



Letters from Ladysmith: Eyewitness Accounts from the South African War

Edward Spiers

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Edward Spiers, a leading authority on the Victorian British army, presents here a select edition of letters from the siege of Ladysmith (1899–1900) that have not been seen since their original publication in metropolitan and provincial newspapers. The 250 letters were published in different British newspapers and provide crucial insights into contemporary perceptions of the battles that preceded the siege, the onset of the siege itself, and the desperate and bloody attempts to relieve the town. Subsequent efforts to defend Ladysmith – and to march to its relief – became the great dramatic saga of the early phase of the Anglo–Boer War, providing the context for a series of dramatic battles that embarrassed the Empire and destroyed established reputations. Much has been written about the failings of the British commanders but it is clear that in no other theatre in the war were the practical difficulties so real – or the stakes so high. These letters reflect vividly the feelings of junior officers and other ranks as they struggled to cope with the demands of modern warfare. These eyewitness testimonies provide first-hand commentary upon the events in Natal that shattered the pre-war confidence in Britain.

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