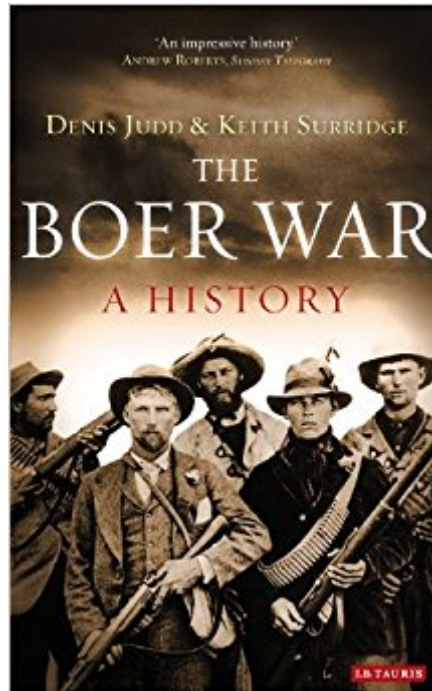




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# Boer War, The: A History



## Synopsis

The Boer War of 1899-1902 was an epic of heroism and bungling, cunning and barbarism with an extraordinary cast of characters - including Churchill, Rhodes, Conan Doyle, Smuts, Kipling, Gandhi, Kruger and Kitchener. The war revealed the ineptitude of the British military and unexpectedly exposed the corrupt underside of imperialism - in the establishment of the first concentration camps, the shooting of Boer prisoners-of-war and the embezzlement of military supplies by British officers. This acclaimed book provides a complete history of the Boer War - from the first signs of unrest to the eventual peace. In the process, it debunks several of the myths which have grown up around the conflict and explores the deadly legacy it left for southern Africa.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a shorter review than I normally write, but I've had a hard time writing it. After reading Byron Farwell's *The Anglo-Boer War*, I really wanted to enjoy *The Boer War* by Dennis Judd and Keith Surridge but instead, I came away somewhat disappointed. The Boer War is well researched, informative, and argues some great points but it does so in a very dry way. The authors don't develop the important personalities, so you don't get as

much insight into their interactions. The book is light on details and heavy on analysis and that isn't necessarily a problem, but there just doesn't seem to be quite enough detail on the military action. Additionally, it had no maps and maps are important when you're dealing with military history. Finally, I frequently felt like I was reading a text book much of the time. I never really felt engaged with this book. It didn't draw me in and make me want to keep reading, or make me wonder what was coming on the next page. That's a trap that a book on history can easily fall into and this one unfortunately did. I can only give this book three stars, but at the same time I don't want to discourage anyone from reading it. It's definitely worth reading, but only after reading another book on the war that will familiarize you with the war and provide more detail on the fighting and the personalities than this one does.

If you already know all about the Boer war, and merely want something that skims over everything (except for what British forces were raised and how - that is mind-numbingly dealt with), then this is the book for you. Otherwise, look elsewhere. After I finished, I was no more clear on why the war happened than I was when I opened the book. Many major players in the events are briefly mentioned, as if, OF COURSE, everyone is totally familiar with them, and why they did what they did, so no further mention is needed... never mind what they actually did, which is frequently not mentioned either, & certainly not explained! Battles are covered, but so confusingly that I was never quite sure who won. It all seemed rather like an early British flipped-version of the American Vietnam War - the Brits lost all the battles but won the war, somehow. (And a particular annoyance was also the use of first and last initials, rather than actual names, for people. Not for everyone mentioned, but frequently enough to be really irritating - didn't people have first names back then?!?) A definite pro-British bias to the book, which still left me feeling like they were the criminals of the entire thing.

Judd and Surridge have written a comprehensive yet approachable book about the Second Boer War in *The Boer War: A History*. This conflict between the British coastal Cape Colony of South Africa and the two independent Boer Republics, the Transvaal, and Orange Free State, in the interior, lasted from October 1899 to October 1902. The Boers were descendants of seventeenth century Dutch and French religious dissenters who sought refuge in South Africa. So, this was a white man's colonial war, in a country overwhelming black. Rich gold and diamond fields were discovered in the Boer Republics, and Great Britain, eager for this wealth and to consolidate their hold on all of South Africa, sought an excuse for war. They found one, and the

British initially lost many of the opening battles due to a shortage of men and equipment, and a lack of knowledge of the country (which of course the Boers knew very well). The British believed this would be a short war, and everyone would be home by Christmas. This common refrain about the quick war proved to be untrue in this case as well. The British got bogged down in sieges of important inland towns, and only when the Empire could marshal large numbers of men, over half a million, did the scales finally tip. But even with the conquest of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, hostilities did not end. The Boers, accustomed to operating in small units called commandos, began a guerrilla war against the British, extending the expensive conflict, which was increasingly unpopular at home. In attempts to stop Boer farmers, mostly women and children, from supplying food to commando units, the British burned Boer farms suspected of collusion, or sometimes just in the wrong location, and incarcerated Boer civilians in concentration camps. Conditions in many were deplorable, and thousands of civilians died of undernourishment and disease. The Boer War, occurring on the cusp of the twentieth century, became a marker signifying the limitation of being a Great Power. Judd and Surridge show again and again how Great Britain could not completely defeat the Boers or only did after paying a far greater cost than they estimated. We have seen this again and again in the hundred years since the Boer War, in different places among different combatants. A smaller force, on its home turf, can either win a war against a larger adversary, or make them pay a heavy price for their occupation.

Excellent overview of a part of South African history that has been rather obfuscated in the teaching of history at schools and the minds of the general populace. The war and the events that lead up to it and more importantly those that reverberated well into modern South Africa were far more complex than just Boer against Brit for the gold reserves in the Witwatersrand. A great read considering the complex history and politics, good pace and deep insight into the details made this a very enjoyable book.

Judd pays more attention to the internal governmental messages than does Kruger (In Goodbye Dolly Gray), and pays little attention to the military aspects (and supplies no maps). Maybe Judd does correct some errors in the works of others, but I am insufficiently expert to recognize that. I am keeping a dilapidated copy of Goodbye Dolly Gray rather than a new Judd.

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