

AFRICAN MILITARY STUDIES

Volume 1

African Military Geosciences

Military History and
the Physical Environment

Jacques Bezuidenhout & Hennie Smit

Editors



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African Military Geosciences: Military History and the Physical Environment

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FOREWORD

African Military Studies

Series Editor

Ian van der Waag, Stellenbosch University

African Military Studies is an exciting, new series of books on war, conflict and armed forces in Africa. Covering the whole span of African history, and the full conflict continuum, the series seeks to encourage works on the drivers of armed conflict, the ways in which societies and armed forces prepare for and conduct war, the development of technology, strategy, tactics, and logistics in the African battlespace, and the impact of warfare on African societies. *African Military Studies* presents the latest research and accepts high-quality monographs, collections of essays, conference proceedings, and annotated military and historical texts. It is a library for the academic specialist, for the policymaker, and for the practitioner with “boots on the ground”.

Volume Editors

Jacques Bezuidenhout & Hennie Smit, Stellenbosch University

The editors want to thank all the authors for their contributions towards this book, as well as their efforts to ensure that publication timelines were kept. We would also like to extend our sincere gratitude to the anonymous external reviewers for their thoughtful, insightful and critical scholarly evaluation of the manuscript. The comments and suggestions emanating from the double-blind peer review mechanism was an indispensable part of the process to guarantee the academic quality and integrity of the publication. In the final instance, we want to express our heartfelt gratefulness to Emily Vosloo from AFRICAN SUN MeDIA who patiently guided us through the publication process. May all who read the book find what they were looking for in a book of this nature.

INTRODUCTION

African Military Geoscience: Military History and the Physical Environment

Traditionally, military activities strongly depend on the physical environment of the operational theatre where a conflict transpires. The field of military geosciences study the relationship between these different physical environments and the associated offensive and defensive military tactics and strategies. Military geoscientific studies are mostly undertaken from either a geological or geographical perspective. Although there are some underlying relation between these perspectives, the theoretical approaches typically differs. The differences in these approaches, and the manner in which they guide the study of the impact of the physical environment in military historical geoscientific studies, are presented in the chapters of this book.

The ever-present relationship between warfare and the physical environment is well established. Throughout history, key elements of geology and geography have served as decisive factors in the conduct and outcome of military operations at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war. In each area of military operations, a number of physical characteristics, unique to that area, combine to create a distinctive operational environment. The elements that render an operational environment unique provide a useful background for the study of the historical impact of climate and terrain on warfare.

The physical environment likewise shaped the course of wars in Africa. The continent is well known for its large variation in physical environments. This makes it an ideal theatre for investigating the impact of different environments on military activities. Despite this, the interrelationship between the physical environment and military operations in Africa is not well studied. This publication aims to address this disparity. The first chapter investigates the interaction between geography and military operations within southern Africa. Four very different physical environments are described and specific battles are