

Zulu Rising – The Epic Story of Isandlwana and Rorke’s Drift by Ian Knight.
Sidgwick and Jackson 2010.

Those old enough to have seen the epic film Zulu, starring Michael Caine, will have a particular image of Zulu warriors in mind, courageously hurling themselves against the guns of an embattled British force, whom they hugely outnumbered, but by which they are mown down.

Zulu Rising, written by the renowned Zulu historian Ian Knight, recounts the story of the most famous military contact between the Zulu *impi* and the British redcoats, at Isandlwana and Rorke’s Drift, a story shot through with heroism and savagery.

However, as befits a book that the author has laboured towards over three decades, it is much more than the tale of two battles: rather, Knight looks in forensic detail at the Zulu nation, its origins, internal structures, and rulers, as well as its relations with the other peoples of southern Africa, building a picture which sets its two most famous battles in their proper context.

Knight also focuses on the history of the British in southern Africa, as well as the Boers, and explains how the conflicts between them, the British desire for a stable base for its shipping going to India and its imperial ambitions, as well as a contempt for other races, built into a combustible concoction that was destined to erupt.

Zulu Rising is divided into 29 chapters, the most dramatic being those concerned with the conflict itself, which Knight meticulously reconstructs, though for me the most fascinating aspect of the book is that which concerns the Zulu nation itself, especially its great kings Shaka and Cetshwayo.

This is a fascinating, extremely detailed work of history of interest to anyone concerned with British imperial history, or the history of South Africa, or history in general.

Highly recommended!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh