

Banzai!!

The Newsletter of the Austin ASL Club

Issue #1

December 1995

This newsletter is FREE. Don't let anyone charge you for it.

From the Editor's Desk

Matt Shostak

This is the first in what we hope will be a long series of newsletters for the Austin ASL Club. Its purpose is to promote the play of ASL in the central Texas area. With that in mind, we hope to have regular features in this forum on club news, upcoming events, tactical tips, scenario analysis, and anything else we can think of that seems appropriate. There is no publishing schedule; we will put this rag out whenever we feel like it. If you would like to see something in these pages, please contact me directly. Anyone who has a love for ASL and the inclination to write useful articles on the subject is welcome to submit his work for publication. We want to see ASL grow and flourish in the central Texas area, and hope that this humble effort will help. If you are interested in getting involved with our club, please contact me at 280-8414 or Mike Seningen at 892-7169.

Club Notes

Club meetings do not follow a rigid schedule, although our goal is to have a meeting roughly every month or so. Club members volunteer to host meetings, so the location varies. The agenda for each meeting is simple: play ASL. Our last gathering was during the summer, and work schedules have since gotten in the way. For the next meeting we will be playing ASL on Saturday, Dec. 16, from 10am to 6pm and again on Sunday, Dec. 17, 10am to 6pm. Club members are encouraged to come to either or both meetings. To keep in touch about club meetings, call Matt (280-8414) or Mike (892-7169).

Third Annual Austin ASL Tournament Another Success

David Hailey

From sea evacuations to desert night actions to plain old 'Guard's Counterattack', the 3rd Annual Austin Team Tournament had it all. We moved from the Austin Sheraton to the Georgetown Recreation Center, but all participants agreed the accommodations were great! The returning champs (Mike Seningen and Jack O'Quin) lost team member Matt Shostak, but with steady consistent play, eeked out a second victory. My team (Tom Lavan, Todd Hively, and I) had a big lead after two days, but collapsed on the final day going 1-4. Steve Budeigh won the Long Distance Award, traveling from Oklahoma City. For his efforts he received a copy of KGPI. The play for the individual crown was very competitive. No one went undefeated this year. Mike Seningen and I were the night owls, and started a game of 'The Mailed Fist' late Saturday night that could've turned out to be the Championship match. At around 3:00 we decided to rest. Sunday morning Russell Mueller arrived. In order for my game with Mike to mean anything I'd have to beat Russell. It didn't happen. I thought I was in good shape until the last turn when the Americans swarmed. I had a final hope, but it was a 2MC vs. a 447. Russell finished 4-1 and received the 10-3 award, a mighty fine trophy. Everyone loved the trophies, American paratroopers that stand about a foot high. Thanks again to Mike Seningen for providing

such wonderful trophies. As the final individual game was wrapping up, Jack O'Quin was holding off Glen Gray's Americans in 'The Last of Their Strength' to secure the team trophy. Otherwise Russell's team (Russell, Glen, and Brian White) would have had the edge. Another exciting tournament came to a close. I think everyone had a great time. Kirk Woller and Bob Purnell also made an appearance and played a few games, but had other commitments. I think next year we'll plan on having the tournament sometime in June. Spread the word. It would be great to see more ASLers at the 4th tourney.

