ASL Starter Kit Explained

Daniel F. Savarese

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by Daniel F. Savarese

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Daniel F. Savarese

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A Brief History

Avanced Squad Leader (ASL) is a board wargame that simulates squad-level tactical combat during the Second World War. Its predecessor, Squad Leader, was released in the 1970's and, through expansion modules, gradually became more complex. ASL revamped the entire system in the 1980's at the expense of creating a difficult to digest mega-compendium of rules. The size of the rules and the cost to get started with the system discouraged the uninitiated from trying the new game.

For years, there has been talk of providing a simplified version of ASL to make it easier for new players to grasp the game. The original Squad Leader featured a programmed instruction system, whereby rules were presented in chunks required to play a given scenario. You'd read some rules, play a scenario, read some more, play another, and so on until you'd mastered all of the rules.

In 2004, Multi-Man Publishing (MMP) produced the Advanced Squad Leader Starter Kit (ASLSK) to make it easier for new players to master the game. The ASLSK is a proper subset of ASL. Each game will introduce additional rules from the ASL system. Even though it doesn't explicitly use programmed instruction, each game in the ASLSK series is, in a sense, a programmed instruction unit. The ASLSK harkens back to the days of Squad Leader, even sporting an affordable $24.00 price tag.

A second starter kit, *ASL Starter Kit #2—Guns*, was released in Summer 2005. A third starter kit, adding armored vehicles and subtitlted *Tanks*, will complete the starter kit series. Additional scenarios are published in *Operations Magazine* and there has been talk of publishing historical modules or scenario packs for players without a desire to move up to full ASL, but that's just talk at this stage.

Getting Started with ASLSK#1

The first ASL Starter Kit contains 12 pages of rules, but after you factor in the introduction, glossary, illustrated examples, and back cover, the rules are more like 5 or 6 pages long. Still, they are densely written and can turn off the novice wargamer. If you're new to wargaming, don't read them all. Plan on playing Scenario S1 first and read only the rules you need to start playing it. Also, refer to the Section 2 glossary any time you encounter an abbreviation you do not recognize. Then read the additional rules you need as you play the scenario. You can skip Section 4 entirely because no support weapons are used in Scenario S1. Also, don't use the rules in Section 5 because they aren't critical for Scenario S1. You can use them the second time you play the scenario or in other scenarios.

Suggested order in which to read rules and start playing

1. Skim Section 1 since the terrain modifiers are listed on the quick reference chart. Instead, focus on the counter descriptions in *1.2 Counters*.
2. Read *3.3 Movement Phase*, including *3.31 Defensive First Fire*.
3. Read *3.4 Defensive Fire Phase*.
4. Read *3.5 Advancing Fire Phase*.
5. Set up Scenario S1.
6. Start scenario by moving Germans. The first time you contemplate engaging in defensive first fire, defensive final fire, or advancing fire, read *3.2 Prep Fire Phase and Fire Attacks* and *3.2.1 Effects*.

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[1] https://www.savarese.org/

7. The first time you reach the rout phase and have at least one broken unit, read *3.6 Rout Phase*
8. When you reach the advance phase, read *3.7 Advance Phase*.
9. The first time you think you need to advance into an enemy occupied hex, read *3.8 Close Combat Phase*.
10. When you reach the end of a player turn, read *3.9 Turn record chart*.
11. When you reach the start of the first American player turn, read *3.1 Rally Phase*.

After you've played Scenario S1, you can read sections 4 and 5 on support weapons, experience level rating, and unit distinctions. Also make sure to read *1.2.4 Support Weapons (SW)*. Then play Scenario S2, where you can apply those final rules. The ASL Starter Kit rules are a subset of ASL rules. Everything you learn in the ASLSK, you can transfer to ASL.

Squad-level tactical combat presents a number of challenges and contradictions you'll become comfortable with over time. Maneuver, concentration of fire, and dispersal of units are all important and at odds with each other. You have to concentrate units under a leader to gain a movement bonus that facilitates maneuver or to gain a firing bonus to make concentrated fire more effective. Yet you need to disperse your units to prevent enemy fire from affecting multiple units with one attack. You want to move quickly to maneuver, but you need to move slowly and carefully (assault movement) to avoid FFNAM and FFMO modifiers when fired upon. Coping with all of these variables and more is what makes ASL so engaging to so many players.

Getting Started with ASLSK#2

The second ASL Starter Kit contains 20 pages of rules, but only 8 of the pages contain new material. The ASLSK#2 rules are the same as the rules from the first kit, but with additions covering new terrain (hills and orchard roads), multilevel line of sight, new support weapons, and ordnance. Additions and corrections to the rules from the first kit are highlighted in a salmon color. After you factor in the two pages of ordnance notes, new glossary entries, and examples, there are only about 4½ pages of new rules to read.

