

Banzai!!

The Newsletter of the Austin ASL Club

Issue #2

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

From the Editor's Desk

Matt Shostak

Wow, we've done a second issue already. The first issue has to be considered a success, since it resulted in a longtime Squad Leader player contacting us to express his interest in learning the greatest of games, Advanced Squad Leader. Recent news on the global ASL front is that AH has contracted with the makers of the Backblast fanzine to produce ASL material. They will do the Annuals, for example, and will be responsible for new modules. This is very good news, because ASL is now in the hands of people who love the game and are very motivated to publish quality new stuff.

We need articles to keep this newsletter going. Although I have a small backlog to draw from, it will run out soon. So if you want to see something in these pages, write it up and get it to me (in electronic form if at all possible).

Club Notes

We tried something a little different for the December club meeting. That is, we met on both Saturday and Sunday of the same weekend, Dec. 16-17. On Saturday, Mike Seningen and Mike Sosa squared off in Rocket's Red Glare, while newcomer Eric Gerstenberg and I looked on. When Mike Sosa had to leave early, I took over his Americans, but I could do nothing for them. Seningen's Germans had had too much good luck up to that point to overcome. On Sunday, Tom Lavan matched up against Bob Purnell and took him to school in *The T-Patchers*. Tom's use of the fortified locations to set up his ATG in the second level of a building on his left flank, coupled with some good ROF, had Bob's Shermans flaming very early on. It was too much to overcome. David Hailey also matched up against Kirk Woller in *Tiger 222*. Kirk brought his previous experience in this scenario to bear and defeated Hailey's Germans. All in all it was a very fun weekend, although I have my doubts if I'll volunteer to do a Saturday-Sunday doubleheader again.

Aside from playing, we talked about starting a local ladder system to rate games. All the players were in favor of the idea, so it's full speed ahead now. The details are presented below. Remember, it's for entertainment value only; please, no wagering.

For information about our club, and the next club meeting, please call Matt (280-8414) or Mike (892-7169).

Details of the Ladder Points System

This ladder will follow the same format and scoring system as the Internet ASL Ladder, which has had strong success and has been going on for several years now. The rules are simple. No game counts for ladder points unless both players agree beforehand. Of course, if you refuse to play for ladder points, you are a weenie and will be subject to much good-natured ribbing from the rest of the club. Seriously, the only strong reasons not to play for ladder points

are when one player is just learning the system and is being taught by one of the "experts" or when playtesting a scenario. Otherwise, play for points. As you can see from the scoring system below, there is no incentive for the top scorers to beat up on the low scorers, since they have so little to gain by doing so, but have plenty at risk. All in all it should balance out, should be plenty of fun, and should give us all plenty to talk about.

When you join the ladder, you get 1000 points. You gain or lose points by winning or losing games against other Ladder people. Ladder rankings are based on these points, so if you beat the top-ranked player, you'll gain plenty of points, but you won't take over the #1 spot unless the points you gained were enough to give you more than everybody else. The points system awards you for playing the highly-ranked people. There's no official system for challenging players. You can play anybody, regardless of how far above or below you they are ranked.

Austin ladder points system: Everyone starts out at 1000 points as a baseline. You gain points/lose points depending on the differential between you and your opponent based on the following:

BASE POINTS:

These are the points that are gained/lost depending on who wins/loses a scenario. If the lower rated person wins a game, then the lower rated person gains the points in the "Lower Wins" column while the higher rated person loses those points. "Bonus Points" are added/subtracted from the base points to get the total points gained/lost.

DRAWS RESULT IN NO POINTS GAINED/LOST

| Point Differential | Lower Wins | Higher Wins |
|--------------------|------------|-------------|
| 0-50 | 25 | 25 |
| 51-100 | 30 | 20 |
| 101-250 | 35 | 15 |
| 251-500 | 40 | 10 |
| 501- | 45 | 5 |

BONUS POINTS:

These are variable points added to the winning players' base and subtracted from the losing players base. To find the bonus point total:

$(1000 - (P_{win} - P_{lose})) * 0.01$ Where P_{win} = point ranking of winner P_{lose} = point ranking of loser Bonus points are FRU.

