

The Last Defenders of the Laager: Ian D. Smith and F. W. de Klerk



When the Afrikaners (Boers) migrated northward from the Cape to escape British rule, they encountered the Zulu people. To protect their claims, the Boers formed the laager, a circle of wagons. As years passed, the laager acquired wider political dimensions and became a symbol of Afrikaner determination to survive under hostile conditions. Ian D. Smith, last colonial leader of Zimbabwe from 1964 to 1979, and F. W. de Klerk, the last white president of South Africa from 1988 to 1994, were the last defenders of the laager on the African continent. Rising nationalism and the devastation of civil war would eventually force these leaders to abandon the colonial systems that they had inherited from their predecessors. The study details the origins and development of the laager system in Africa. It discusses how and why previously successful tactics to maintain the system would fail amidst the rising African nationalism of the late 20th century. The focus of each of the eight chapters alternates between Smith and de Klerk and examines the efforts of each to overcome unanticipated challenges.

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