

THROUGH THE MIRAGE: RETRACING MOMENTS OF A WAR “UP THERE”

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- Hamman, H. 2006. *Days of the generals: The untold story of South Africa's apartheid era military generals*. Cape Town: Zebra. 243 pp. ISBN: 978-1-86872-340-9.
- Holt, C. 2008. *At they call we did not falter*. Cape Town: Zebra Press. 194 pp. ISBN: 978-1-77007117-9.
- Potgieter, D.W. 2007. *Total onslaught: Apartheid's dirty tricks exposed*. Cape Town: Zebra. 314 pp. ISBN: 978-1-77007-328-9.
- Shubin, G. 2007. *The oral histories of forgotten wars: The memoirs of veterans of the war in Angola*. Moscow: Memories Press. 91 pp. ISBN: 978-5-903116-40-9.
- Webb, S. 2008. *Ops medic: A national serviceman's border war*. Alberton: Galago. 296 pp. ISBN: 978-1-919854-29-8.
- Williams, D. *On the border, 1965–1990: The white South African military experience*. Cape Town: Tafelberg. 151 pp. ISBN: 978-0-624-04469-7. An Afrikaans version is also available.
- Zhdarkin, I. 2008. *We did not see it even in Afghanistan: Memoirs of a participant of the Angolan War (1986–1989)*. Moscow: Memories. 515 pp. ISBN: 978-5-9031116-57-7.

Review articles allow books to speak, however subjective such articles may be. Reviewers, participants and observers share their reading of the written work or discourse as interpreted by human beings within time and context.

If Anthony Giddens is correct that segmental interests lie deeply embedded in structures of signification and if Feuer is to the point in his argument “that in ideology words are measured for their fire-power, not the truth they hold”,¹ then any attempt to make sense of what happened where, when and how and with what consequences during the Border War/Bush War and its outcomes in Angola

will be no easy matter for historians and social scientists. It is understandable that for the observer and participant alike it seems that “truth” and “fact” became obscured by the drifting smoke and dust of past ideological and military struggles. Include the static views then held, and none closer do we come to understanding this war in all its complexity.

Cuban troops left Angola while others on horseback² turned back from Namibia and Angola to Pretoria following the implementation of Resolution 435. Angola remained with an economy in tatters and a devastated countryside and infrastructure – and conflict continued. In 1990, the Namibians gained their independence after a long war of liberation, which some argue in an interesting quirk of logic was “where the USA finally won the Cold War in the Third World” – and by implication also brought peace to Africa.³ In this drawn-out conflict, all the Frontline States suffered, but Angola and northern Namibia bore the brunt. Through the fog of different political frameworks, selective memories, self-justification and (re-)assertion of “social truths”, numerous authors and veterans are now (re-)treading the battlefields of Namibia and Angola. The Border War or Bush War has also been revisited in the Afrikaans press, mainly by those who feel that national servicemen should get more recognition for what they have done. Some of these pieces were written in reaction to a television series, *Grensoorlog*,⁴ which some writers felt portrayed the war in an unnecessarily negative light.



Images from the past: (1) From a motivational booklet for Christian conscripts, circa 1978. (2) A photo that appeared in the *Cadet* (last quarter 1985), a SADF sponsored paper distributed to schools. More than 400 cadet units at white secondary schools existed.

Most of them try to justify the war as well as most of the actions of those that took part in it. Some of these writers, who never actually fought in a war themselves, desperately want to come to the conclusion that it was somehow worthwhile to have

fought wars in Namibia and Angola. Others write about the senselessness of a war fought from an illegally occupied territory in a country twice removed from South Africa and how their own government exploited them for selfish political ambitions.

2008 saw the commemoration of a series of battles around the Lomba River in Angola, where Angolan, Cuban, South African and Unita soldiers faced each other for months on end before the South African Defence Force (SADF) departed in what they argued was a strategic withdrawal on accomplishment of their objectives. On the real objective or objectives of the apartheid forces in 1975/1975 and 1987/1988 there remains a debate.⁵



Images of the past: The above demonstrates the spirit of the times cultivated by the political elite within the Afrikaner community. Source: *Ster*, 18/12/1970.

Gaining insight into the past through social analysis shares some similarities with tracking. Getting closer to “what happened” in Angola and during the Bush War requires, in metaphorical terms, direct tracking, indirect tracking and systematic tracking. Yet, no tracker would be successful if there are not moments of interpretive and speculative tracking.⁶ Departing from an assumption that an objective truth is unattainable, the social scientist can at most endeavour to track a reading of the past into the present that may contribute to further insights and dialogue and perhaps unearth some elements of a slippery “truth”.

A review article such as this can neither hope to address all the works published on the war, nor can it deal in detail with the political, ideological, strategic and tactical aspects deployed by the relevant actors during the war. The authors made a *capita selecta* of relevant works for review here. Most of the selected publications are fairly recent. They cover a spectrum from being sympathetic to the war to being critical of the war, as well as perspectives from contending actors, for example Soviet veterans that partook in the war. In this regard, references to contemporary literature published outside South Africa are also made. As with most

review articles, this one cannot claim objectivity, but rather acts as an invitation to the ongoing dialogue on the war, its socio-political context, causes and consequences.