Incentive for Playing: Each player is awarded 2 points per game completed, regardless of who won, as an incentive for participation in Ladder games.

Panzer Gegen Mortar

So you've just taken the Americans in a scenario where you will be facing Panthers. You have some Shermans in your OB, but what good are those? You know your opponent will be careful not to give you a side shot, and the kill number of the wimpy 75 MA of the Sherman is not high enough to penetrate the frontal armor of the Panther without a critical hit. What about those 60mm mortars that you have? Don't laugh.

Consider firing the mortars at the Panther. Suppose the Panther is more than six hexes away (so the Sherman can't go for deliberate immobilization). To hit, a mortar would need an 8 (7 base, -1 DRM size). Then by rule C1.55, you would roll on the IFT, not a To Kill table, to determine the effect on the Panther. Since it is a 60mm mortar, you would be rolling on the 4 column. According to C1.55, you need to roll <3 to immobilize or shock. The mortar has ROF 3, so

there's a pretty good chance that it will eventually do damage to the Panther (the math is left as an exercise). If the Panther happens to be in woods, airburst would apply as a -1 DRM. Read D5.311 carefully. CE crews and OT AFVs can be especially vulnerable in woods.

The Sherman could use this tactic too. Curiously, it will prove to be more effective than firing AP ammo at the Panther. Firing HE as area fire, the Sherman would probably need a 7 to hit (7 base, +1 BU, -1 size). Then it would roll on the 6 column of the IFT for damage. You can see that a 3 or 4 would immobilize or shock while a 2 would kill the Panther. The ROF 1 of the Sherman is not as good as that of the mortar, however.

BEGINNER'S CORNER

Kirk Woller

So, you've just purchased the Advanced Squad Leader Rulebook (ASLRB) and Beyond Valor (BV) and can't wait to remove the BV shrinkwrapping, open the top of the box, and inhale the odor of freshly cut cardboard. You'll glance at the attractive rulebook, and then start punching pieces and putting them in plastic baggies, sorting by color. You'll read a few of the rules and begin playing. Right? Wrong! Adopt this approach and soon all you will have is a dog-eared rulebook with missing and torn pages, and German light machinegun counters which are obvious under those concealment counters. What have you done wrong? You have failed to protect your investment! This article is for beginning ASL players who may not realize how vulnerable their new game is to the ravages of play. My hope is to help you avoid the mistakes I made when starting the lifetime journey known as ASL.

The Components

Let's take a trip around the basic components of the ASL system. You should have the rulebook binder, the chapter dividers and rules pages, the game box, the pieces, the scenarios, the dice, and the mapboards and overlays. As you purchase more of the system you will be adding to most of these components so a good start at storing and protecting them will save you time, money, and frustration and will make the game easier and more enjoyable to play. Expect to spend an amount equal to the price of the game to protect your system. Remember, though, that pets and children and overzealous individuals armed with vacuum cleaners will not be completely stymied by the following methods, unless you store securely everything at scenario's end.

The Binder

What a beautiful binder! Informative inside covers with references and an attractive outside cover. The binder, however, is a good idea gone bad. As it comes, the tabbed chapter dividers protrude from the edge and are quickly destroyed, and the size will NOT accommodate the rest of the rules system! What was AH thinking? Your best bet is to buy three new binders from the friendly neighborhood office supply store. I bought ones with the clear plastic sleeves on the inside and outside so that I could photocopy the covers for quick reference purposes. I also bought different colors for the same reason. You will need a 1.5", a 2", and a 2.5" binder and should divide your rules into chapters A through D, scenarios, and chapters E through ?, respectively. Do NOT try and fit everything into one binder! You will regret it each time you do a rules lookup or try to read in bed, (*or in the bathroom - ed.*) as the sheer weight of the complete set of rules qualifies it as a dangerous weapon. I have placed the original index in the A-D binder, and one downloaded from the ASL list on the internet which covers chapters E-? in the second binder since to my knowledge AH has not provided an updated index for the higher level chapters. Additionally, your chapters A-D contain most of the basic rules which you will use heavily as a beginner, and since you will not be so concerned with beach landings there is no need to wrestle with these rules, anyway. Chapters A-D will not grow much, since AH has cheated and included updates to these chapters as color- marked sections in later chapters, instead of replacing the rules in the appropriate chapter, as they promised they would do.

