarchy and thereafter became the mouthpiece of the democracy, pacifism and internationalism [p. 109].

The German Army leaders clashed in this way with both the strongest ruling party and