

The Drift 1879

Bringing “civilization” to native peoples consumed most of the 1800s. The native people were often less than enthusiastic about being “civilized”. In January 1879 the British wanted to “civilize” The Zulu nation. This would expand and protect the South Africa colony. At the battle of Isandlwana, Great Britain, suffered the worst defeat in colonial history when the Zulus destroyed their army. An organized army of 3,000 to 4,000 Zulu warriors, confident, armed with modern rifles and flush with victory invaded South Africa. The largest British military force is 140 men at a river crossing called Rorke’s Drift. The officers decided that their best chance was to fortify and fight. Fleeing would require them to abandon the sick and anyone who could not keep up. In an open field fight, all of them would be slaughtered. They fortified, the Zulus surrounded them and attacked. The Zulu army, unable to take the fort, returned home defeated. Losing less than a third of their men, outnumbered 20 to 30 to one, the defenders held. This small battle resulted in 15 men being awarded the Victorian Cross or the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

This game works best if the human player is the garrison and the computer is the Zulus. Both sides can be a human player but the Zulus have historic restrictions that limit a player’s playing.

The game is played in phased turns as alternate sides move and fire. A unit’s actions are limited by movement points and moral. Movement and combat expended movement points. Disruption or routing steals them. While a unit will always try to defend itself, lacking movement points restricts combat.

The computer will handle most of the reaction fire based on SOP settings. This frees you to concentrate on positioning men and selecting targets. SOP settings are careful, normal or reckless, controlling the amount of risk to take attacking and the fire range to targets. Ammunition controls much of the British player’s activities. You must protect your supply source and you need to keep the fort clear of Zulus to resupply your men.

The Zulu’s command ability is set for each game. A higher ability means better coordination for multiple attacks with more warriors. A lower ability is fewer warriors and single side attacks. Random, means you will see a variety of attacks

and can never be sure which ability is in use this time. Additionally, you set the size of the Zulu army from 3,000 to 4,000.

Victory conditions are brutal and realistic. The Zulus win by killing the British. The British win by breaking the Zulu's resolve. The moral of each side is set at the start of a game. The higher the moral and the lower the breaking point, the harder and longer the game. There is NO "Game Over" when the magic number of turns is completed. A larger Zulu army, higher command ability, high moral with a low breaking point makes for a very hard game to win.

There are four major Zulu command groups. One or more of them will attack a side of the fort. The British move men into position men to fire at the attackers. The Zulus will continue the attack until they break or overrun the fort. They may get to or over the wall; they can set building on fire. When one attack breaks, one of the other command groups will shortly start a new one. The British player constantly repositions a diminishing number of men to meet attacks from different directions.

The map is the buildings and the surrounding area the colors are gray and brown. Unit depiction is either standard war game symbols or figures. Using figures the Zulu command groups have different colored shields. The British have red coats, South Africans blue coats and the chaplain is dressed in black. Line of sight is block by building. Gullies and walls. You need to consider distance when firing at targets but you cannot let them get to close.

Is this a game that you will soon tire of? I say no, for the following reasons. While there is only one scenario the Zulus are very adjustable from easy to very hard. The garrison can be reinforced with historical units that did not stay or did not arrive in time to help.

If you will excuse me; the hospital is on fire, I've lost 20 men, we have been fighting for eight hours and the Zulus are attacking from two sides.....