



TACTICS 101

13 Steps Closer to Improving Your ASL Game

By Mike McGrath



There you are sitting across from the legendary Bill "Fish" Conner in the finals of the AVALONCON ASL tournament. You are the fluke, out of No-name, Montana, no one else has ever heard of, you've crushed the likes of Mark "call me Irwin" Nixon, Guy "Chain-saw" Chaney, Mitch "Balicquidator" Baliki, Steve "Elvis" Pleva and other assorted ASL rabble. You have also badly beaten Eric "Barker" Baker but no one is really impressed by that. This is your first tournament and you're having a great time. You have been playing ASL for 72 hours without a break; with no food for at least 64 hours, and you have been listening to Pat Jonke whine about his luck for what seems like forever. You think to yourself, "Poor Pat, from the sound of it, he hasn't rolled less than a ten in three days."

You snap out of it as Fish asks you what scenario you want to play. Your attention focuses on the "Fish"—the scraggly beard, the keen eyesight, the stupid t-shirt "The Grofaz." What the hell is a Grofaz?! He asks you again what you want to play. You think to yourself, "I don't know, I have only been playing ASL for about a week, I just don't know." After much circling and sniffing, you and the "Fishman" finally agree on the big scenario. As you are setting up, you think "I'm going to get smashed, I've only been playing a week and Fish has been playing ASL for almost 60 years." Well, never fear because after reading this article, you'll have taken Tactics 101.

Okay ASL fanatics, I often read in letters to the editor about people who are just starting the game or have only been playing ASL for a short time wanting *basic tactics*. Here are 13 suggestions to rapidly improve your game. I must stress that not all players will agree with them. All of these suggestions have hundreds of exceptions to them. That's the great thing about ASL; every situation is different, even in repeat playings of the same scenario. Most of these are valid 80-90 percent of the time but there are always situations where they will not be.



1. KNOW THE RULEBOOK. I cannot stress how important it is to know the rules. I try to read the rulebook cover to cover once a year. Keep a copy of the list of ASL questions and answers which clarifies the rulebook. The rulebook itself will tell you a lot of the tricks of the trade and let you know when your

opponent is violating them. A friend of mine recently lost two games in a tournament because he didn't know that you can breach a fortified building with a DC. He lost another because he didn't know SMOKE negates FFMO from a firelane attack.



2. DON'T STACK. Contrary to what you read in ASL articles for scenario setup, never stack units. Unnecessary stacking is a recipe for certain disaster. Never stack squads when possible, always spread out and form firegroups. It is better to have one squad in a stone building and another in the woods than to have both together in the same location in the stone building. Use upper levels when possible to avoid stacking. By not stacking, the most your opponent can hurt with a single attack is one squad. My rule of thumb is one squad with a -1 leader and two squads with a -2 or better leader. Situations may dictate changes in this policy, but players who constantly stack their squads are asking for trouble.

3. BE AGGRESSIVE. This is as valid for the defender as it is for the attacker. Being too passive is the most common mistake the beginner makes. I have seen many games where the attacker sits at his starting point and prep fires every unit every turn until the end of the game, then loses because he hasn't taken enough ground even though he has killed 10 times what he has lost. I have also played games where my opponent has the chance to really hurt me by taking a small risk, but doesn't because he has conditioned himself to never take a chance. Always be on the lookout for opportunities to nail your opponent. Being able to decide when a risk is worth taking is the mark of a good player.

4. DON'T BE TOO AGGRESSIVE. This is especially important with armor. Someone much wiser than myself once said "Remember, tanks don't rout". If you don't need to take a chance then don't. Foolish recklessness is a sin. Each move you make during the game should bring you closer to winning. Don't do something "for the hell of it." Think before you move. Before moving that big stack through the open, make sure it's safe to do so. Be sure the line of sight to that enemy HMG is blocked. If you are not absolutely sure, find another route or move one unit at a time. If you have a lot to gain, then take risks. Otherwise, play it safe.



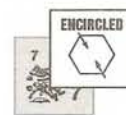
5. MOVE. Moving is perhaps the single most important feature of the game. Before you move any unit,

know where it is going and how it is going to get there. Always move units individually, never move in a stack unless you need the leadership bonus. If you are attacking, try to move so that the defender in his turn cannot move without being fired upon in the DFPh. Attempt to limit the defender's defensive fire opportunities. Get a unit close to his firegroups so that they will not be able to use SFF against your units which are further away. Recognize when you may be able to overwhelm a defending unit with sheer numbers. Sometimes you can take out a position by running at it instead of shooting at it. This can be dangerous though and is not always the right answer.



6. REDUCE THE LUCK FACTOR. As a player you can reduce the importance of luck considerably; don't stack, this helps reduce the possibil-

ity of one lucky roll taking you out; try to retain concealment, assault move if you are only moving one hex, always use terrain; use smoke; don't move in the open if possible, etc. Don't rally units that need a "2" to rally unless you must have them in the next phase. This is especially true for broken conscripts under DM. Even if you rally them with that "2", they will most likely disrupt, or berserk and charge to their death. Never try to fix a tank's MA unless you need it to shoot at another tank. Tanks have too many other valuable functions to risk losing them to a single dr.



