

RIFLE & SABER: Four Boer War Scenarios

by Philip Gray

INTRODUCTION:

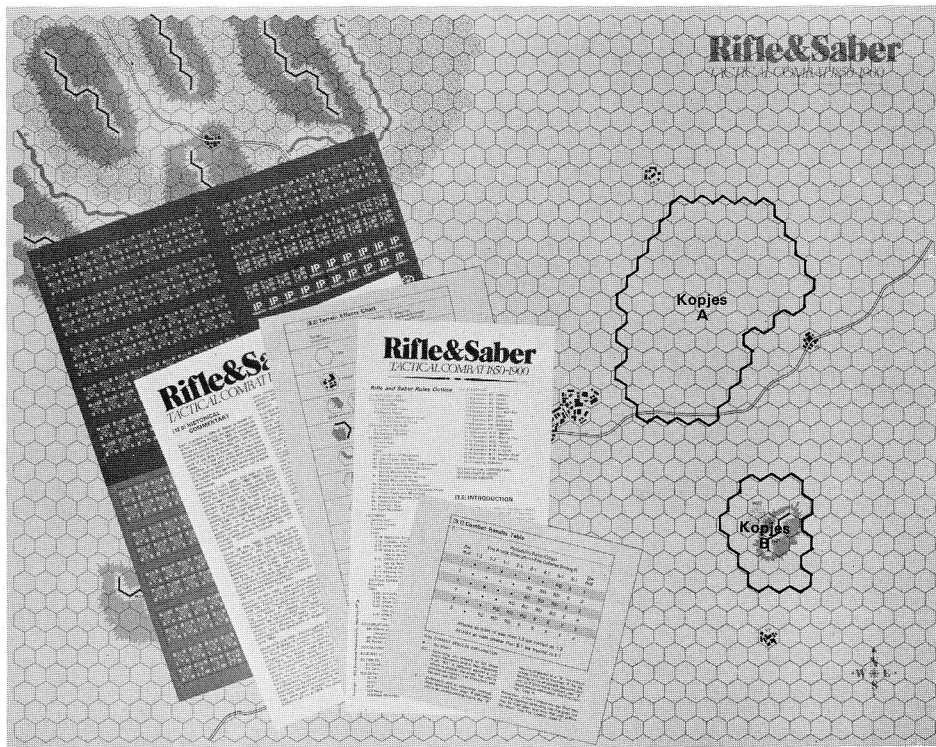
The early part of the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) saw many, relatively small engagements. These battles were easily recreated in their entirety using SPI's *Rifle & Saber*. All the battles were of the same pattern — British forces assaulting Boers dug in on heights. However, differences in the composition of the forces, the terrain, and victory conditions make each scenario singularly challenging. There are four battles which make reasonably good game situations; they are given below.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

The Boer inhabitants of 19th century Transvaal and the Orange Free State were extremely nationalistic and strongly opposed to British rule. They had successfully defended their lands against an attempted British expropriation in 1880-81. Then, in the late 1890's, the British began another attempt to take over Boer territory.

In mid-October, 1899, the Second Anglo-Boer War began and Boer forces immediately went on the offensive. They invaded the British colonies of Natal to their east and the Cape Colony to the west and south. In the west there was little opposition and the towns of Mafeking and Kimberly were easily besieged. Natal was invaded by 20,000 Boers; they were opposed by 8,000 British troops at Ladysmith and 4,000 more further north at Dundee. On 19 October Dundee was practically surrounded by Boers. At the same time a smaller Boer force captured Elandslaagte, thus cutting the retreat route from Dundee. The next day the British at Dundee attacked a small Boer commando on Talana Hill (which overlooked the British camp) and forced them to retreat. It was an empty victory, through; the British suffered heavy casualties (including their commander) and the Boers remained hovering about. One day later the Boers at Elandslaagte were defeated, allowing a retreat to Ladysmith, where the entire British force was to remain besieged until 28 February 1900.