Rules and Chapter Dividers

Now, the pages and dividers! Avalon Hill has done a beautiful job with these, combining color, examples, and text into a rulebook which is relatively easy to use and understand, once you get over the acronym shock and index (some of my favorites are the lookup for Rate of Fire and the expansions of sP and sN). You will want to protect everything using plastic page protectors available at office supply stores. The ones I bought have oval holes for the rings, and

this led to tearing of the pages, so buy ones with circular holes if you can. Page protecting will double the original size (thickness) of your rules pages. As importantly, laminate your chapter dividers. You can do this at most copy stores. I have chosen to cut a slit for the tab to allow for folding, but you will need to tape the cut edge to prevent the lamination material from peeling off (or else don't cut it at all).

The Scenario Cards

The scenarios will go into their own binder, and should be protected by sliding them into page protectors which are designed for sheets without holes. You may also use these for the regular rules pages to prevent any tearing at the holes, but the pages will then be flush with the edge of the chapter divider tabs, making the tabs useless as lookup devices. The page protectors come in several styles and thicknesses; I prefer the clear over the frosted ones. Remember that you will be filling up your scenario binder with photocopies from old Generals and fanzines, so be prepared to buy more protectors *[and more binders; there are enough scenarios out there to fill 2 or 3 - ed.]*.

The Pieces

Your pieces need to be protected as well. I suggest spraying with a crystal clear acrylic coating spray. Do this BEFORE you punch any of your pieces. I decided on this too late and had to set out by hand each of the pieces, spray them, let them dry, turn them over and re-spray, and then reorganize into the storage boxes I have. This takes many hours. A sheet can be done in less than five minutes if left unpunched. Do this in a well ventilated area and be sure to let the pieces dry THOROUGHLY, or you risk having them stick together and be destroyed. Doing this outside will minimize the amount of drain damage, but be aware that insects and pieces of trash may find their way onto your sticky sheets, perhaps turning that 8-1 leader into a 8+1 if you are not careful. Although I haven't clipped the corners on my pieces and am not sure why some gamers do, this can be an additional chore you may want to perform after spraying your pieces. *[Spray coating comes in several kinds of finish. While Kirk and I prefer the clear coat, others may prefer a matte finish, which does indeed reduce the glare of the pieces. Experiment with something that is not valuable first and decide which you like best. Spray coating counters goes above and beyond the call for many ASL players. The reason it is mentioned here in a beginners article is that the chore is most easily done while the pieces are still unpunched. - ed.]*

Counter Storage

Ah, storage. My first historical game was AH's Battle of the Bulge '65, which I purchased when I was eleven for \$5.99 plus tax. I thought I was clever to use sandwich bags for the pieces. I still have the game and all the pieces, but it is worse for the wear it has received after twenty-five years of playing. I hope to get as much play out of my ASL set, and since the ASL rulebook binder alone will set you back ten dollars, you should store the pieces in something other than sandwich bags. ASL has thousands of pieces, and you will want quick access during set-up, play, and pick-up. I have seen several different systems at tournaments and all have their merits, but I decided on soft plastic boxes from a container store. Most people order by nationality and place the squads from left to right across the top in descending order from elite to conscript, with corresponding half-squads and crews moving from top to bottom. Although I haven't done it, boxes come in various sizes and I suggest the larger compartments for the vehicles and larger counters, as finding and sorting vehicles can be frustrating in the smaller compartments. Plastic container boxes can also be found at sporting goods stores intended for storing fishing tackle, but gamers are a resourceful lot and many of them insist these boxes are the best.

