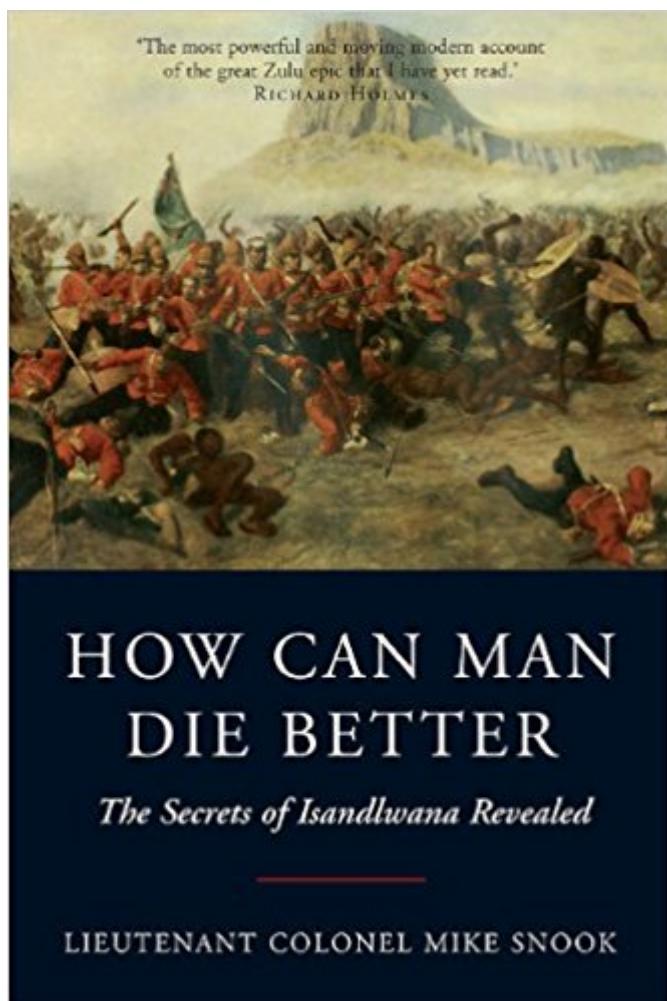


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How Can Man Die Better: The Secrets Of Isandlwana Revealed



Synopsis

Wednesday 22 January 1879 was one of the most dramatic days in the long and distinguished history of the British Army. At noon a massive Zulu host attacked the 24th Regiment in its encampment at the foot of the mountain of Isandlwana, a distinctive feature that bore an eerie resemblance to the Sphinx badge of the outnumbered redcoats. Disaster ensued. Later that afternoon the victorious Zulus would strike the tiny British garrison at Rorke's Drift. How Can Man Die Better is a unique analysis of Isandlwana of the weapons, tactics, ground, and the intriguing characters who made the key military decisions. Because the fatal loss was so high on the British side there is still much that is unknown about the battle. This is a work of unparalleled depth, which eschews the commonly held perception that the British collapse was sudden and that the 24th Regiment was quickly overwhelmed. Rather, there was a protracted and heroic defense against a determined and equally heroic foe. The author reconstructs the final phase of the battle in a way that has never been attempted before. It was to become the stuff of legend, which brings to life so vividly the fear and smell the blood.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Applying his knowledge of military procedures to calculate the rate of ammunition expenditure during each move, the author proves that when the fugitives managed to make their escape, soldiers of the 24th Foot were still doggedly fighting and would continue to do so for some time. What emerges is a story epitomizing the Victorian values of courage, pride and patriotism exhibited by both sides, values which are usually denigrated by many of today's writers,

but which are still valid despite modern fashionable cynicism. (TOY SOLDIER AND MODEL FIGURE MAGAZINE)