Massive reinforcements began to arrive from Britain, and by late November they were ready to attempt the relief of Mafeking, Kimberly, and Ladysmith. Lord Methuen advanced toward Kimberly, pushing the Boers out of successive defensive positions at Belmont and Graspan. Meanwhile, General Buller prepared the Natal offensive. Simultaneous with these efforts, however, the Boers opened a third, central, front by invading the Cape Colony from the southern part of the Orange Free State. Soon the Boers were at Stormberg. While Methuen moved slowly toward Kimberly and Buller fussed with preparations for the relief of Ladysmith, General Gatacre tried to stem the invasion at Stormberg. On 10 December he attacked — and suffered a heavy defeat.



The Battle of Stormberg, the last battle included in these scenarios, was the first of three serious British defeats in one week (which came to be known as "Black Week"). Much hard fighting, and more British defeats, were yet to occur before the sheer size of British forces would overwhelm the Boers.

RULE CHANGES:

Upon trying out these battles with the *Rifle & Saber* rules, it was found that several aspects of the situations were not accurately simulated. In nearly every battle (in reality), the Boers constructed defensive positions in kopjes (low hills) which were virtually impervious to rifle fire, except at very close range. Also, the Boers were much better shots than the British soldiers, almost without exception. Consequently, British assaults had a great tendency to bog down, the Boers being pushed out of their positions only after a British bayonet charge. Since the Boers were quite afraid of bayonets, they were easily routed if the British could engage them in hand-to-hand combat. Finally, each Boer was mounted on his own pony. These ponies weren't very fast, but they gave the Boers a much needed mobility which their opponents largely lacked. If forced to retreat, the Boers would jump on their ponies, kept at the rear of the kopjes, and ride away, ready to fight another day in another place.

In order to represent these factors in the game, the following rules are added to the regular *Rifle & Saber* rules:

A. SIGHTING

1. Hills (called "kopjes") in these scenarios are, as in *Soldiers*, divided into *slope* hexes (marked by overturned counters) and *crest* hexes (those hexes entirely enclosed by slope hexes). Movement through both slope and crest hexes has the same cost as regular *Rifle & Saber* ridge hexes. A unit lower than a crest hex (all crest hexes are considered to be of the same height) can only fire through *one* crest hexside. Units firing from lower ground to crest hexes, and vice versa, may trace a line of sight *through* units on slope hexes.

2. British infantry, cavalry, and mounted rifles can only fire on Boer units in improved positions or trenches when *adjacent* to the Boer units. This rule does not apply to British artillery or machine gun units.

B. PINNING

1. Any British unit which is within a 5 hex line of sight of a Boer unit in an improved position or trench is considered *pinned*.

2. A pinned unit may move, or, in the case of artillery, limber or unlimber, only on a roll of 1, 2, or 3. A roll of 4, 5, or 6 means the unit stays put. This roll must be carried out each turn that a particular unit is pinned. The die must be rolled separately for each individual unit.

3. A pinned unit may engage in a shock attack only on a roll of 1, 2, or 3. The die must be rolled separately for each unit. This die roll is *in addition* to the roll for movement of pinned units. A shock attack may be voluntarily cancelled if too few units are able to participate (the decision is up to the attacker).

C. BOER SPECIAL CAPABILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS

1. Any Boer unit which is located on a slope hex on the eastern side of a hill (i.e., the side opposite the direction of the British attack) may be replaced at the end of the Boer Movement Phase by an MR unit. Thereafter, the unit moves, attacks, and defends as an MR although it counts toward victory points and morale determination, if destroyed, as an LB. Units may also reverse this procedure.

2. When a Boer force reaches low morale, it goes into an automatic retreat. This means that *all* Boer units must immediately (i.e., in their next Movement Phase) move to the nearest rear slope hex (i.e., hexes on the eastern slope of the hill) not in British zones of control, change into MR, and continue to move at the fastest possible speed off the eastern edge of the map.

3. Boer units may never engage in shock attacks. They may defend against British shock attacks, but only at half strength. The shock value advantage gained by having high morale is not given to a Boer force.