Tactical Tips

Top Ten Things to do with a Half Squad

Mike Seningen

10. Sniper Bait: Protect those all-important leaders by placing a half squad or two nearby, preferably in lower TEM, to attract sniper attacks.
9. Pack Mules: Double your PC allotment by using two half squads - great for mortars and other high PP manhandling.
8. Scouts: Sure ASL doesn't have scouts anymore, but a half squad makes a good substitute. They search as well as a squad, and they are better for stripping concealment in the movement phase.
7. Mortar fire teams: Some might argue using a real squad, but when you fire inherent you lose ACQ.
6. Spotters: Use that other half squad to spot for his mortar buddies. Don't waste a precious leader calling in shells.
5. DCs and Flamethrowers: These SWs demand a lot of attention and firepower - why subject a whole squad for target practice? Besides, after the first half squad gets toasted, you have another who can pick up the SW (but not in the same phase - A4.4).
4. LATW firers: With the exception of the PF (where a -1 availability DRM applies), half squads make great LATW platforms. You can cover more territory, potentially HIP more units, and force your opponent to worry about multiple threats.
3. Delay Tactics: In a lot of defensive situations, the game is won not on how much damage you do but how much time you milk off the clock. Utilizing half squads doubles the number of threats, increases the number of "shells" for your shell game, and totally frustrates cautious players.
2. Guarding prisoners: You often don't want to waste a full squad on this duty, and you get a chance to freely deploy.
1. (HTH) CC: Nothing is more devastating than to wipe out an enemy's stack of units in CC with a lone half squad. Sure, most of the time you'll be facing 1-4 odds and your prospects for survival are slim to none, but throw in some HTH modifiers, and/or Japanese modifiers and even the most powerful enemy stacks quake in their boots when they hear the grenades go off and see bayonets glistening in the moonlight.

(The following article first appeared in the Internet ASL Digest, volume 3 number 10. It is reprinted here because I feel like it. When it was written the Internet ASL record had it 11-9 in favor of the Germans. The latest record (95.02) has it 25-16 in favor of the Germans. - ed.)

Scenario Analysis: Dreil Team (Scenario A37)

Matt Shostak

Since my favorite type of article to read in the various ASL publications is the scenario analysis, most notably the kind done by the esteemed Mark Nixon, I thought I might try my hand at it. While I would never claim to be an authority on ASL, I thought I might still be able to provide some valuable insights to an exciting scenario. After all, there are too many scenarios available for Mr. Nixon to cover all by himself. If you disagree with any of this analysis, notice any glaring errors, or have any comments whatsoever, I would be happy to discuss it with you. It seems I'm always learning about this game.

I chose Dreil Team (Scenario A37) because it is small and manageable, and quite exciting. As of this writing, the internet record has it 11-9 in favor of the Germans, which suggests that it's fairly balanced. The attraction is that it is a tight little tournament style scenario featuring a greatly outnumbered German force, with no heavy weapons except a nearly invulnerable Panther, trying to hold back a mass of British infantry, using the flooded stream between them as a barrier.

German Advantages ----- unopposed armor (a Panther tank), choke points

The Panther is clearly the Germans' best weapon. Its 18 frontal armor is too much for the British PIATS, which have a kill number of 15. As long as the German can prevent any opportunities for side shots, he can keep his tank in the game. An SSR even gives the crew a morale of 9, though I probably wouldn't take a chance on recalling this magnificent weapon by exposing the crew to any decent IFT shots at all.

The British can only cross the stream at 4 points. These are the two bridges, and the two endpoints of the stream, which are considered deep water by SSR (not flooded like the rest of the stream is). Moreover, moving into the deep water is slow and risky for the British. It costs 4 MF to enter such a hex, and the unit automatically becomes CX (B20.43). This makes it difficult to advance from W10 to V10 in the same turn that they entered the water. The trick is to declare CX movement before moving, enter the stream, and use whatever movement points are left to go into crest status on the other side. Then the unit can advance out in the same turn.

German Disadvantages ----- outnumbered, low exit VC

The British have 14 squads to the Germans' 6, and their total firepower, discounting ROF and the PIATs, favors them 70-52. They only need to exit 8 VP. That's just 4 squads, or 3 squads and the 8-1. You get the picture.

