

A HANDFUL OF HEROES: RORKE'S DRIFT – FACTS, MYTHS AND LEGENDS

by KATIE STOSSEL

Barnsley, U.K.: Pen & Sword Books, 2015; 201 pages.

ISBN 978-1-47382-822-3

KATIE Stossel's book on the battle of Rorke's Drift is a compilation of accounts, anecdotes and extracts which will captivate and challenge both Anglo-Zulu War buffs and fundis. This review is accordingly addressed to them.

The core of the book is a fairly straightforward narrative of the action. Some readers may wish that it had more depth and details, but as it stands Chapter 4 is a long one and might well have been broken into two smaller chapters, with the second one dealing with the aftermath of the battle.

The real meat of the book is in subsequent chapters and appendices, which constitute two thirds of the text. These contain many interesting reports, reminiscences and comments on contingent events and persons. The book presumes a lot of the reader, who is expected to contextualise the variegated mass of information. It includes some fascinating but inessential chapters on the nurse Sister Janet, the surveyor Augustus Hammar and the missionary Otto Witt, and similarly appendices on Lieutenant

Walter Higginson and Sergeant Thomas Cooper at Fugitive's Drift.

Probably the most interesting part of the book is the comparative critique of Captain John Chard's reports of the battle, but the reader must pull these together from three chapters (2, 10 and 11) and an appendix (7). Lord Chelmsford and Sir Henry Bartle Frere are treated conventionally. The Zulu *impi* gets its due.

Yet there are a good many loose ends and errors in the details. Most of these seem to be connected with the role and placement of the Natal Native Contingent, a unit that British writers (except Ian Knight) seem never quite able to understand or fit comfortably into accounts of either Isandlwana or Rorke's Drift. More serious defects are the absences of a bibliography and maps of the battle and related operations.

Thus the book will make a nice addition to the scholar's shelf of books on the Anglo-Zulu War, but only for selective reference.

PAUL THOMPSON