Youthful South African soldiers on a break next to a Ratel 90 during active deployment.

The terms “Border War” (*Grensoorlog*), “Bush War” (*Bosoorlog*) and “Angolan War” (*Angolese-oorlog*) require some conceptual clarification. Border War and Bush War are used interchangeably, denoting in many cases the war in northern Namibia and on the border with Angola. However, as the war in Namibia (then South West Africa) spilt over into Angola, these two notions are frequently interspaced with the Angolan War. For South Africans, the conflict in Angola falls under the rubric of *grensoorlog* or *bosoorlog* and is not denoted a specific name, for example the Angolan War. From this perspective, conflict in Angola was part of the escalating Border War and, in turn, is linked to the operations, skirmishes and battles, including large-scale semi-conventional operations between 1975 and 1989 (transborder-deep penetration or pre-emptive operations) and clandestine support to Unita in Angola.

For others it was the *Angolan War*. Cuban literature refers to the ‘first war’ and the ‘second war’ in Angola. This distinction denotes the periods when Cubans and South Africans were involved in serious confrontation. The first confrontation took place in 1975/1976, when South Africans as well as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) supported the Front for the National Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and Zaire’s forces invaded Angola (for South Africans this is known as *Operation Savannah*). The other serious confrontations were the large-scale, mostly conventional Lomba River Battles and the clashes in the Tumpo Triangle during 1987/1988, which became known as the Battle of Cuito Canavale,

or simply “Cuito” (Operations *Modular*, *Hooper* and *Packer* in South African references). The reason for using the terms the “first war in Angola” and “the second war in Angola” is that the Cubans saw their role largely as protecting Angola’s sovereignty and seldom moved south of the Lubango-Menongue line, with the exception of the two abovementioned military conflicts.



Cuban soldiers entrenched at Cangamba, July 1983. From its support base in the Cuando Cubango province Unita, with South African assistance, attacked Cangamba. 818 Angolans and 92 Cubans defended the town. By 11 August Unita was repulsed. (Source: Blanche & Liebenberg, 2009: 100; Cuban Military Archives, Havana).

The Angolan people frequently refer to the “first war for liberation (of Angola)”, meaning their attempts to dislodge the Portuguese colonialists (1956 to 1975). Their “second war for the liberation of Angola” (resisting foreign aggressors) literally cascaded onto the “first war for liberation”, as South African and Zairian forces, CIA advisers together with mercenaries and the Front for the National Liberation of Angola (FNLA) invaded Angola months before independence was due on 11 November 1975. The Angolan people found themselves embroiled in a conflict that was less of their making than those that thought it well to interfere partly for own agendas and partly as proxies of the USA in the oft’ spoken about Cold War era. In turn, their interference caused further outside interventions and an escalation of conflict for years to come – with Angolan civilian population and infrastructure bearing the brunt.

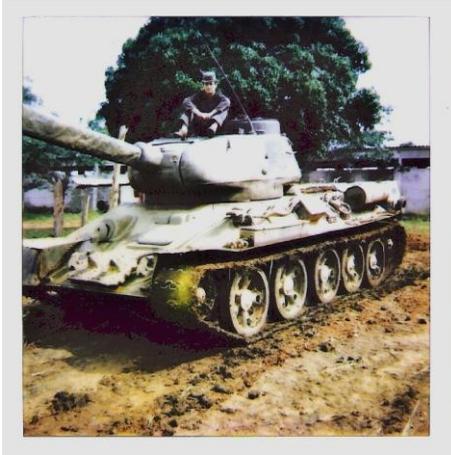
Publications produced between 1990 and 2007 in South Africa were largely marked by writings from ex-SADF generals and higher-ranking officers, which to the larger extent justified the apartheid regime's involvement in Angola.⁷ Other works were produced by researchers/practitioners who could be viewed as pro-South African or by journalists and authors who might be viewed as “partially embedded”. Publications in this genre include those authored by Helmoed-Römer Heitman and earlier works by Willem Steenkamp.⁸ In the same era, various works appeared on the Special Forces (*Spesmagte*) and other ‘elite’ battalions (e.g. 32 Battalion), which took part over many years in many conflicts and in their view fought the real war. Examples of these authors are numerous: Jan Breytenbach, Paul Els, Piet Nortjé and Louis Bothma.⁹ The South African Air Force also received attention.¹⁰ Earlier on, following Operation Savannah and other transborder operations, various publications appeared in South Africa. Among these count Willem Steenkamp's *Adieu Angola* and *Borderstrike*.¹¹ For many white South Africans at the time, it seemed that there was only one side to a war that ravaged Angola and debilitated the population of northern Namibia – a war in which South African forces entered Angola (for a decade and a half) to “support” the people of Angola, who was about to be consumed by a Moscow controlled proxy, bent on imposing Marxism-Leninism (if not Stalinism) in Angola and to keep an atheist and Marxist proxy, Swapo, out of Namibia – where “these terrorists” aimed at imposing an evil dictatorship.