German Defense -----

The German player must be ready for a fallback defense, but first he must cover the choke points with fire. There are several nice positions, but I would be wary of setting up any Germans in upper building levels, since this will make it harder to fall back when necessary. One should consider how formidable the Panther can be in J1. From here he can cover 2 of the 4 crossing places with point blank fire, and most likely get some sort of negative DRM to boot. In my playing of this scenario, the Panther parked in this position and held the entire right wing of the British assault in check for several turns, since they had no smoke left for their mortar at that time. It may have won the game for the German side. Therefore I think the German should either start his Panther in this hex or move it there when it is needed. It'll take 2 turns to get the tank from Q10 to J1. A squad (or even just a half squad if the German is feeling bold) should go in either J2 or J0, to assist the lank in covering this approach. J2 is probably the better of the two. To cover the R7 bridge, I recommend putting a squad in P8. Another should go in O9 with one of the 9-1s, so they can start the game concealed and advance forward to help cover the crossing also, and to prevent the British from getting a bunch of lucky rolls to break the entire covering force on the first turn. It is worth considering putting one or both of the LMGs in this area, so that they can throw firelanes across the bridge. This could be very intimidating to any British

units wishing to cross. The other 9-1, with three squads and (maybe) the 2 LMGs, goes in the N6-M6 area. This area has the advantage of covering both bridges, while being out of sight of any British Prep Fire on turn 1. N6 has quite a few nifty LOSs, notably to O1, L1, and S7. M6 can see O2 also. It could take the British a while to root this group of Germans out, depending on what they do with their attack.

Of course, as soon as the British 9-2 kill stack gets a bead on them, they'll probably have to relocate. N7 and K5 are good fallback positions. And the Germans WILL have to fall back. The British cannot be completely stopped in this scenario, only slowed. With that in mind, the German player must not only pay attention to his initial positions, but those that he must retreat to should be carefully considered as well. One reason I like the LMGs in the N6 area is that I figure they should eventually wind up in the I6 building, where they can threaten firelanes out to I1, and also have shots at the N9-M10 area. It can also conveniently see G9 and F10. D5 and B6 are good last ditch positions. Note that all of these crucial positions for the German infantry are in the middle of the board. This is because, in my opinion, the greatly outnumbered Germans should try to choose spots with shots at both flanks, since there probably won't be enough troops around to cover each separately.

The German must be prepared to use his Panther as a fire brigade, to plug any holes the British start to exploit. This is the most mobile German weapon, so it should be repositioned when necessary to cover British lines of advance with its machine guns. Don't forget overrun possibilities, and don't give up any side shots to PIATs. A panzerfaust can also be a nasty surprise to the British player, since he has no armor. But his infantry in buildings and behind walls are eligible targets, and the German will want to keep in mind the potential of this weapon.

Lastly, as the game winds down, start figuring out which British units cannot possibly exit the map. There is no need to fire on these units, so knowing which ones are capable of exit and which are not may help to offset the numerical advantages the British have.

British Advantages ----- 9-2 leader, MMGs, 51mm MTR, numbers

The 9-2 is the best leader on the board, so I list this as a British advantage despite the fact that the Germans have a better leader to squad ratio. The MMGs have the best ROF on the board, and the numbers advantage was covered earlier. I list the 51mm MTR as an advantage because of its ability to place smoke (s7). This is probably the most important weapon the British have, and it should be guarded jealously. It is, however, a very dicey advantage. As soon as it runs out of smoke (and it can happen on the very first roll, believe me), it becomes just another support weapon.

British Disadvantages ----- choke points, unopposed German armor

I really don't know what else to list here. Usually in scenarios where the attacker must exit VP, time is a great factor, but it strikes me that with 9 turns available, time will be on the side of whoever plays well in the early game.

British Attack -----

The first thing that the British player should remember is the victory conditions. Only 4 of the 14 squads need to get off. With this in mind, I wouldn't worry too much about getting everybody moving right away in an attempt to get across the stream. I might even go so far as to count on certain units NOT exiting. This most likely would include the 9-2 kill stack, and the half squad with the mortar.

(In my one playing of this scenario, my opponent tried to wade the W10 stream hex with the 9-2, 2xMMG, and 2x457 early in the game. Well a sniper came along and wounded the 9-2, and that coupled with the 4PP MMGs made it very slow going for them as they tried to get out into V10. During all this time they were not providing much needed fire support.)