I have been to Isandlwana and found it a very moody sort of place. The mountain does brood over the battlefield like some lion squatting over its kill daring anything to come close. I stayed at the Isandlwana Lodge which, apparently, is where the Zulu right horn came over the ridge. Sat on the verandah, with an evening drink, looking over to the white memorial stones scattered underneath the mountain it is so easy to imagine the Zulus coming over the ridge either side of you and watching the pathetically small lines of red battalions forming up to meet the devastating attack. I have read pretty much all the highly recommended accounts of the battle and each one has had, in my opinion, a little more to add to the equation. "How Man Can Die Better" is no exception. Col Mike Snook has done an excellent job with this book. It is easy to read and does not go over the top with discussions regarding the unpronounceable Zulu Regiments as some authors tend to do. As he says it is unfortunate that there is very little of the Zulu side that has come down to us. The big question is why, when in enemy territory and when the strength of the enemy is unknown and his whereabouts unknown, split your command? Didn't Chelmsford read anything about Custer at the Little Big Horn in '76? It's amazing how Junior Officers and Other Ranks have to always bear the brunt of the ineptitude of Senior Officers. Anyway, I digress! I do thoroughly recommend this book, you can never read too much about this battle. Each book, as I have said, has a touch more to add.

Lt. Colonel Snook has written a loving tribute to the British soldier of the Victorian Empire. Does it add anything to the battle of Isandlwana? It has strengths. His careful analysis of the battlefield adds some clarity and the eye of a professional soldier. His clear dislike for Durnford seems more personal than based on evidence. He makes excuses for officers of the 24th for making poor decisions and condemns similar mistakes by officers outside the regiment. It is an interesting look at the Victorian army in action. As long as you are aware that the author has his side to tell it can be worth the time.

This is a hard book to review because it's a mixture of good and bad. I've been to Isandlwana and stood in all the key places of the battle, and in fact of the rest of the Zulu wars of 1879. There is no better, more thorough, more compelling account of the movement of forces involved than this book, and few convey better the sense of the battle. The problem I have is that virtually everyone who writes about Isandlwana agrees that Chelmsford was the major cause of the defeat, but they then

divide into anti-camps. You're either anti-Dernford or anti-Pulleine, and most of the books I've found are poisoned in part by the anti-perceptions of their authors. This one is no exception. It recounts events as correctly as circumstances allow, but it interprets them in a decidedly anti-Dernford context. Pulleine can do nothing wrong and Dernford nothing right. Respectfully, I disagree. Dernford did do wrong things, but they probably did nothing in the end but add his own forces to the casualty list. Pulleine had the only realistic chance of saving the British forces given Chelmsford's blunders, and he failed to concentrate. In battles fought within days by the other two thrusts of Chelmsford's forces, the commanders proved that they could defeat Zulu forces under similar conditions. Rorke's Drift, fought the next day, saw a victory of a small group against thousands of Zulu. The common thread was that the winners concentrated and defended, and the losers died. I would recommend this book for its incredible insight into terrain and movement, and I'm on my second reading. I'd recommend that the judgments of Dernford and Pulleine be taken with a grain of salt.

The book was deeply moving. Even though I knew the end, I had to pause for several days from reading the book as the British right collapsed and Lieutenant Pope saw eternity staring at him. I just couldn't bring myself to read the end of this gallant force. The battle of Isandlwana has always carried a rumor of tragedy and loss for me and I am grateful that Colonel Snook led me deftly across the battlefield with a soldier's eye. It was the best terrain walk I have ever. The American Civil War hero of Gettysburg, Joshua Chamberlain said that soldiers leave a part of themselves at every battlefield that those who come behind can feel. I certainly felt a part of those men in your books. From my days doing liaison work with the BOAR, I have always highly respected my British brothers-in-arms. This book brought the proud traditions I saw to pinpoint clarity. I have placed Colonel Snook in company of my other favorite military authors such as Douglas Freeman, Bruce Catton, and Charles MacDonald. I am looking forward to reading more of his work.

I was only familiar with information from the 'Washing of the Spears' era. Like the further evaluations of Custer, and unlike the horrible Zulu Dawn, these professionals retained some semblance of fighting cohesiveness to the end. The author is a member of the regiment so they are not going to suffer, but it is a logical analysis that does not depend on the testimony of everyone after the fact trying to cover their tracks.

I have read several books about Isandlwana, and this is by far the best. I would be surprised if this

is not considered to be the definitive book on the battle. The author leaves nothing out, every moment of the battle is covered from the initial Zulu attacks to the British collapse. The author also includes an order of battle for both the British and Zulus. I have always been interested in Isandlwana, and would love to visit the battlefield one day with this book in hand. A must read for anyone interested in the Zulu War.

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