The Dice

I just keep the dice in one of the storage boxes and throw them into a solid glass cup (for lots of dice action; probably one of the most satisfying aspects of the game for me) but some gamers prefer to store them in a container with a lid and shake them this way, while others use a dice tower to randomize them. All of these share the trait that they save valuable table space for other purposes. Avoid players who merely throw the dice on the table, as you will soon find that all you have left is that rear mortar position which happens to be out of LOS.

The Overlays

Eventually you will accumulate many sheets of overlays which require cutting according to some slightly confusing rules. I eventually cut them all conservatively, which meant I left all the colored sections and hex borders, but I can cut them again if I find it necessary later on. I spray-coated them, but you could also laminate them as is done with the chapter dividers. If you laminate them, you should cut them out first, and then laminate them, to prevent peeling of

the lamination. You will need to find someone who is skilled with a laminating machine and can handle all the small overlays. I store the overlays in various labeled envelopes for easy access during set-up. *[Beware indeed how they are cut. Some overlays are meant to be cut just inside the lines, some just outside. Follow the rules given precisely. - ed.]*

The Boards

Boards come in two types, mounted and unmounted (paper). The mounted ones stand up best by being stored horizontally, but for access purposes I store them vertically. Leave these boards in the sun for completely new terrain, should you find yourself bored with the current color scheme and levels! Sunlight can bleach the boards and counters very fast, so beware. The unmounted boards can be handled two ways, one of which is to laminate in the larger machines available at the copy shops, or to buy a large sheet of plastic to place over the top. I laminated mine and was pleased with the result, but make sure you find a competent employee who understands the value of your map. I store them in cylindrical mailing tubes, rolled up with the map to the outside so that the corners will lay flat when on the table. To place your overlays on the boards, or to assure that the lines of sight stay consistent during the course of play, use a semi-stick (removable) tape which can be easily pulled off when your game is over. The tape I buy comes in a blue box and is produced by a well known tape company. Do NOT place this tape on the back of the mounted boards, as it will destroy them. Want to buy a slightly used board 11?

The Game Box

Although the game boxes are nicely done, I have found it difficult to utilize the space for much, so currently I store my Generals in them.

Miscellaneous

In addition to the above, some gamers use tweezers to handle their pieces, but I have found that if they are protected properly, there is no reason except convenience to handle them this way. Also, a well-lit surface facilitates play and is essential for those nearing forty years of age, so I recommend a good white halogen lamp be used during your games, in fairness to your opponent.

Putting It All Together

If all this seems like a lot of work, it is! But for me part of the enjoyment of playing boardgames comes in manipulating the pieces, rolling the dice, and other tactile elements of play; probably much akin to what model railroaders enjoy while building their layouts, except with ASL you can also play a game with the pieces! *(Internet ASL humorist Tom Repetti is fond of saying how one of the pleasures of ASL is that it provides an introduction to the wonderful world of office supplies. - ed.)* Finally, I store most of the components in a very large plastic carrying case. Although I can't fit everything in it, I do have space for all my boards and three nationalities, plus any special magazines or rules additions. I hope the above suggestions are helpful and I wish you many hours of enjoyable gaming!

Scenarios Analysis: The Fugitives

Matt Shostak

"The Fugitives" became a favorite of mine as soon as I played it for the first time. The historical background is interesting, but the units involved, the objectives, and the tactics that must be employed are what really make this scenario appealing. At this late date in the war, for instance, how do you usefully employ the thinly skinned PSW 222? The choice the Germans have regarding what order and where to enter their groups add variety, making the game playable many times. The Russian player also has some interesting choices to make, such as where to place his rubble counters and his AT gun, and of course when to first fire his concealed and hidden units.

Let's start with the German perspective. Their advantages are numbers, mobility, armor support, leadership, and entry conditions. Their disadvantages are troop quality, ammo shortage, and choke points (bridge crossing). The Germans start with a good amount of infantry, and they also have some excellent AFVs. The armor, however, is vulnerable to street fighting (and ammo shortage), and since it represents such a large number of VPs, it should be used very carefully. The German can lessen the chances of losses to street fighting by using a lot of armored assault, keeping at least one squad with each AFV. In fact, armored assault is a crucial tactic for the German, because it provides good cover for the infantry as well. Combined with the +1 TEM of the twilight in the first four turns, infantry can move with the tanks and still be protected by a total +1 TEM from any shots. This is a great way to advance.