Suggested order in which to read rules and start playing

1. The first two scenarios don't require ordnance. Therefore, if you've already absorbed the ASLSK#1 rules, read only the orchard road and hills terrain rules. Also, read the highlighted additions to *3.2.1 Line of Sight (LOS)*. Then play scenarios S9 and S10.
2. Scenario S11 introduces light anti-tank weapon (LATW) and light mortars. Instead of tackling both weapons systems at once, download Scenario S29—which includes bazookas, but no mortars—from MMP's Web site and play it before moving on to S11. First, read sections *4.4, 4.4.1, and 4.4.2* to learn about LATW.
3. Next, read *3.2.4 To Hit Process* and examine the to hit chart and dice roll modifiers on the player aid card.
4. Finally, read sections *6.0 and 6.1*, primarily to understand critical hits, which LATW are capable of producing
5. Play Scenario S29.
6. To prepare for Scenario S11, read section *4.5* on light mortars.
7. Next, read sections *6.2, 6.9, 6.10, 6.11, and 6.12* followed by *1.2.5 Smoke*, because it restates the hindrance effects of white phosphorus—which the light mortar in S11 is capable of firing—from *6.2*. Even though light mortars aren't Guns, they can use different ammunition types and employ Target Acquisition, requiring one to read a chunk of Gun rules.
8. Play Scenario S11.
9. Now read all the remaining Gun rules: sections *1.2.6 and 6.3–6.8*
10. Play Scenario S12 and the rest of the ASLSK#2 scenarios. Don't forget that shaped charge weapons (e.g., BAZ and PSK) can target Guns!

ASL Starter Kit #1 Unofficial Errata

Daniel F. Savarese

Last Updated: 2005-08-27

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ASL Starter Kit #1 Clarifications and Unofficial Errata

Despite the excellent job MMP did in preparing ASLSK#1, there are a few potential instances of confusion that arise from either omission or form of presentation. References to *ASLRB* in these clarifications refer to sections in the *ASL Rule Book*. Just because a rule exists in the ASLRB that could be applied in ASLSK does not mean it was unintentionally omitted from the ASLSK (e.g., voluntary breaking [4]). It seems reasonable, however, to resolve the few ASLSK rule ambiguities by referring to the ASLRB (e.g., fire group modifiers).

Note

I started maintaining this errata list on October 10, 2004. As of December 10, 2004, Multi-Man Publishing posted an official ASLSK errata list which contains a subset of these items. The rule book included with ASLSK#2 incorporates the official errata.

Counter Exhaustion (CX)

- CX is not defined in the glossary. CX stands for Counter Exhaustion (see *ASLRB A4.51*).
- A CX counter is removed at the next movement phase of the unit's player, not the opponent's movement phase. Also, a CX counter is removed from a unit when it breaks (see *ASLRB A4.51*).
- CX units do not add a DRM for morale checks or pin task checks. *ASLRB A4.51* makes it clear that CX units add one to labor tasks and attacks. Morale checks and pin task checks are not labor tasks or attacks.
- The quick reference data card states that there is a -1 DRM for attacks against CX units. That modifier applies only to close combat (CC) attacks (see Section 3.3 discussion of CX status effects).

Final Fire and Multiple ROF

During the Defensive Fire Phase:

> Any weapon with a Multiple ROF marked with a First Fire counter is limited to only one additional attack during Final Fire and only vs adjacent or same-hex targets.
>
> *—ASLRB A8.41 MULTIPLE ROF*

In other words, a support weapon is not entitled to multiple ROF during the Defensive Fire Phase if it is marked with a First Fire counter. If the weapon is not marked, even if it is currently maintaining ROF, it may continue to perform attacks until its ROF is exhausted.

Fire Group (FG) Modifiers

Fire groups are subject to the worst penalty incurred by any unit in the fire group (see *ASLRB A7.52*). Therefore, if you have a fire group with one unit that is CX, then the entire fire group is subjected to a +1 modifier when firing.

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[1] https://www.savarese.org/

Leader Breaking and Pin Task Check (PTC)

The wording in Section 3.2.1 about performing a PTC for Good Order units when a leader breaks is ambiguous. Perform a PTC only for units that are in Good Order after attack resolution (see *ASLRB A7.8*). Units that are broken after attack resolution do not perform a PTC if their leader failed his morale check.

Desperation Morale

Broken units are subject to desperation morale immediately when a Known Enemy unit moves adjacent to them, regardless of whether or not the enemy unit ends the movement phase adjacent to the broken units (see *ASLRB A10.62*). This is actually indicated at the end of Section 3.2.1, but it may not be entirely clear to a new player that the effect is immediate and not contigent on adjacency that results from termination of movement.