Cangamba, August, 11 1983. FAPLA and Cuban forces celebrate the withdrawal of Unita after fierce fighting (Source: Cuban Military Archives, Havana)

For non-English readers, alternative perspectives could be found and are increasingly available in a range of Portuguese, Spanish and Russian publications dealing with the role of the Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola (FAPLA)¹² military wing of Movimento Popular da Libertação de Angola (MPLA),¹³ and later the defence force of Angola, the Cuban Forces and Russian

(then Soviet) advisors/veterans.¹⁴ Because of linguistic differences, other perspectives are unfortunately not accessible to the majority of South African readers. In terms of historiography and social analysis (as well as for the sake of the lay reader), a serious need exists for the translation and publication of such works into English and Afrikaans.



Junior Lieutenant Barabulyaiv, on a T-34 tank in the early 1980s in Angola. Source: Barabulyaiv, Personal archives, Moscow

The latest avalanche of publications in South Africa is not the first on the Border War. Despite the tight grip of the authoritarian government in Pretoria on its subjects, some critical works (call them “anti-heroic” or “subversive”, if you wish) appeared in the 1980s, many of them in Afrikaans. Among these one finds *Forces favourites* by Taurus Publications¹⁵ and a variety of other works by some that had military experience and others that did not. Literature in this genre became known as border literature (*grensliteratuur*). Several books appeared at the time. In literary journals such as *New Contrast* and *STET*, some prose were to be found, while some short stories appeared in *Penseel*, a literary journal at Stellenbosch University.¹⁶

The past five years introduced new views with several works published – some again by ex-SADF leadership, while others relate the experiences of the rank and file that one subtitle terms “an unpopular war”. The latter trend is perhaps of more importance. Eventually it seems – if not apparent by now – that those of lower rank and those not reckoned to be the ‘glamour boys’ are raising their voices. A large reservoir of young conscripts and citizen force members (CFs) were relied

upon to underpin the apartheid state by being deployed all over Southern Africa. In nutria they were to be found as conscripts in Angola (a country twice removed from South Africa), in the dust-ridden *shonas* of Owamboland and *omarambas* of Kaokoland (South West Africa), stealthily inserted into Rhodesia in support of Ian Smith and used in towns, farming areas, cities and townships of South Africa – all key points guarded by conscripts, CFs and *Kommandos*. Between Cape Town and the far north, conscripts (later on becoming part of the CF) provided the “blunt end” that allowed apartheid politicians and hawkish generals to further their adventures in the Frontline States.



Taking a break. A Cuban armoured column on the move in south western Angola, 1988. The southward bound move became a threat to the SADF. The tank in the foreground is a rather dated T-55 of Eastern Block origin used by Cuban forces. Source: Cuban Military Archives.

It speaks for itself that a new spate of writing would appear sooner or later. More than half a million young men saw one or two years of national conscription (then termed *national service* or *nasionale dienspelig*), many of them deployed in Namibia or Angola. Now in their middle years, they have grown tired of others speaking and interpreting on their behalf. No wonder that some recent publications bring to the fore clashing perspectives – perspectives that run against the mantra of earlier justifications and propose viewpoints that frequently subvert the self-justification of past political leaders, generals and colonels and confront the claim that the war was fought, upheld and finished by special units.

In this line, we find a work by Karen Batley on the experiences of conscripts.¹⁷ It reflects raw poetry and prose and little pretensions of being a “literary” text. Sadly enough, this work could have seen the light by the early 1990s – was it not that it was not yet the “flavour of the month”. Batley had to wait (and so

did South African readers, including conscript veterans) until 2007, when an appreciative publisher saw the value of the work. Another example shedding light on how conscripts saw the war is *An unpopular war: Van afkak tot bosbefok*.¹⁸ Containing short transcriptions of interviews with veterans, it stands in the anti-heroic tradition and subverts the images of “a war well fought and won by the best of the best”. On the contrary, it transports the absurdities, the mindless justifications of generals and glory boys into a light of glimmering scepticism and disillusionment, if not resentment and alienation. (The book was soon to be singled out by apartheid die-hards as containing propaganda and in cases fabrications. Some criticisms regarding some contributions seem to be relevant.) The work highlights tensions between Afrikaans- and English-speaking conscripts during active service, illustrating the divide between rural and urban subcultures among the troops (*plaasjapies*, *dorpsjapies* and *stadsjapies*, *plattelandse boykies*, *boertjies* and the *Jo'burg laaities* and *Durbs' jollers*, for example), experiences of gay people, the emotions of parents and loved ones, inter-unit rivalry and the deep dislike that many servicemen had – and retained – for PFs (members of the Permanent Force).¹⁹



Olifant tank. Several upgrades of the Olifant that evolved from the Centurion tank saw the light in South Africa. During the battles around Cuito Canavale Olifants were deployed in battle.