I think W8 level 2 is a good spot for a kill stack made up of the 9-2, 2xMMG, and 2x457. They should be able to get there with little difficulty. From there they can hit the P8 building with 12+0 shots, or hit the N6 woods with 12-1. That ought to drive the Germans away from the R7 bridge. Of course, a Panther in this area poses the threat of a critical hit with its MA, but that's war. Other positions, such as Y10 or Y6, provide the opportunity to hit the P8 building with prep fire on turn 1, but this leaves the kill stack exposed, so I probably would not chance it. I think 2 squads should start in Y10 with the intent of wading hex W10 as early as possible. This ought to put some pressure on the German

right. In the Y2 area I would put 5 or 6 squads with a leader (probably the 8-1), a couple of PIATs, and an LMG. Their job is to move to the K1-K2 crossing area as soon as possible. By themselves they represent enough VP to win the game, and their job is to keep the Germans honest. Remember double time and the road bonus, but beware of the lines of sight from N6 and M6! The rest of the force should go through the middle of the board. Many of these units could start the game concealed if set up right, and they should be able to stay away from any truly dangerous fire for a while. Some should head for U7 and T6, from which they are ready to rush the R7 bridge when the opportunity arises. If the K1-K2 area looks more promising, these units could be shifted there relatively easily.

Where to put the mortar is an important consideration. One good spot might be BB10. They could start the game concealed, and get to Z10 just in time to try for smoke in Q8 when their buddies are poised to cross. Another option would be to stack the mortar-toting half squad with a leader in Y2, with the goal of reaching O1 by turn 2. Remember, a leader can "lend" his 1PP to the half squad (A4.42). From O1 they could smoke either bridge area. Of course, the Germans in N6 need to be neutralized before I'd put such an important unit in O1. I would be wary of trying for smoke early in the game. It is too crucial to the success of the bridge crossings to risk losing it so early. Timing is everything.

Once across the stream in force, the British must press the Germans hard. Remember the usual tricks for limiting subsequent fire opportunities. Take advantage of close combat to tie up German units. Look for side shots against the Panther with the PIATs. Remember that deliberate immobilization can ruin the Panther's day. Don't forget that British units don't cower, so leaders can be used to rally the broken guys without losing too much in the way of fire direction. And don't forget how much time you have left. As I mentioned earlier, time will be on the side that does well early. In some cases units that prep fire will not then be able to exit.

Conclusion -----

The Germans sweat as they peer out of windows and from behind the cover of trees at the bridges the Tommies must cross. They know they are outnumbered. But the sight of the monstrous Panther heartens them. The British paratroopers have very little anti-tank capability. Meanwhile, on the other side of the stream, the Brits move into their assigned positions. They must link up with the Polish paratroopers at Dreil, and Panther or no Panther, this small SS force is not going to stop them...

The Dangers of Variantism

Matt Shostak (with special thanks to Tom Repetti)

"Some damned foolish thing in the Balkans" - Bismarck

(How ironic that as I write this appeal to my comrades to prevent the balkanization of our hobby, American troops are preparing to embark on a peacekeeping mission in the very place that gave the word its meaning.)

The ASL community has reached a crossroads in its history. It has reached a stage where it can either unite or undergo fragmentation due to variantism. Several factors have combined to produce an atmosphere that is ripe for balkanization.

First, the ASL system has now been around for about 10 years, and it is now very nearly complete. In the early years players had their hands full just trying to learn the rules well and keep up with the latest releases. But now there are many players who have had enough time and experience to speak with confidence on rules questions. Thus the stage is set for variants to spring up more readily. Players know the system now, and they are looking for areas that the system missed.

Second, the decline in new modules and Annuals from Avalon Hill has led to an explosion of amateur material, ranging from fanzines to historical modules, to campaign systems. The thirst of the ASL community for new products

is obviously very great. To slake that thirst, amateur efforts have been producing their own rules. Already we have two new rules for bayonet charges (from Time on Target and Heat of Baffle) in the form of SSRs. The French fanzine Tactiques has been cooperating with Backblast to produce rules for a new terrain type, railroads. The rules for applique armor from the Time on Target group form another example.