MMC Self-Rally

The single MMC self-rally attempt allowed to the attacking player during the rally phase must be the first MMC rally attempt of that phase (see *ASLRB A18.11*). This is alluded to in the leader creation table, but is not stated explicitly in the ASLSK rules. It is, however, a byproduct of the ASLSK sequence of play. Self-rallies (3.1e) should be performed before unit rallies (3.1f).

Residual Firepower

- If you don't read the illustrated examples, you may not know which counters you're supposed to use to designate residual firepower. Use the counters that look like the one pictured to the right.
- Machine guns maintaining multiple rate of fire (ROF) do not leave residual firepower (see *ASLRB A8.23*). You can choose to not maintain multiple ROF, even if you qualify for it, in which case you can leave residual firepower. Otherwise, if you maintain multiple ROF, you do not include the firepower of the machine gun in the residual firepower calculation.
- Residual firepower left in a location is reduced by an IFT column shift to the left for every positive DRM—resulting from effects outside of the target hex—in effect during the attack that created the residual firepower (see *ASLRB A8.26*). Even though this rule is omitted from the ASLSK, you should probably use it. Otherwise, residual firepower may be stronger than it should be. For example, a +1 orchard LOS hindrance should cause residual firepower to shift one column to the left. Any terrain effects in the target hex are applied as a DRM when a residual firepower attack is resolved. Negative modifiers do not result in right column shifts.

Pinning

- A pinned unit's firepower is halved in close combat when it is attacking, but not when it is defending (see *ASLRB A7.8*). When defending in close combat, use its full firepower.
- It's easy to miss, but you should remove Pin counters at the end of the close combat phase. This is stated at the end of *3.8 Close Combat Phase*.
- Pinned leaders cannot rout with broken units (see *ASLRB A10.711*). In full ASL, they may break voluntarily (see *ASLRB A10.41*), allowing them to rout. Voluntary breaking is purposely omitted from the ASLSK rules, but you may want to use it as a house rule.
- Broken units can become pinned while routing as a result of interdiction (see *ASLRB A7.8*), preventing them from further routing movement.

Line of Sight Hindrance

What to do when your LOS goes along a hexside with a hindrance in at least one adjacent hex:

Whenever a LOS crosses (or goes along the shared hexside of) two hexes that have the same range to the firer, however, only the LOS Hindrance of the hex with the highest applicable LOS Hindrance DRM is counted.

—ASLRB A6.7 LOS HINDRANCE

Building Control

Some scenarios require that you gain control of buildings. The ASLSK rules define building control in the glossary entry for *Control*. A building is controlled by the last side to have an unbroken unit in the building while no enemy units occupy the same building (see *ASLRB A26.12*).

Exiting the Mapboard

Some scenarios require that you exit the mapboard in order to meet victory conditions. The cost of moving off the mapboard is as though a unit is "… entering an imaginary off-board hex which is the mirror image of the one [it] currently [occupies]" (see *ASLRB A2.6*).

Random Selection

The ASLSK#1 rules do not specify how to randomly determine the squads eliminated by a #KIA result (it's up to the players to decide the method). They also do not explain how to deal with situations where a DR for a fire group may affect any one of multiple support weapons. For example, if you roll a 12 for a fire group attacking with an LMG and an MMG, which weapon suffers a breakdown? Given that this is an area where ASLSK can be said to use a different rule than ASL, you may wish to use the ASL rules *A.9 Random Selection* and *A9.71 Multiple MG Malfunction*. Roll a die for each unit or MG that may be affected by a result and apply the result to the unit with the highest die roll. In the case of a tie, all units with that die roll are affected. Therefore, it is possible for a 1KIA result to eliminate more than one squad (see *ASLRB A7.301*) or for a breakdown to affect multiple machine guns.

ASL Starter Kit #2 Unofficial Errata

Daniel F. Savarese

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ASL Starter Kit #2 Clarifications and Unofficial Errata

Even though it corrects much of the errata from ASLSK#1, ASLSK#2 contains a couple of regressions and typos in addition to some genuine errata of its own.

Road Bonus

In *1.1.1 Terrain Types*, the description of *Roads* should read "… Infantry that crosses only roads …" (the sentence dropped a couple of words that appeared in ASLSK#1). As long as throughout your entire movement you cross from road hex to road hex via hexsides crossed by the same road, you gain a 1 MF bonus.

Smoke

Smoke adds an extra MF/MP to the entry cost of a SMOKE Location only during the Movement and Route Phases. It does not affect advance during the Advance Phase[2] (see *ASLRB A24.7*).