And the Germans must advance quickly. In order to be able to cross one of the bridges effectively, it is important to get there before the Soviet reinforcements do, so the German player should plan to have his troops massed at one of the bridges by the end of turn 4. Once there the German can use one of his other advantages, the great smoke making capabilities of his AFVs. Each one of them has some sort of smoke dispenser, and the StuG and PzIV can each fire smoke ammunition as well. Since the twilight TEM most likely will be gone by the time the Germans are ready to cross, I think that it is wise for the German player not to attempt any smoke shots until he is ready to cross a bridge, when it will be most needed, as the Russians will surely concentrate firepower on the bridge and its exit hex. It is possible that the German will find himself at the bridge ready to cross, but he rolls and finds out that he has no smoke ammunition. In that instance I think that it is best to lead the assault with the PSW. Its light armor makes it likely to brew up when hit, especially if hit by the T34. This would provide cover for the crossing. If the Russian opts to wait for a better target, then the PSW can get across and maybe try to exit, earning a nice 5 VP for the Germans.

The Germans should remember that conscripts only have 3 MF, and should therefore stack leaders with them to help them move faster. Since the conscripts are so slow, I recommend that the first group to enter should be group 3. This allows the conscripts the maximum amount of time to cross the board. In addition, this group has the largest number of squads, which will be useful in clearing a path for the next two groups. Moreover, the PSW is the most expendable of the German AFVs. Losing this vehicle to an unexpected appearance of the AT gun or some other mishap wouldn't be as bad as losing one of the more powerful vehicles, or a halftrack carrying troops. Either of the other two groups can enter next. The German player should try to get the MMGs stacked with the 9-2 leader as soon as possible, since a large fire group will be very handy in breaking the Russian squads guarding the bridge. Which bridge to go for should vary with each playing, to keep your opponent guessing. The Russian, however, will most likely put his ATG in position to guard the center bridge, with a shot at one of the other side bridges. For that reason, the German will find it advantageous to attack on one side of the board more often than not. Lastly I think the Germans should throw all their weight at the same area, preferably one of the sides rather than the middle. I don't like the going for the middle bridge because then the Russians can close in on both sides and have less distance to cover to get there. Going up one edge or the other can take the Russians on the far side out of the game for a few precious turns. More importantly, I think the Germans just need their firepower in one place in order to punch through the line. Bridge crossings under fire are difficult, and I think any German who spreads his units out too far will see them get bogged down.

The Russian advantages are troop quality, HIP, reinforcements, bridge crossing, and time. Their disadvantages are numbers and dispersed units. The Russian defense should be determined by placement of the ATG. It is capable of knocking out any German AFV, and therefore should be valued highly. Although its placement should vary to keep your regular opponent guessing from game to game, some of the best spots are near the center bridge. There are spots providing shots at 2 bridges, while moving one hex will allow a LOS to a third. With this in mind, the Russian player needs to adequately defend the side bridges with troops. The name of the game for the Russians is delay, delay, delay. If the reinforcements arrive before the Germans have crossed a bridge, the Russians have a good shot at winning. The initial rubble placement can be used to slow or channel the German advance. Keep in mind, however, that rubble placement can also be used to create some interesting lines of sight. The Russians should take advantage of any street fighting opportunity, and should set up units to be able to bring to bear a decent amount of firepower on the bridge exit hexes. As soon as it is obvious which bridge the Germans are going for, the Russian units must all move at maximum speed to that area. Be careful, however, not to commit too soon. The third German group might come in an unexpected place to try to get some cheap exit VPs. Overall I think playing the Russian side is easier in this scenario, which is typical of the defending side in bridge crossing actions. It is very clear that the best use of firepower is covering the choke points, so you can hang your defense on that concept, throw in a couple of traps and level-headed play, and you're all set.