A third stream of current literature falls into the realm of a form of ‘history from below’, written by conscripts, conscripted officers and short-service SADF members, which brings the reader closer to the experience of the soldier on the ground (the typical *Skutter Snoeks*, *Boetie-oppie-border*, the husbands, fathers and boyfriends/girlfriends, the *Bokkoppe* (infantry) , the *Tiffies* (mechanical corps), the *Medics* or *tampon taffies* (medical service), the *Seiners* (signal corps), *Budgy Gunners* (anti-aircraft), *Genie Korps*, *the Doggies*, *Arties* (artillery) and various

others. All of them proved to be indispensable in the course of the war in Namibia and Angola. Were these men not at their posts, the Big Brass and their PF could hardly have left the perimeters of HQ Pretoria. Examples in this genre are Nico van der Walt's *Bos toe*, David Williams, Clive Holt and others.²⁰ Van der Walt's writings from the perspective of a junior officer with 32 Battalion offers valuable and realistic perspectives. It shows, among other things, that even in elite battalions things are not always "hunky dory" and that mistakes are made, tactical misunderstandings and accidents occur and things can become pretty mixed up for those on the ground.

In terms of this new genre, Rick Andrew's memoir, *Buried in the sky*, which was published in 2001 by Penguin, can be regarded as a forerunner and has since been reprinted. It is a touching, sometimes poignant, description of 'the army and its madness' and border duty in the mid-70s. The soldiers in *Buried in the sky* are for the most part unheroic figures involved in the dusty boredom of border duty. Lofty ideals like duty to *Volk*, *Vaderland en God* against godless communist enemies are far removed from the minds of Andrew and his buddies; to them the only thing that matters is personal survival.²¹

Steven Webb was exempt from doing natural service as he was a British immigrant. He volunteered in an effort to find some direction in life. His memoir covers the period of his training as well as his 14 months on the border as a medical orderly (*Ops medic: A national serviceman's border war*, 2008). It is a valuable addition to the 'history from below' genre. Webb falls in the category of ex-servicemen who uncritically and subjectively look back at their time in the army with considerable pride and a feeling that they have done their bit in the perceived fight against communism. Self-reflection and critical thought years after the war are not to be found here. The book contains a list of SADF personnel that died on active service from 1962 to 1994, as well as a complete list of *Honoris Crux* awards. It is a lifelike portrayal of the fears and tribulations national servicemen had on the border. It sketches a realistic picture of the heat, the glare of Ovamboland's white sand, the dust and the flies that were the bane of many a soldier's existence.

The work of David Williams (with a foreword by Chester Crocker) covers the Border War from 1965 up to the unbanning of the liberation movements. Williams concludes his work with a qualified defence of the views of the apartheid generals. From a foreword by Crocker to a qualified defence of the generals is not much progress, the reader may argue. However, the value of the publication lies in that Williams takes the reader to some extent 'into' the world of the servicemen and, by implication, that of their loved ones. The list of terminology is useful, though by far not exhaustive of the military jargon/terminology used, less so the terms used by

conscripts to describe their reality. The military is a ‘total institution’ and involves an intense socialisation process. It impacts deeply on the individuals and subcultures entering it. As institution it touches language, existence, worldviews and human relationships. The experience thereof becomes an intense consciousness of representation – symbolically and in discourse. It is no wonder that the lingua becomes unique to time and space and needs far more research (as does the dark humour of the time, by the way). The source list in Williams’s work is rather unimpressive, while the appendices on SADF rank structure and CF units are helpful. However, one cannot help but feel that the book was compiled in too much of a hurry with broad expanses of the war and the military experience generalised to an extent where it becomes vapour thin.

Clive Holt’s *At thy call we did not falter* cannot be described as a superficial glance at forced conscription.²² Holt, who now resides in Australia, restricted himself to personal accounts of the war *circa* 1988 from an auto-ethnographic perspective, and the work has an intense private feel to it. It is a reflective work and touchingly honest. Holt’s subjective description of the last battles of the war in Angola makes it clear that at Cuito, all sides involved in hostilities must have understood that this war is now showing signs of escalating into a truly horrendous conflict, and the South African government must have realised that bold adventures also have limits. Hopefully, South Africa will see more of these types of publications in the future.²³

Outside South Africa, numerous publications made a welcome appearance. To balance the works of Williams and Holt, the reader is advised to read and reflect on Igor Zhdarkin’s *We did not see it even in Afghanistan: Memoirs of a participant of the Angolan War (1986–1988)* and Gennady Shubin’s collected interviews with Soviet veterans entitled *The oral history of forgotten wars: The memoirs of veterans of the war in Angola*. The work by Holt and the one by Zhdarkin make for interesting synoptic reading as perspectives highlighting the experiences of the group and individuals under fire during the Lomba Battles (1987/1988). Sadly, while these Russian works are available in English, their distribution is limited in South Africa. This does a disservice to historiography in South Africa and hopefully some publisher or distributor will step in and correct the matter.

But there is a broader canvass. No war is fought within a vacuum. The hawkish political elite and their generals in South Africa fought a war steeped in the *mythology* of a *total onslaught*. The experiences of the people described and analysed above had an ideological context with real-life outcomes. When an authoritarian state evolves, the ideology it boasts is one by a leadership presuming

itself all powerful within and boldly outward looking and acting. And ideology touches not only the state internally (state security) but a range of areas. Policies to maintain and enhance a grip on civil society, the internal opponents and the geographical spaces surrounding the state (foreign policy) become mirror images. Domination lies not only in internal oppression and the creative use of a repressive discourse, but also in foreign policy. The policies used to uphold the apartheid state internally (including covert operations) and the means of power projection towards other countries in the region received some scrutiny in the past.²⁴ Internal and external policies are frequently mirror images of each other; internal hard handedness is complemented by militarist projections of foreign policy. Disregard for negotiations internally is complemented by aggressive foreign policy.