LOS Obstacles

> … an intervening same-level obstacle never blocks the LOS of same-level units.
>
> *—ASLRB 23.2 BUILDINGS*

Obstacles at the same level or lower than both the firer and the target do not block line of sight. For example, a level 1 building on level 0 open ground does not block the line of sight between a firer and target on level 1 hills. The ASLSK line of sight rules are simplified and appear to treat all buildings as level 1 obstacles.

Pinned Effects

A pinned unit suffers a +2 penalty to its to To Hit DR when firing Ordnance (see *ASLRB A7.81*). This penalty is listed in the QRDC but I cannot find it in the rule book.

Quick Reference Data Chart (QRDC) and Gun Charts

- The QRDC incorrectly states in the IFT DRM table that fire by a CX unit conveys a -1 DRM. The DRM should be +1.
- Item 17 in the *To Hit Dice Roll Modifiers* list from the gun charts swapped the modifiers for small and large targets. The modifier for small targets should be +1 and the modifier for large targets should be -1 (see *ASLRB C2.271*).

Target Type TEM DRMs

In *3.2.4 To Hit Process* under *Effects*, the text contradicts the earlier description of TEM DRMs against the Infantry Target Type (probably the result of a typo where *TH DR* should have read *IFT DR*). The original description is

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[1] https://www.savarese.org/

[2] In ASLSK#1 it wasn't possible for smoke to last beyond the movement phase, so MMP probably overlooked this discrepancy when updating the rules to reflect ASLSK#2 additions. Nevertheless, the omission may have been intentional. Therefore, as with all unofficial errata and clarifications, be sure to verify the rule with the tournament director if playing in a tournament.

correct. The Infantry Target Type applies TEM to the TH DR and not the Effects DR on the IFT (see *ASLRB C3.32, C3.33, C3.331, and C6.8*).

Mortars

A mortar cannot be fired from the inside of a building (see *ASLRB B23.423*). In full ASL, mortars can be fired from a rooftop.

Loss of Target Acquisition

It may not be clear from the rule book, but target acquisition is lost when a unit manning a Gun engages in close combat because that constitues firing its inherent FP. As additional clarification, a Gun may interdict the same target without losing acquisition, but use in close combat or interdiction against a different target results in acquisition loss (see *ASLRB C6.5*). That is in contrast to the manning unit, which will cause acquisition loss when engaging in close combat or interdicting any target.

Inherent FP Forfeiture

Per *ASLRB A7.353*, forefeiture of inherent FP as a result of firing a Gun or SW does not prevent a unit from using inherent FP in Final Fire against adjacent units or Subsequent First Fire (including Final Protective Fire). In such instances, the normal rule of halving inherent FP applies, as does the negation of inherent FP when using maximum SW/Gun capability during those attacks.

ASLSK Basic Infantry Tactics

Daniel F. Savarese

Last Updated: 2005-03-04

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Basic Infantry Tactics

The original Squad Leader rule book contained a section at the end with a discussion of basic tactics to apply in the game. The ASL Starter Kit does not contain such a section, which can leave the novice ASLer a bit lost as to how to play the game, even after having learned the rules. Although the tactics you apply will, in general, be specific to the situation you encounter in a scenario, there are some general principles a new player can follow before mastering the tactical nuances of ASL.

Disperse Squads, but Stack for Firepower and Leader DRM

I mentioned previously the challenge of coping with the conflicting aspects of concentrating fire and dispersing units. In general, it is better to disperse your squads than to keep them stacked. The same is true in real life. Infantry concentrated densely in a single location is more vulnerable to enemy fire than infantry spread out across a broad area. When you stack your MMCs, a successful attack on their position can break or eliminate all of the squads. When unstacked, at most one squad is vulnerable (in most situations). Dispersing your units makes it more difficult for the enemy to choose which targets to fire on (because he cannot fire on all of them) and minimizes the damage of any one attack.

It is true that MMCs dispersed into multi-hex fire groups will lose the DRM of the leader originally stacked with them. It also is true that units that break without a leader present may not have a chance to rally the next turn. Still, a leader stacked with MMCs may also break during the attack that breaks the MMCs. Furthermore, the attacking player may self-rally one MMC during the rally phase, even if it doesn't have self-rally capability.

A mistake new players sometimes make is to think they can move leaders around to rally all of their broken units. What usually happens is that their dispersed broken units remain broken for the entire duration of a scenario. The key is not necessarily to keep MMCs stacked with leaders, but to keep leaders close to MMCs (see leader positioning discussion). Leader DRMs can be sufficiently advantageous to firing, that you should stack MMCs into single-hex fire groups with a leader if you need the DRM. In general, there is little benefit—other than immunity to cowering—to stack with leaders that have a zero or positive DRM. Finally, you should stack MMCs with leaders who have a higher morale than the MMCs. Otherwise, the leader is just as likely to break as the MMCs and won't be especially helpful during the rally phase.