4. Boer LB may fire at full strength up to 4 hexes, half strength up to 8 hexes. Maximum range of Boer LB remains the same (i.e., 12 hexes).

THE SCENARIOS:

In each scenario, hills must be created. It is suggested that overturned counters be used to represent slope hexes. All other terrain features on the mapsheet should be ignored. British units in each scenario must start at least 12 hexes to the west of the nearest Boer unit (exception: see the set-up for the Battle of Elandsplaagte). All Boers begin in IP (exception: see the set-up for the Battle of Stormberg). Boers set up first and the British move first in all scenarios.

1. BATTLE OF ELANDSLAAGTE (21 October 1899)

British: 1,583 infantry (16LB); 1,297 cavalry (13 CY); 18 guns (5 BA); 6 machine guns (1 MG).

Boers: 1,000 infantry (10 LB); 2 guns (½ BA).

The Boers were dug in on one long arm of a horseshoe-shaped ridge. The British attacked frontally with one regiment of infantry and toward the Boer left flank with two regiments. To simulate this, it is recommended that in set-up 6 British LB plus all cavalry and artillery be placed directly west of the Boer position, and the remaining 10 British LB be placed on the hill at least 6 hexes to the west of the Boer left flank. The British infantry on the low ground were pinned for quite a while, but finally rallied for a bayonet attack. Under close assault, both frontally and from their flank, the Boers mounted their ponies, only to be overwhelmed by a cavalry charge as they tried to ride away.

Game Length: 10 Game-Turns

Victory Conditions: The Player with the greatest number of victory points at the end of the game wins; if they are equal, the game is a draw. Victory points are awarded as follows:

(1) Boer Player receives 3 Victory Points for each Game-Turn he has units on the hill.

(2) British Player receives ½ Victory Point for each Boer fire Point destroyed.

(3) Boers receive automatic victory if they have any units on the hill at the end of the game.

2. BATTLE OF BELMONT (23 November 1899)

British: 7,000 infantry (35 LB); 920 cavalry (5 CY); 16 guns (2 BA); 10 machine guns (1 MG).

Boers: 2,500 infantry (13 LB); 3 guns (½ BA).

The Boers were dug in on the Belmont kopjes. They pinned the Brigade of Guards for a while, but a British charge finally forced them to retreat. Most of the Boers got away to fight again at the Battle of Graspan.

Game Length: 10 Game-Turns

Victory Conditions: British must clear all hills of Boers by the end of the game.

3. BATTLE OF GRASPAN (25 November 1899)

British: same as Battle of Belmont

Boers: 2,500 infantry (13 LB); 5 guns (1 BA).

Basically, this was a replay of the Battle of Belmont. This time the Naval Brigade was pinned and ultimately forced the Boers off their kopjes by a bayonet charge. An attempt by British cavalry to pursue the fleeing Boers was unsuccessful.

Game Length: 10 Game-Turns

Victory Conditions: British must clear all hills of Boers by the end of the game.

4. BATTLE OF STORMBERG (10 December 1899)

British: 436 mounted rifles (4 MR); 1,910 infantry (20 LB); 12 guns (3 BA); 4 machine guns (1 MG).

Boers: 1,780 infantry (17 LB); 3 guns (1 BA). [2 LB and 2 Trenches should begin on the small hill.]

The British were trying to stem a Boer invasion of the Cape Colony. They lost their way during a night march, exhausting themselves in the process, and then attempted an abortive assault on the Boer position. The British commander neglected to tell 600 of his men that a retreat was in progress and they were isolated and captured by the Boers!

Game Length: 10 Game-Turns

Victory Conditions: The Player with the greatest number of Victory Points wins; if they are equal, the game is a draw. Victory Points are awarded as follows:

(1) 1 Victory Point for each Enemy Attack Strength Point destroyed.

(2) 1 Victory Point for each crest hex controlled. Control consists of either having a unit in that hex, being the last Player to pass through that hex, or having a friendly unit closer to the hex than any enemy unit, in that order. Any hex the control of which is in dispute is controlled by neither Player.

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