Twenty years had passed since the war in Angola came to an end and the negotiated transition started in South Africa. As the years passed, more information on the ramifications of apartheid self-interest and power plays came to the fore and is likely to be increasingly unearthed.

Much of the literature providing a larger canvass now coming to the fore is in this realm. Look at *Apartheid's friends* and *Total onslaught*, for example.²⁵ Gone are the days that earlier researchers (or civilians denied the information) in the field of covert operations and foreign ventures had to work with the little that was available. The SADF and those realising that they are going to be dumped destroyed tons of incriminating documents. However, it seems that for each document destroyed, somewhere one or two survived in the hands of someone. Recent publications are emerging on the consequences of the cajoling and conniving of the spies and politicians of the old order – and with documentary evidence to boot! Potential is daily opening to get closer to a more comprehensive picture of the *grensoorlog* and the war in Angola and its lingering effects on South African society.

Apartheid's friends: The rise and fall of South Africa's secret service by James Sanders presents a well-researched work that deals with secret service missions and links with foreign policy and covert operations over a long period. Between 1960 and 1988, South Africa moved gradually from a state relying on police support to a garrison state amid a militarised society (some referred to it as a *praetorian state* or a *bunker state*).²⁶ Sanders takes an informed look at these forces since the time of the Bureau of State Security (BOSS) under Lang Hendrik van den Berg, personalities like Jimmy Kruger and others until the 1990s. He concludes with pointers well into the 2000s. His investigation of front companies and the involvement of the private sector are worth a close read.

A second work, somewhat more sensational, if not “spicy”, is that of De Wet Potgieter entitled *Total onslaught: Apartheid’s dirty tricks exposed*. The book is written with a certain amount of bitterness and makes use of various interviews and some documentation that survived the old regime’s destruction process. The work is relevant, though. Reading it in conjunction with that of Sanders, one gets a fair idea of the lengths to which the apartheid government went to maintain power and in the process destabilised the Frontline States and Angola – and even abused its own loyal citizens.

Days of the generals is an attempt by Hilton Hamman to bring the reader into the mind of the apartheid era generals.²⁷ Hamman was a journalist with the *Sunday Times* and *Soldier of Fortune*. His work is based on interviews with, among other people, generals Magnus Malan, Constand Viljoen, Jannie Geldenhuys, Kat Liebenberg and George Meiring. Generals Hein du Toit, with his vast knowledge of intelligence work, and Chris Thirion, former Military Intelligence, were also interviewed. For the uninitiated reader/observer there may be something new in the book. The personal differences between generals and their views on politicians such as Pik Botha, Roelf Meyer, Kowie Coetzee and FW de Klerk might be news to some readers. It is well known that the old SADF disliked the police. It is no news that they did not trust Pik Botha and thought him too much of a loose gun and spendthrift with words then and now. The generals found FW de Klerk not up to the challenge and in some cases considered him a political sell-out. But this we know. The same applies to references in the work derived from the interviews pointing to problems of line and command functions (or rather, confusing mandates and personal agendas) of intelligence bodies, the distrust between the police and the military and the post-war rationalisations of the generals. For the informed reader and those closely involved in 1980 and early 1990 politics, the book brings no revelations and little post-war insights. Some of the arguments seem to be self-rehearsed and more for popular consumption than contributing to an understanding of what happened at the time. The explanation of why the generals thought they were cooperating with the Truth and Reconciliation Committee while in fact they did not sounds too simple. The book itself seems to suggest that there was really a “total onslaught” (rather than a prevalent mythology of a total onslaught) at the time. There is no reflection on how the political generals and militarist-minded politicians in Pretoria benefited from the Cold War rhetoric for power purposes. Some nagging questions are worth contemplating. Why did FW de Klerk refuse to court-martial General Chris Thirion? How did it come that some lower-ranking officials had to run the gauntlet on behalf of politicians and generals that never saw the inside of a court room? How did it come that ex-spies and operators are serving the post-apartheid government as if

nothing changed from then until 2010? For hard information and rigorous analysis, preferably search somewhere else than Hamman's attempt.

In completing reading Hamman's book, one may conclude that if only South Africa had generals of the calibre of António de Spínola, who rejected the impulses of an authoritarian state and its frontier army and questioned the hawkish politicians and their loyal generals, would things not have turned out far differently (and perhaps more positively) earlier on in South Africa's history? But that is a debate for another day.