The first turn a unit is broken, it will probably not rally succesfully because of the desperation morale penalty. Therefore, it's not that detrimental to spend a turn moving a leader to a broken unit; but if it should come to that, it's more efficient if several broken units are stacked together so they all can be rallied at once. As mentioned later, it's more efficient to rout units to leaders than to move leaders to broken units.

Summary

1. Disperse MMCs across multiple hexes when possible.
2. Stack MMCs when you need the firepower and leader DRM.
3. Avoid stacking with leaders with zero or positive DRMs; use those leaders for rallying.

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[1] https://www.savarese.org/

Position Leaders Along Rout Routes

Don't stack your leaders with your MMCs unless you get a good firing DRM. Instead, position your leaders in locations where units can rout to them should they break. The tradeoff is that you lose the firing DRM and immunity to cowering. Furthermore, if your broken units can't rout to a leader, you may lose two player turns moving your leader to the units to rally them. A stacked leader may break during an attack, lowering the chances to rally accompanying units the next rally phase because a leader self-rally is required first. Deciding when to stack leaders and when to use them strictly for rallying routed units can be quite a challenge.

Don't Move in Stacks

Even though there are advantages to keeping MMCs stacked with leaders, you shouldn't move your MMCs in stacks (at least not in open ground) unless you absolutely need that leader movement bonus. By moving MMCs individually, you prevent an entire stack from falling victim to a successful full strength defensive first fire attack. Also, you can confuse your opponent by making feints with individual units, drawing defensive first fire for the units you move first, and allowing your later units to move without fear of defensive first fire. Therefore, try to move units individually (moving your leaders last), but end movement in a fire group stacked with a leader. By moving your leaders last, you have the opportunity to move them to units that break during the movement phase or move them to locations where broken units will rout during the rout phase.

Skulk

Skulking is a gamey tactic that—given the game's time scale—bears little foundation in reality. It is so commonly used, you'll be at a disadvantage if you don't use it yourself. It involves moving a unit one hex—out of the enemy line of sight—during the movement phase, only to move it back to its original position during the advance phase. Players that are primarily defending will use this tactic to avoid defensive fire. Players that are primarily attacking—attempting to take enemy held ground—cannot afford to skulk because it denies them the ability to prep fire.

Take Cover

It should be readily apparent from the terrain effects modifiers that you should take cover when possible, positioning units inside buildings and woods. Also, don't forget about smoke placement during the movement phase.

Disperse or Stack According to the Scenario

I've offered two points of view about dispersal versus stacking. The fact of the matter is that how you arrange your units will depend on the scenario. The number of squads and leaders available combined with the terrain and victory conditions dictate your options. For example, Scenario S2 forces you to spread out your squads in multi-hex fire groups (see Scenario S2 discussion). When you have limited cover, you may tend to stack your squads to share cover. When you have ample cover, you may tend to disperse your units to minimize the effects of attacks on a location.

Break Enemy Positions Before Advancing

Your squads will break. Get used to it. But so will your opponent's squads. The key to advancing on enemy positions is to concentrate your fire to break the enemy units before advancing. Broken units cannot fire upon you, allowing you to move next to them and force them to rout.

You usually need at least two fire groups to take a position held by a single enemy fire group. One fire group fires on the position during the prep fire phase, covering the later advance of the second fire group during the movement phase. In theory, the prep fire should break all of the enemy units, but in practice only some of them will break. During the movement phase, you can gauge whether you can survive any defensive fire from the position before advancing on it. Ideally, you will have a third fire group draw defensive first fire from the position (or contribute additional covering prep fire) before advancing on it with your second fire group. That way your advance will be

subject only to a half-firepower subsequent fire attack (possibly doubled back to normal firepower at point blank range). After advancing next to the position, you can fire upon it during the advancing fire phase (half-firepower, doubled back to normal firepower at point blank range) to clean up any remaining Good Order units.

Although you can approach a position that isn't completely broken, it is safest to break the entire position with prep fire before moving adjacent to it. The more fire groups that prep fire to soften a position, the better. At the minimum, make sure you've induced any remaining Good Order units to perform defensive first fire before closing in on them. You don't need many units to perform the actual advance and you want to minimize your losses if defensive fire proves more successful than anticipated. After you've moved adjacent to the position during the movement phase, the broken enemy units will have to rout during the rout phase, allowing you to advance into the position during the advance phase.

The main concept to retain is that you shouldn't try to do everything with one fire group. You need to coordinate your fire groups, utilizing each during different phases of a turn to achieve your objectives. Think ahead and plan which fire groups will provide covering fire during the prep fire phase, which will move during the movement phase, which will fire during the advancing fire phase, and so on. Even though die rolls will often ruin your plans, you'll be better able to adjust if you have a coherent plan of attack.

