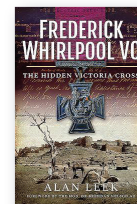


BOOK REVIEWS:

Frederick Whirlpool VC: the hidden Victoria Cross

by Alan Leek

Pen & Sword Military: Barnsley, South Yorkshire; 2019; 248 pp.; ISBN 9781526759108; RRP \$49.99 (hardcover); Ursula Davidson Library Call No. 501.2 LEEK 2019



This book is a biography of Humphrey James, who was born on 17 July 1831 in County Carlow, Ireland. Following education at a Protestant school, he enlisted in the army of the Honourable East India Company as 'Frederick Whirlpool'. He arrived in Bombay in 1855 and was posted to the 3rd Bombay European Regiment. During the Indian Mutiny, in April 1858 at Jhansi, he was involved in heavy fighting during which he rescued two wounded men. In May, during an assault on Lohari, he saved the life of a wounded subaltern, but sustained 17 severe sword wounds, which ended his military career. For these two separate acts of valour, he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

In 1859, he migrated to Australia. His Victoria Cross was pinned on him on 20 June 1861 by the wife of Victoria's governor in Melbourne. At the time, he was serving part-time in the Hawthorne and Kew Volunteer Rifles. Shortly after, repulsed by fame, he moved to Tasmania and later moved to Sydney where he died on 24 June 1899 after living as a recluse for several years. Despite having been awarded the Victoria cross and having lived in Australia for much of his life, there was only one mourner at his funeral. As the author points out, Whirlpool deliberately obscured much of the facts of his life and this was the result. His Victoria Cross is now displayed in the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

The reasons why Humphrey James chose to enlist as 'Frederick Whirlpool' will never be known, but, while he later wished to revert to his correct name, his military pension, being in the assumed name, made this impossible.

Various episodes in Whirlpool's life, including episodes of self-indulgent anger, suggest that Whirlpool suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, to his detriment. As the author says: "His bodily wounds had been inflicted by the enemy, but his wounded psyche had come largely from his own side".

I have had an interest in Frederick Whirlpool since a friend asked me to pick up Whirlpool's Indian Mutiny medal from Customs many years ago. I must compliment the author on writing a most readable and instructive book on a little-known Victoria Cross winner. Quite apart from giving us the best possible biography of Whirlpool, the book also contains a very good general history of the Indian Mutiny which is well worth reading in itself.

I recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the Indian Mutiny and the Victoria Cross, but also to those interested in the life of a man whose life was altered by his military experiences.

Sergio Zampatti