

***The Leopard and the Cliff:***  
***A novel of the North-West Frontier***

by Wallace Broom

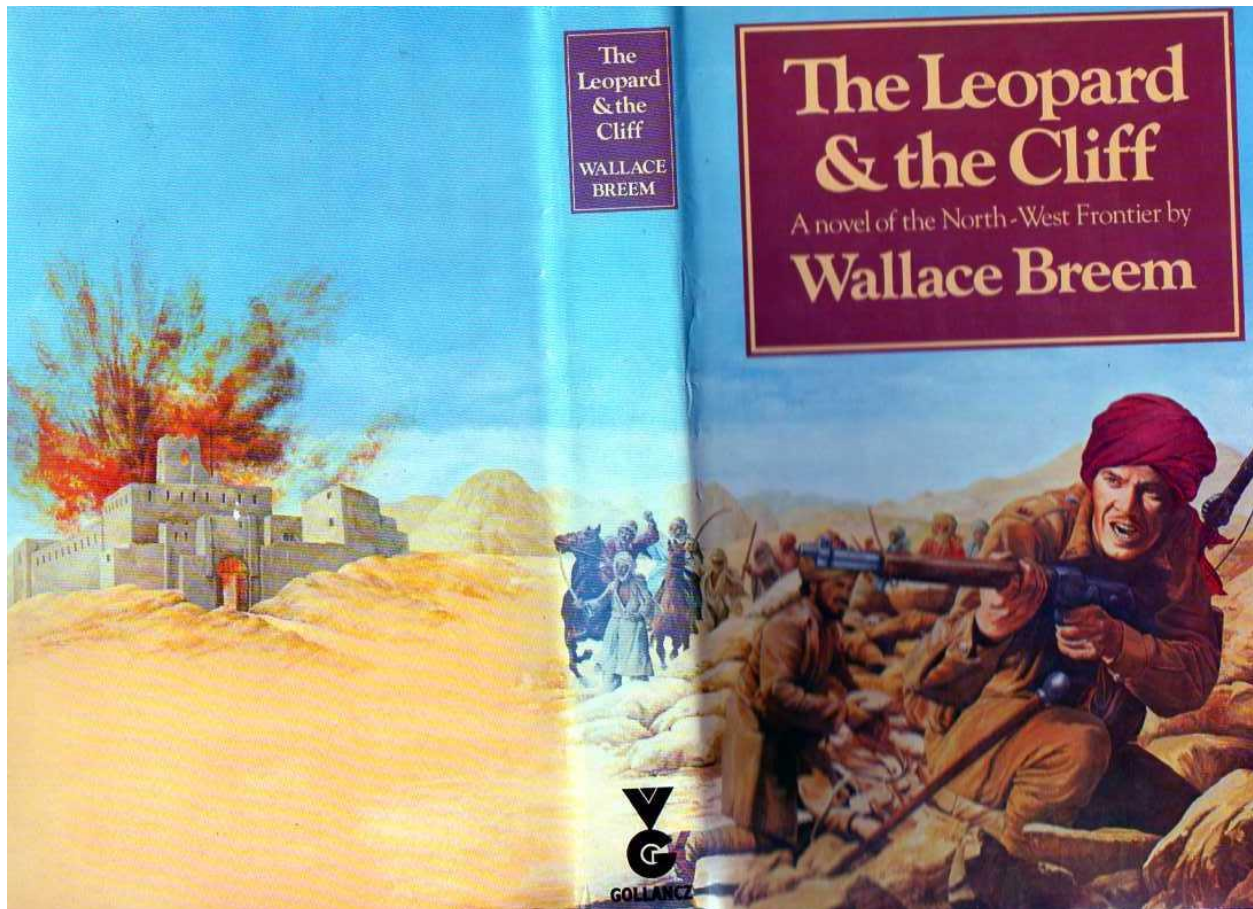
(with a mention of *The Legate's Daughter* and *Eagle in the Snow*)

Reviewed by Derek Clark

Over the five years that I have been wargaming, I have come to realize that my main pleasure is the research. Fiction and non-fiction books, magazine and journal articles, comics and films.

Occasionally a good fiction author springs up in a period that I am interested in: Bernard Cornwall with the Uhtred trilogy times five, David Gilman's four or five novels, and Robert Low's Lion Rampant trilogy. These are books whose authors have researched properly and are able to convey by the quality of their writing what feels like an authentic account of the period they write in. Not to say that it is, but it feels like it could be.

Now and again an author comes along who has the wordsmith skills coupled to the advantage of having been at the place of the history that they write of. Such a chap is Wallace Broom. Born in 1926, he was commissioned as an officer of the Guides Cavalry in 1945, and following partition in 1947 he returned to England.



The fictional story is based on the framework of the Third Afghan War of 1919. With British forces in India weakened by WWI, the decision was taken to withdraw from several frontier outposts and forts in the face of the Afghans. Many Pathan tribes took that as a sign of weakness by the 'Engerazi'. A lot deserted from British administered Guides and Militias with their weapons and rose with their brothers and cousins in rebellion against their enemies - both English and other tribes.

Sandeman (Senneman to the tribesmen) is 2 i/c (Second-in-Command) at Fort Khaisora. He has not been a happy soldier having failed to meet the standard set by an illustrious father. He has however found some contentment by choosing a posting to the native guides and finding a respect of the native people and a love of their land. He has also married late in life and his wife is back at base waiting to deliver their first child.



As the tribes rise against the British the OC (Officer Commanding) Fort Khaisora is mortally wounded. It falls to Senneman to organize the retreat from the post, and its outposts, while surrounded by enemies and accompanied by a native militia whose loyalty is now questionable. Stage by stage the story of the retreat by forced march is detailed while the characters, major and minor, and their relationships are beautifully developed. It is a very sad tale but also a noble and soldierly one.

There is much here for wargamers of the NW Frontier in the 20th century at campaign, battle and skirmish level. From significant battles and politics; tests of loyalty to sly treachery; and skirmishes including the horrors of native cruelty, and the difficult decisions that forced others to make.

It is a book that has a permanent space on my shelves and that I have returned to several times.

Wallace Breem also wrote *Eagle in the Snow* - set in the 5th Century Western Roman Empire and *The Legate's Daughter* set in Augustan Rome and North Africa. Both are superb novels with the same quality of characterisation and plot development as *The Leopard and the Cliff*.

I had read the *Leopard* and *Eagle* novels first and they have similarities in style that made the *Legate's Daughter* a 'different read' but, if I may wax lyrical, the plot opened like a dew speckled flower about a third of the way in. A very different storyline to his other two novels.

Such a shame that he started writing so late in life. His novels were written in the 1970's but have been reprinted (quality reprints in hardback) in the early 2000's.

Recommended for a good read and think.