Remember, the prep fire phase is your chance to minimize the effects of defensive fire so you can maneuver your units during the movement phase. The advancing fire phase is your chance to finish breaking a position before moving into it during the advance phase. If you don't break the position during the advancing fire phase, you want to make sure your close combat odds are good. Therefore, don't advance on an enemy position with a fire group that has a poor chance of surviving close combat. You want to avoid close combat when you can, but sometimes it's the only way to take a position.
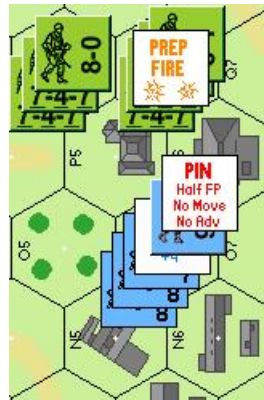
Example of Taking an Enemy Position

The following example illustrates how to take an enemy position using the basic tactic of breaking the position before advancing. It is based on a real playing of Scenario S1.
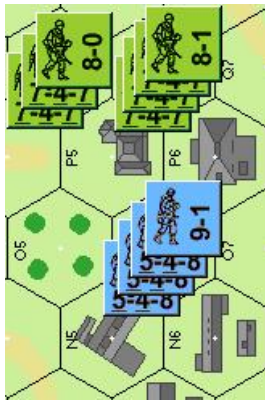
**Initial Position**   **Prep Fire**

Initial Position

The initial position is the result of the American player trying to avoid German firing lanes. The American is trying to retake hexes N5 and N6. Hex N5 actually contains a German fire group which is omitted from the example to reduce clutter. American reinforcements enter from the north end of the map. Movement along the east and west roads surrounding the buildings expose them to enemy fire in the open. Therefore, the American player chooses to crack the German defenses from the north, where he can use the cover of buildings to make his approach.

Prep Fire

During the Prep Fire Phase, the American player fires on the enemy position using his strongest fire group under the command of a leader with a -1 DRM, using a total of 21 fire points. The defender is in a stone building, resulting in a total DRM of +2 (i.e., -1 leader bonus +3 stone building penalty). The American rolls a 6, modified to 8, yielding a 2MC result in the 20 FP column of the IFT.

The German leader passes his morale check by the bare minimum, having rolled a 7 + 2, equaling his morale of 9. Therefore he becomes pinned and cannot contribute his DRM to the MMC morale checks. The rest of the units break, all failing their morale checks and thereby suffering desperation morale. Only one desperation morale counter is shown to reduce clutter.

Movement and Advancing Fire
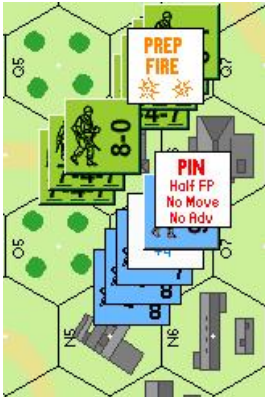

Movement and Advancing Fire

Now that the enemy has broken, it is safe for the backup fire group to approach the position during the movement phase. The squads move into the stone building in hex P5 using assault movement and survive defensive fire from the units in hex N5 (not depicted).

Having moved next to the enemy position, the squads fire on the enemy during the advancing fire phase. Their fire power is halved per the rules for advancing fire, but it is doubled for point blank range, yielding 14 points + 2 extra points of assault fire, for a total of 16 FP. Firing on the 16 FP column of the IFT with a +3 DRM, the American player rolls a 7 producing an adjusted value of 10 and a normal morale check result. All but one of the units pass their morale checks. The unit that fails suffers casualty reduction and is replaced by a broken 2-4-8 half-squad with a broken morale of 7.
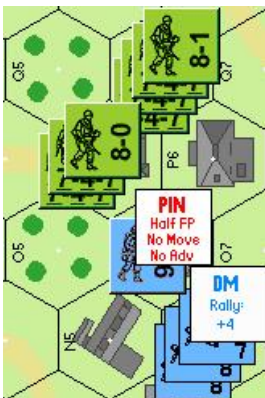
Rout   **Advance and Close Combat**
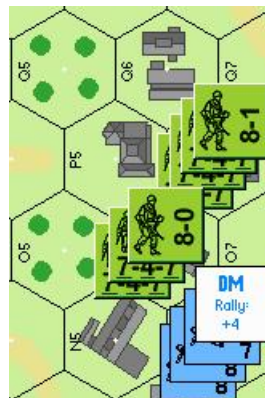
Rout

During the rout phase, the broken German units rout away from the adjacent American units. The German leader is pinned and therefore cannot choose to rout with the broken units (exception: voluntary breaking, an ASL rule omitted from the ASLSK).