Lastly, players from all over are creating their own house rules to deal with rules they find disagreeable, whether it be due to their particular sense of realism or playability. This has been a very hot topic on the Internet ASL Mailing List lately, as players have posted house rules for disallowing such time honored tactics as the "VBM freeze" and "skulking" to name just the two most important ones. It is clear that, left unchecked, these factors are likely to combine to balkanize the ASL hobby.

Sure, the ASLRB is so huge that house rules and amateur efforts at new rules may only impact the way the game is played in different circles by a small amount. But that small amount can be very annoying and often unnecessary. Hearing no, we don't play that way about certain rules would be enough to piss us off, even if it was only a small point. "Radio spotters are always HIP? Damn, I was planning on suppressing that guy." Or how about more important issues: "You mean to tell me I now need to reprogram myself not to skulk? You gotta be kidding!"

I should note here that there can indeed be good variants. There can be good house rules. But there can be bad ones too. It is human nature to try to fix things that are perceived to be broken. How then can we distinguish between the two? The line should be relatively clear. Good variants and house rules are those that constitute a good tradeoff between chrome and complexity. Very good ones are those that actually fix something that was broken (a workable Bocage or Human Wave rule would be welcome by many players, including myself). Bad ones are those that erase parts of the ASLRB or outlaw time honored tactics, especially with regard to parts that weren't broken to begin with, such as skulking. For the remainder of this article, when I condemn variantism, I mean the bad, nasty, evil kind.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to just say "No!" to variantism. There are really two different levels of concern. The various groups that are producing new modules can be a more serious problem in the sense that the nature of their medium lends a certain air of authority to their actions. Certainly, if AH does not support ASL with new rules to cover certain topics in the future, it may become necessary and desirable for the amateur publishers to do so. But the decision to do so must be weighed carefully, and should be a joint venture among the major publishers. A good example of this is the work being done on the railroad terrain type by Tactiques and Backblast. It could be a good thing to have, and it is good that they are cooperating. But can you imagine what it would be like if each of the major fanzines released their own rules for railroads? Or worse, suppose each of the fanzines decided to rewrite the bocage rules, to make them cleaner. Or human wave rewrites? Even if quality was high, without cooperation it would be distracting at best, fragmentary at the worst. At ASLOK you play with the BB rewrite of human waves, but the next tournament you go to uses the one from Critical Hit? Argh.

The bayonet charge rules mentioned earlier are a slightly different matter. Did we really need bayonet charge rules at all? Did we need two different sets of rules on this topic? Could this not adequately have been covered by the human wave rules?

Of a different ilk is the tendency for players to come up with their own house rules disallowing certain undesirable (to those players) tactics. This is generally a bad thing for several reasons. First, house rules based on realism arguments are inherently unsound, for how many of these players have seen real combat, not to mention real combat in World War II, and therefore have any credibility with regard to realism? Second, house rules based on playability achieve the opposite result, rendering the games less playable when venturing outside one's own gaming circle. I sense that many house rules (such as those outlawing VBM freeze and skulking) arise more out of frustration at not being able to overcome the given tactic than any sense of realism or playability. I urge all players, when confronted with a tactic that seems loathsome, to first try to overcome it within the rule system as it exists, rather than to succumb to the evils of variantism. Remember that, as a model, ASL must contain a certain level of abstraction. It is not only unavoidable but necessary to produce something we can all play. Channel your creative energy to more worthy endeavors, such as designing scenarios, writing articles for the fanzines, playtesting, or organizing your local club. But please, no bad variants. There's already more than enough stuff within the system to keep track of.

Coming Soon...

Plans are in the works to maintain a local ASL ladder, along the same lines as the Internet ladder. Standings would be published in this newsletter as a regular feature. Stay tuned for details.