Works by generals such as Malan and Geldenhuys previously referred to fall in the same genre as that of Hamman. Malan's book is an extremely dull read that will do nothing to enlighten anybody that really wants to know more about South African military or social history. One gets the impression that Malan was a classroom rather than a battlefield general, then turned into a propagandising politician. His book tries to glorify the apartheid military experience and he is scathing about former national servicemen writing their histories from below. Geldenhuys comes across as more of a soldier's general in his book, although a firm believer in the erstwhile ideologies that governed the military. But it is a much livelier read and adds to one's knowledge of the Bush War, a war he describes as one fought not by generals but by lieutenants and corporals. It is also refreshing to see an SADF general who has regard for the fighters of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), the military wing of Swapo, and who does not instinctively denigrate opponents.

As mentioned, not all sources stem from South Africa. The numerous works that are emerging in other countries on the experiences of veterans and by theorists make up for a broader understanding of this war. In Cuba, several publications saw the light. In Russia, the Soviet veterans are taking to the pen, two of them discussed in this review article. As a broader background, other works by Soviet/Russian participants and experts are worth mentioning, such as Vladimir Shubin's *ANC: A view from Moscow* (first published in 1999, re-printed in 2008) and *The Hot Cold War* (released in 2009).²⁸

Historiographers and social analysts should be thankful. These authors, some with more shortcomings than others, are doing us a favour. For social scientists and historians as well as the broader public (including those that lived through it, or lived/live with those that lived through it) more perspectives are opened up. Each perspective holds its drop of information despite destroyed documents and clumsy bureaucratic processes. Such growing intersubjectivity can do historiography and social sciences (including international politics scholars) in South Africa only good.

End notes

- ¹ Giddens, A. 1979. *Central problems in social theory: Action, structure and contradiction in social analysis*. London: Oxford Publishers: 188; Feuer, L.S. 1975. *Ideology and the ideologists*. Oxford: Oxford Publishers: 190–191.
- ² South African forces (in Finer's classic words when referring to the military, "the men on horseback") withdrew from Angola. Democratic elections in Namibia were held under the supervision of the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (Untag), which brought the South West Africa People's Organisation (Swapo) to power in Namibia. A year later, the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) were unbanned. The unbanning of these organisations set in motion transition to democracy through negotiation with the resultant decline of militarisation followed by the implementation of South Africa's first democratic constitution (Act 108 of 1996).
- ³ Chester Crocker recalls in his memoirs that "[t]his book tells the story of peacemaking in Africa in the 1980s. It is a record of an American diplomatic strategy which helped us to win the Cold War in the Third World (*sic*)". Two historians consequently remarked: "But such a 'victory' looks rather bizarre. After all what happened with Washington's protégés in the region? Who rules Namibia (at current): Swapo or the DTA? Who becomes the President of Angola. Dos Santos or Savimbi? And who became the first President of democratic South Africa: Mandela or Buthelezi?" See Shubin, V. & Tokarev, A. 2001. War in Angola: A Soviet dimension. *Review of the African Political Economy* 90:607–618.
- ⁴ The producers of the series missed a golden opportunity to give viewers a definitive account of the war. The poor technical quality further distracted from what might have been a worthy exercise. The main value of *Grensoorlog* was that it gave the 'other side' (Namibians, Russians, Cubans, Angolans, end conscription campaigners) a limited chance to air their views. Far too much attention was given to those who believed in and acted according to the total onslaught myth. Way too little care was given to the social context of the militarised South African society and its consequences, a common defect in border literature since the 1990s. The series received considerable positive advance publicity in the Afrikaans media, but in the end, one was reminded of a Shakespearian tale full of sound and fury yet signifying very little.
- ⁵ Compare Gleijeses, P. 2002. *Conflicting missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959–1976*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- ⁶ The Bush War carries by implication a wider meaning. Reference to it frequently includes the bush war in Angola and Mozambique. Pertinent to South Africans because of their involvements in the bush war in Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe), it also includes the *bosoorlog* in Rhodesia. See Moorcraft, P. & McLaughlin, P. 2008. *The Rhodesian war: Military history*. Johannesburg:

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- Jonathan Ball Publishers. An earlier version appeared in the 1980s: Moorcroft, P. & McLaughlin, P. 1982. *Chimurenga: The war in Rhodesia, 1965–1980*. Marshalltown: Sygma/Collins. For a review of the latest edition of this work, see Liebenberg, I. 2008. Militêre oormag sonder meer is takties dom *Rapport*, 8 February: 18. For a perspective by a disillusioned veteran on the end of Portugal's bush war in Mozambique, consult Coccia, G. 1976. *The scorpion sting: Mozambique*. Johannesburg: Livraria Moderna.
- ⁷ Geldenhuys, J. 1995. *A general's story from an era of war and peace*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball was slightly revised and reprinted in 2007 as *Dié wat gewen het: Feite en fabels van die bosoerlog*. Hatfield: Litera. Note also Malan, M. 2006. *My lewe saam met die SA Weermag*. Pretoria: Protea.
- ⁸ Heitman, H. 1990. *War in Angola: The final South African phase*. Gibraltar: Ashanti. The following work, just prior to 1990, deserves to be mentioned: Steenkamp, W. 1989. *South Africa's Border War, 1966–1989*. Gibraltar: Ashanti.
- ⁹ Breytenbach, J. 1990. *They live by the sword*. Alberton: Lemur; Breytenbach, J. 2002. *The Buffalo Soldiers: The story of South Africa's 32-Battalion 1975–1993*. Alberton: Galago; Els, P. 2000. *We fear naught but God: The story of the South African Special Forces 'The Recces'*. Johannesburg: Covos Day; Nortjé, P. 2008. *32 Battalion: The inside story of South Africa's elite fighting unit*. Cape Town: Zebra Press; Paul, M. 2008. *Parabat: Personal accounts of paratroopers in combat situations in South Africa's history*. Johannesburg: Manie Grové Publishers; Bothma, L.J. 2008. *Die buffel struikel: 'n Storie van 32 Bataljon en sy mense*. Revised edition. Bloemfontein: Self published. Bothma's book received rave reviews in the Afrikaans media and proved so popular that it was reprinted nine times in Afrikaans and once in English (2008). David Robbins's sometimes poignant account of the San soldiers of the SADF also deserves a mention. See Robbins, D. 2007. *On the bridge of goodbye: The story of South Africa's discarded San soldiers*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball. The blood and guts aspect of the war was revived with the re-issue in one volume of At van Wyk's (2008) tales of recipients of the Honoris Crux: *Die roem en die rou: Stories agter Honoris Crux*. Pretoria: Litera.
- ¹⁰ Becker, D. 1990. *On wings of eagles*. Durban: Walker Ramus; Lord, D. 2000. *Vlamgat: The story of the Mirage F1 in the South African Air Force*. Weltevredenpark: 30°South; Lord, D. 2008. *From fledgling to eagle: The South African Air Force during the Border War*. Johannesburg: 30°South. The experience of Cuban pilots is related in a work by an Air Force veteran, Humberto Trujillo Hernandez (2005): *Trueno Justiciero: Mis campañas en cielo angolano*. Havana: Casa Editora/Editora Política.
- ¹¹ Steenkamp, W. 1976. *Adeus Angola: The seesaw war*. Cape Town: Howard Timmens; Steenkamp, W. 1983. *Borderstrike! South Africa into Angola*. Durban: Butterworths. H.-R. Heitman's (1985) *Die Suid-Afrikaanse krygsmag*. Johannesburg: Bison Books should also be mentioned here. Especially the chapters entitled 'Insurgensie in Suidwes-Afrika' (pp. 134–

165) and ‘Ingryping in Angola’ (pp. 166–175) are relevant to this discussion. Also see Du Preez, S. 1989. *Avontuur in Angola: Die verhaal van Suid-Afrika se soldate in Angola 1975–1976*. Pretoria: L J van Scaik and, F.J. du Toit. 1989. *Operasie Savannah 1975–1976*. Pretoria: SADF.

¹² English: Armed Forces of the Peoples’ Republic of Angola (Angolan Defence Force).

¹³ English: Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola

¹⁴ Earlier works on the war of liberation in Angola are generally locally unknown due to a limited knowledge of Portuguese, Spanish and Russian. Historical works reflecting the Angolan liberation struggle from colonialism among others are: Lara, L. 1998. *Um amplo movimento: Itenerario do MPLA através de documentos e anotações*. Luanda: LitoCor, and two works by Edmundo Rocha (2002) both entitled *Angola: Contribuição ao Estudo de Nacionalismo Moderno Angolano* (Vols. 1 and 2). Luanda: Kilombelombe Publishers, which covers the era 1950 to 1964. Another work, albeit propagandistic, tells the story of Angola’s military during their second war of liberation, Anon. 1996. *FAPLA: Baluarte de paz em Angola* [FAPLA: Bulwark of peace in Angola]. Luanda: Communication Works. Several works appeared in Cuba. Among these are the following: Risquet, G., Gleijesus, P. & Ramirez, R. 2007. *Cuba y Africa: Historia Común Lucha y Sangre*. Havana: Casa Editora, which addresses the period 1975 to 1988, including the Angolan theatre; Cabrera, M.R. 1989. *La Guerra de Angola*. Havana: Editora Política, dedicated to the war in Angola; Burness, D. (ed.) 1996. *On the shoulder of Marti: Cuban literature of the Angolan War*. Colorado Springs: Three Continents Press, holds collected fiction and poetry by Cuban volunteers in Angola. Another worthwhile read (this time in Russian) is Tokarev, A.A. 2006. *FNLA v anticolonialnoi borbe v Angole I grazhnanskoi voine v Angole* [FNLA in the anti-colonial struggle and civil war in Angola]. Moscow: Africa Institute. As far as the authors could ascertain, this work is the only work dedicated exclusively to the dubious history of the FNLA.

¹⁵ Taurus. 1987. *Forces Favourites*. Emmerentia: Taurus Uitgewers. The Taurus group which published predominantly in Afrikaans, in the lingo of time was no *wussies* (wimps). Their publications remained a thorn in the side of the Afrikaner power elite and were habitually banned by government. Against all odds this small enterprise survived until the 1990s.

¹⁶ A recent work related to the Border/Angolan War includes chapters that deal with “subversive”/“anti-heroic” publications and social interpretations. See chapters by Rogez, M., Roos, H. & Conway, D. in G. Baines & P. Vale (eds.). 2008. *Beyond the Border War: New perspectives on Southern Africa’s late-Cold War conflicts*. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press: 75, 93, 120–136, 137–157.