Advance and Close Combat

With but one pinned leader left in the enemy position, the Americans advance on it, engage in close combat and eliminate the leader. The position is now taken, setting up an assault on hexes N5 and N6 during the next turn.

Keep Moving

For those situations where you need to take control of or cross enemy held territory, keep moving. Don't stall or time will run out before you satisfy your victory conditions. Staying mobile does not mean you should run haphazardly into a nest of machine guns. Nevertheless, you should not be paralyzed from fear of moving.

Movement does not always put you in danger because your opponent must decide whether or not to fire on a unit that crosses his line of sight. If your opponent is indecisive, he may try to save his defensive fire for the perfect opportunity which never arises, allowing your units to move unscathed. Continual movement toward your objectives denies your opponent the opportunity to make perfect defensive firing decisions. Still, you will require some prep fire and feinting[2] to facilitate movement. Also, don't move in stacks.

Pre-plot Lines of Sight

The defensive countertactic to mobility is to pre-plot lines of sight before the scenario starts. If you pre-establish your kill zones, you won't have to think twice about whether you have a clear shot. You still have to decide whether it is worth firing at a particular unit when it crosses your LOS.

Miscellaneous Tips

- When defending, maximize your field of fire. Organize your fire groups to have converging fields of fire so they can cover each other.
- If you're going to move only one hex, use assault movement to negate the FFNAM penalty.
- Disrupt multi-hex fire groups by attacking their centers.
- When attacking a well-defended line, isolate the weakest point of the line from reinforcement by establishing fire lanes. Use prep fire to weaken the positions before moving in.

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[2]Half-squads are useful for feinting, but it's a gamey tactic to move half-squads to draw fire. Your opponent may not be fooled so easily. Be prepared to sacrifice a full squad for the greater good.

ASL Starter Kit Scenario S2 Explained

Daniel F. Savarese

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Scenario S2 Analysis

Learning the rules to a war game can be a difficult task, even for the most experienced player. For a novice wargamer, the more difficult task is to understand how a simulation model translates into viable strategies and tactics. Knowing the rules that govern the model is not sufficient to apply them effectively. In particular, Advanced Squad Leader tactics can be difficult to grasp because the combat model is so different from the operational and strategic simulations to which many players are accustomed. For example, zones of control (ZOC) and terrain play an important part of structuring defenses in operational and strategic simulations. In a 20th century tactical combat simulation, where the ZOC modeling artifact does not apply, covering approaches with multiple fields of fire is as critical to a good defense as choosing when to fire on an advancing attacker.

I will attempt to provide some guidance to the player who is new to tactical simulations by analyzing ASLSK Scenario S2. I provide merely an overview of some of the factors you should consider in devising your strategy for the scenario. I do not advocate a single approach to playing the scenario. The German strategy will depend on the initial Russian setup, but there are several Russian strategies and German counterstrategies that can be successful. Also, the cast of the die can ruin the best laid plans, be it through support weapon breakdowns or early arrival of enemy reinforcements. In fact, the uncertainty introduced by the dice requires you to devise contingency plans.

Scenario Summary

War of the Rats—or *Rattenkrieg*—depicts a snapshot of the block to block fighting that made the battle for Stalingrad infamous. Players of the original *Squad Leader* may see a similarity to the classic scenario, *The Guards Counterattack*. The Germans must take the offensive and capture three buildings before the end of the scenario, while the Russians must defend their ground and prevent the Germans from achieving their objectives. Figure 1 shows the mapboard for the scenario.

Victory Conditions and Scenario Length

The first thing you should do when preparing to play a scenario is read the victory conditions. It doesn't matter how many of your opponent's squads you break or destroy if you don't achieve the objectives specified by a scenario. ASL is a game. Therefore, in the interest of winning a scenario, you may engage in unrealistic behavior for the sake of satisfying a victory condition. For example, in the last turn of a scenario you may charge recklessly across a street to engage in close combat simply because you've run out of time and it's your last chance to take an objective before the game ends. Don't let that bother you. In a game, the victory conditions take precedence and the length of the scenario constrains your ability to achieve them.

Scenario S2 requires the German player to take control of the three buildings circled in red (see Figure 1) in order to win. If the German player fails to take control of all three buildings, the Russian player wins. In planning his defenses, the Russian player should keep in mind that he can give up ground—up to two buildings—and still win the game. The German player cannot spend too much time softening up Russian positions from a distance. There are only six turns in which he can attain victory.

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[1] https://www.savarese.org/

Force Composition

This scenario introduces the ASLSK player to support weapons for the first time, featuring machine guns, a flamethrower, and two demolition charges. Machine guns are effective at long ranges, but flamethrowers require you to be within one or two hexes of a target and demolition charges have to be placed from a location adjacent to the target. In addition, flamethrowers do not suffer from terrain effects. Therefore, the German flamethrower and demolition charge will be used as assault weapons. The Russian forces will want to neutralize the squads carrying them before the weapons can be used.

