

ZULU WAR

Battles For Empire, 1870-1902 scenarios PART I: Isandlwana, 22 January, 1879

by *Chris Leach*

Regardless of the historical period played, ultimately every wargamer dreams of re-fighting the "big battle" of the age. Zama, Pharsalus, Agincourt, Pavia or Waterloo all come to mind. For colonial gamers, a group of fine fellows who usually seem happy to play "attack the supply column" or "defend the oasis" skirmish type actions, there is that nagging desire to see if the impossible can be done: change the inevitable outcome of those colonial big battles that seem so one-sided like Omdurman or, probably the most re-fought classic of them all, the Zulu War Battle of Isandlwana, 22 January 1879.

The background history of the campaign that led to the Battle of Isandlwana is well known. In brief, after precipitating the Zulu War, the British launched an offensive with substantial forces of British regulars, colonial volunteers, and native raised levies. The British commander, Lord Chelmsford, accompanied the Centre - No. 3 - Column of the three major columns that plunged into Zululand. Seeking to engage the main Zulu impi, Chelmsford divided his column to reconnoiter in force, leaving Colonel Pulleine in command of the British camp at Mount Isandlwana with about 1300 British and native troops. Unfortunately for Pulleine, Chelmsford failed to find the Zulu impi; but Pulleine's scouts discovered it, arousing the impi to the attack. The 23,000 Zulus skillfully used the terrain to approach the British lines which were dangerously stretched over a wide front and ultimately overwhelmed and annihilated. Most of the soldiers were killed; only 60 whites and 400 blacks survived. The Zulus suffered the loss of approximately 1,000-2,000 warriors. In spite of the great victory, the Zulu Chief Cetewayo lamented the high Zulu casualties and commented that a spear had been thrust into the belly of his nation.

The challenge of re-fighting a battle like Isandlwana is to create a scenario which recreates the essential elements of the historical battle, but to put them into a game context that is entertaining and tactically interesting to both sides. This challenge seems particularly noted with Isandlwana since the British made a number of mistakes that wargamers would be loath to repeat. One solution is to disguise the scenario as something other than this decisive Zulu attack. In my opinion, disguising the battle with different terrain or circumstances defeats the historical, aesthetic, and gaming purpose of the re-fight. Indeed, I fashioned a large - and heavy - model of the mountain making it rather difficult to conceal the true identity of the battle! Ultimately, victory conditions that call for something more creative than "last man standing" are often the answer to re-fights that would, perhaps should, usually end in a massacre. The combination of casualties and the defense of each camp module should make this a worthwhile endeavor. I hope that I have achieved an interesting balance of the historical military problem and an entertaining game in the *Battles for Empire, 1870-1902* (BFE) scenario that follows.

BFE is suitable for large battles and small, using company sized tactical units organized by stands, not individual castings. This system allows players to collect miniature armies of a size that suits their aesthetic sensibilities, playing space, and budget, without affecting the game. Furthermore, focussing on stands as opposed to castings allows a freer use of any scale of miniatures by adjusting the numbers of miniatures to fit the stand as opposed to the reverse. I use 25mm miniatures but I have often fancied the idea of using very large numbers of 6mm figs on 25mm stand sizes to give that sense of mass. I could imagine doing Isandlwana 1:1 in 6mm would look as good as any 25mm game - or at least close.

Basing aesthetics is very important and contributes to the correct feel for the period. I select a number of figures per stand that I think will look in character for the troop type's fighting style; British regulars are usually based in a tidy close alignment, while Zulus and Dervishes are more loosely arranged on a larger stand. Pathan and Boer stands have fewer figures and lots of rocks and cover. Each stand can be a little diorama in a manner that cannot be achieved as effectively on single figure stands.

Note that since BFE is played using companies as the basic unit of maneuver and fighting, the following scenario should be suitable for many colonial rule sets such as *Principles of War* and, with some alteration, *The Sword and the Flame*.

Questions about this scenario or *Battles for Empire, 1870-1902* can be directed to me via e-mail: cleach@sfu.ca

Errata, clarifications and optional rules for BFE are available at the official BFE sites at By Jingo or Small Wars on the web.

ORDERS OF BATTLE

BRITISH

Commanders: Two British commanders are represented in the game. Colonel Pulleine and Colonel Durnford.

6 companies (units) British infantry (5 x 1/24th 1 x 2/24th),
Regulars, 1st Rate firing
3 companies (units) Natal Native Contingent.
Two NNC companies are spear armed, one company is rifle armed,
3rd Rate firing. Treat all NNC as "green" on the Zulu charts.
2 units irregular horse, use British movement charts,
Regulars, 2nd Rate firing.
1 gun (section), 1st Rate firing
British have 2 ammo "mules"

ZULUS

Commanders: Four Zulu commanders are represented in the game; one for each horn and two for the centre. Mavumengwana and Tshingwayo shared overall command of the Zulu impi, but the numerous regimental commanders of each part of the Zulu attack were of most importance to the tactical control of the battle.

30 Zulu units are present on the field at all times; recycle Destroyed units as necessary. Six units start the game as "elite" (+1 on the Unit Conduct Chart). If an elite unit is Destroyed it returns as a Regular unit.

SCENARIO NOTES

British

The British deploy in front of their camps no further than 30 inches onto the table in their deployment zone. See map for specific deployment limitations. Note that Durnford and the two irregular horse units may deploy as far forward as into the donga. The British deploy prior to the Zulus.

The British must not deploy in a multi-unit square. Not only would this not be in the spirit of the historical battle, but the scenario victory conditions would make this a foolhardy option anyway.

Zulus

Prior to the start of the game the Zulu players must distribute their available units between the three parts of their attack: the right and left "horns" and the center. The Zulus MUST put 6 units in each zone but may distribute the remaining 12 units of the 30 total as they wish. This allocation of units is done prior to the British deployment. The Zulus deploy their units on the table in their deployment zones after the British have deployed.

Zulu units that are destroyed are immediately returned to their attack zone deployment area up to one foot onto the table. Their exact position from the table edge is randomly determined by a die roll. Each pip