¹⁷ See Batley, K. (with Liebenberg, I., Allais, C. & Du Plessis, T.). 2007. *A secret burden: Memories of the Border War by South African soldiers who fought*

in it. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers. The anti-heroic genre counters the perception of the valiant soldier (patriotic volunteer or professional officer) that fought for country, people and righteousness, frequently under the graceful auspices of God. An example of heroic poetry related to World War II is Gwen Roland's (1943) *The soldier and other poems*. Cape Town: Hodder & Stoughton. Batley's work saw two editions, with a third underway.

- ¹⁸ Thompson, J.H. 2006. *An unpopular war: From afkak tot bosbefok – voices of South African national servicemen*. Cape Town: Zebra Press.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11, 37, 50–51, 53, 167, 169.
- ²⁰ Van der Walt, N. 2007. *Bos toe! 'n Storie oor die laaste fase van die Grensoorlog soos beleef deur 'n junior offisier van 32-Bataljon*. Swartkops: Self published; Williams, D. 2008. *On the border: The white South African military experience, 1965–1990*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- ²¹ Andrew, R. 2001. *Buried in the sky*. Johannesburg: Penguin. See p. 197 for the quote on 'army and its madness'.
- ²² In this category, another worthwhile read is Korff, G. 2009. *19 with a bullet: A South African paratrooper in Angola*. Johannesburg: 30° South Publishers. While the authors do not deal with it here, this tough read in itself deserves a good review.
- ²³ Van der Merwe, A.C. 2006. *Moffie: A novel*. Hermanus: Penstock is an excellent recent addition to border literature. This fictional work is based on notebooks the author kept during his national service. The descriptions of army life are exceptional. It also deals with a subject that was previously mostly taboo: that of gays in uniform in a homophobic defence force. The work demonstrates that fictional works based on real-life experiences and auto-ethnography has historical relevance. On the matter of illegal ivory smuggling during the Border War, see a 'fictional' work by Breytenbach, J. 2001. *The plunderers*. Johannesburg: Covos Day.
- ²⁴ Compare Fourie, D. 1980. The evolving experience. In J.M. Roherty (ed.). *Defence policy formation: Towards comparative analysis*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 87ff on a description of South Africa's foreign policy and the place of the military. For a case study on foreign policy enacted by an isolated state, see Geldenhuys, D. 1985. *The diplomacy of isolation: South African foreign policy making*. Braamfontein: Macmillan. Covert operations were much spoken about, yet little published, partly due to lack of sources and resources. For an earlier work, see Schutte, C., Liebenberg, I. & Minnaar, A. 1998. *The hidden hand: Covert operations in South Africa*. Revised edition. Pretoria: HSRC Publishers. The first edition of the work appeared in 1994 following a conference on covert operations at Espada Ranch outside Pretoria. It was the first work to deal with case studies of covert operations in South Africa and contributors were practitioners, academics, theorists and civilians covering a wide spectrum.
- ²⁵ Sanders, J. 2006. *Apartheid's friends: The rise and the fall of South Africa's Secret Service*. London: London.

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- ²⁶ Police support to underpin apartheid: Consult Frankel, P.H. 1980. The politics of police control. *Comparative Politics*: 481–499 and on the role of the military, see Frankel, P.H. 1984. *Pretoria's Praetorians: Civil-military relations in South Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. On other authors that dealt with the garrison state, such as K.W. Grundy, Stephen Davis and Richard Leonard, see Liebenberg, I. 1990. *Ideologie in konflik*. Bramley: Taurus Uitgewers: 114–115, 117, 121, 122–123, 135, 137.
- ²⁷ Hamman, H. 2006. *Days of the generals: The untold story of South Africa's apartheid-era military generals*. Cape Town: Zebra Press.
- ²⁸ Shubin, V. 2008. *ANC: A view from Moscow*. Auckland Park: Jacana Media. The 1999 edition was produced by Mayibuye Books. It is sad that it took so long to see a second print of this work, partly because of an unnecessary delay at a distance education university that promised publication in Pretoria. Fortunately, Jacana Media then took the opportunity. Russian academic interest in contemporary South African developments remains. An example of this is Vladimir Shubin's (2008) latest work *The hot "Cold War": The USSR in Southern Africa*. Scottsville. Pluto Press and the University of KwaZulu-Natal timely teamed up to produce this illuminating work. (For a useful review of the book, consult Visser, D. 2009. The Hot "Cold War". *Scientia Militaria* 37(2):135–139). Another example of continuing Russian interest in South Africa is: Shubin, G. & Maidanov, I. 2008. *ВООРУЖЕННЫЕ СИЛЫ И ВОЕННАЯ ПРОМЫШЛЕННОСТЬ ЮАР* [South African armed forces and military industry]. Moscow: ISAS/AI. Unfortunately, the latter work has not been translated into English.). An updated and expanded version edited by Shubin, G., Maidanov, I. & Liebenberg, I with the same title appeared in 2010 published by Memories Publishers, Moscow. Unfortunately this also came out only in Russian.