The Russian forces contain as many conscript 4-2-6 squads as 1st line 4-4-7 squads. The conscript squads will only be effective at close range and are subject to more extreme cowering effects. Therefore, the 1st line units should man the machine guns at a distance and the conscripts should fight closer in. The conscripts—with a morale of 6—will break early and you'll need to position leaders appropriately to rally them.

Russian reinforcements enter on a randomly determined turn. These reinforcements are capable of assault fire and are commanded by a 9-2 leader. These are the units that will take back lost territory from the Germans. If they enter early, they can buttress the areas held by the conscript squads because of their short range. The leader's -2 bonus will be crucial to making successful attacks. Plan on what to do if the reinforcements never arrive because there is a chance they won't ever arrive.

The German has four elite units capable of assault fire and seven first line units with a range of six, two more than the elite units' range. Therefore, the elite units should carry the flamethrower and demolition charges while the first line units man the light machine guns. The elite units will move in and break enemy positions with assault fire and support weapons after the first line units have softened them with prep fire.

Special Rules

German elite units have their smoke exponent increased, making them more effective at placing smoke to cover an advance. Don't forget about this capability.

The Map

Figure 1. Scenario S2 Tactical Options

Objective buildings are circled in red. Areas the Russian player should focus on when setting up his defenses are circled in brown. Areas the German player should study when preparing his assault are circled in blue.

The Defense

The Russian player sets up first and faces quite a challenge. As the Russian, you have barely enough units to defend a broad swath of territory. Defense in depth requires sacrificing a building from the start. An alternative to defense in depth is to set up a collapsing defense, where you give up ground and retreat to a strong point. That approach should be designed as a delaying action until reinforcements arrive.

Open space is your friend and can be used for defense. Force the enemy to move in open ground. If you keep buildings and other cover between your forces and the enemy, you provide an easy means for your opponent to advance on you unchallenged. This scenario is one where spreading out your forces will be rewarded. By doing so, you make it difficult for several of your squads to be cut down at once. Also, you restrict your opponent's ability to maneuver.

There are several critical blind spots on the map. Preplot your lines of sight (LOS) before setting up. You won't be able to do so during the game[2], so make sure you know which locations your squads can fire on.

The three circled clusters of buildings forming a northern perimeter (H6, J5, and C5) are a useful defensive barrier. By setting up squads in these clusters, the German cannot advance on you without entering open ground and becoming vulnerable to defensive fire with FFMO and FFNAM modifiers. Make sure you form continuous fire groups so that your defensive fire will be effective. You won't be able to stop the German from making progress, but you can slow him down. Consider placing a reserve squad with a machine gun somewhere it can halt a breakthrough. The circled area containing hex M9 is a possibility for curtailing a breakthrough on your right flank, giving you a clear field of fire on the road that must be crossed to move from objective building O6 to objective building L6. Should the left flank break, the squad can reposition to protect it.

Short range units will get picked off from a distance unless they're positioned close enough to fire back. There's no use keeping them out of the action. Put those conscripts somewhere they can use their full firepower. The Russians have the disadvantage of setting up first, enabling the Germans to compensate.

The Attack

The German elite units have a high morale, assault fire capability, and an increased smoke exponent. They are the natural choice for assaulting Russian emplacements. If the Russian tries to defend the entire stretch, he will be most vulnerable at the flanks, where he can't mass a lot of firepower. That is where the elite units will be most effective. The Russian, however, has the potential to mass firepower on your center, especially with a machine gun supported fire group along hex grain E8-H6. Therefore, it may be necessary to deploy elite assault units in your center. Break up multi-hex fire groups by disrupting their centers.

You don't have enough elite units to assault from everywhere at once. Choose at most two points where you'll make your push. Possible assault vectors are indicated by arrows in Figure 1. Which way you choose to push will depend on the Russian initial deployment.

Your flamethrower can be used at two hex range at half firepower, so make sure to use it. Don't place it somewhere that starts out of range of enemy targets. Don't forget about the increased smoke exponent for your elite units. Place smoke before making a run at placing a demolition charge. Try to place a charge while threatening to do the same with another squad to confuse your opponent. If he is lured into firing on the first squad, the second squad will have a better chance. Always try to draw defensive fire before commencing to move in for the kill with assaulting units.

Don't be timid. You have an advantage as long as those Russian reinforcements do not arrive. Use that advantage to its fullest.

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[2]If you declare a fire attempt and don't have LOS, you lose the firing opportunity but still have to mark your unit as having fired.