7. WHEN YOUR OPPONENT IS DOWN, KICK HIM. When I play, I'm always looking for a way to screw my opponent. As soon as one of his units break, the first

thought through my head is "how can I kill this guy through failure to rout"? If possible, when prep firing shoot at units you can eliminate or take prisoner after the MPH if possible. Whenever there is a broken enemy unit on the map, always try to put it under DM if it can rally in the next RPh. If you can't kill a broken unit with a fire attack, try to put it under DM in your APH instead—so that it can't rout away.

8. PICK THE CORRECT TYPE OF ATTACK. There are several different types of

attack. Matching the correct one to the scenario greatly increases your chance of winning. Sometimes you want to concentrate your forces to attack at a single point (Scenario 8—The Fugitives), other times you want to attack on as wide a front as possible to force the defender to spread out (Scenario 9—To The Square) and still other times you want to grind slowly forward mostly prep firing and advancing (DASL 1—Guryev's HQ).



9. INFANTRY. Always look for an advantage. If your squads are stealthy, try to get into CC. If your range is better than the enemy, try to get into firing positions where you are at full FP and he is halved. Never move into a hex where if you break you will surrender or die unless you really have to. If you have a lot of leaders around, 8-0's make great FT and DC units. When on the attack, always set up a prep fire attack group with your best modifier/lowest morale leader (i.e., 9-2 or 8-1 instead of 10-2 or 9-1, unless you expect to be shot at a lot, then use your highest morale leader) and most of your high ROF MG. The logic behind this is that the higher morale leader should be out in front with the assault troops. His higher morale will help him pass the MC the enemy will surely fire him to take. His Leadership DRM will then help the squads with him to pass their MC as well. Meanwhile, the lower morale leader with the firebase still has the same modifier to direct attacks with. When stacking, always make correct stacks—everyone but Germans should stack HMG with HMG and MMG with MMG. Germans should mix and match to achieve higher firepower columns. When setting up firegroups, try to get correct columns (i.e., 2 squads and 2 LMG to get a 12 column). Don't forget to use spraying fire, assault fire, dash and snap shots where applicable. Spraying fire is especially useful for placing residual firepower. It can also be deadly when directed by a -2 or -3 leader. A good leader like this can direct his boys to mow down two enemy stacks at once if using spraying fire.



10. ARMOR. Having been taught the ins and outs of armor by the finest ASL armor commander I've ever known (Guy Chaney), I shall attempt to pass along some of the lessons I've learned at great expense. The most important thing about armor is its immunity to small arms. Tanks should always be used most aggressively (except against Germans with PFs) to drive into opponent's locations, use sD and grenades, cut off broken units rout paths, bounding fire, etc. When you drive into a unit's location and survive, the enemy can't fire out enabling your infantry to move forward blasting away in the AFPh. Stay in motion with the vehicle as this adds +2 to any reaction fire attack. If you prep with a tank, that is all it does. If you move with him, you can first try a smoke grenade or sD, then bounding fire, and then move into his hex all in one MPh. The ability to prevent enemy units from firing out of an AFV occupied location is the single most important factor in a com-

bined arms attack. A potent stack can be neutralized if a single vehicle can enter their location and remain alive. When on the attack, look for opportunities to hose people with this. You may not want to risk a Panther in this manner, but lesser tanks should not hesitate to volunteer for this mission. On the defense, look to minimize the chance of someone pulling this on you. Have AT weapons near your good stacks or place the good stacks in terrain which AFV's cannot easily reach.



11. MORTARS. If possible, always use light mortars in the direct fire mode. Use heavy mortars (81mm) in direct fire if you can, but only if they are relatively safe from return fire. If you can, always shoot at units in woods. Remember that even the light mortars can be very effective against armored vehicles. Mortars can also be very effective at laying SMOKE because they can lay SMOKE and still retain their ROF.



12. MISCELLANEOUS.
A. Always take prisoners except a 9-2 leader +. Shoot those guys.
B. Never shoot a broken unit that is not eligible to rally in the next rally phase or will die in the rout phase—you could rally them by HOB.
C. Always DM units if they will be able to rally the next rally phase.
D. Never take off dummy ? counters even if your opponent knows that is what they are. They can do two things—deny enemy ? gain and go search out the enemy sniper counter to absorb an attack.
E. Rarely shoot enemy ? counters if you don't know what they are. Bounding fire your heavy groups and run forward a couple of HS into the enemy unit's location. This comes under being aggressive. Don't allow a couple of ? counters stop your attack.
F. Never search a ? counter because you can very easily end up dead. Instead, run into its hex. You may die, but it's more likely you'll end up only broken and the ? will be removed.
G. Suppose you have two concealed squads two hexes away from an enemy squad with terrain between you. My favorite way to attack this guy is to assault move one squad next to him. If he shoots, you are concealed and assault moving—about as good as it gets. If he doesn't, move the next squad into his hex to force him to lose concealment—then jump on him in CC if you have the ambush advantage or 2:1 or better odds.
H. Never get into CC unless you have the advantage. CC makes for a very chancy affair. Also remember if he ambushes you he can withdraw to a hex within PF range of the tank you may have parked nearby.
I. Shoot into melees if it is your turn and you can Advance move units into it; unless you already have an overwhelming advantage.
J. Use SMOKE a lot. The only exception is a unit with a SMOKE exponent of 1. These units get SMOKE so rarely you will probably never want to waste the MF to throw SMOKE; unless

you're crossing a bridge or other choke point.

K. If you are trying to throw SMOKE on an enemy unit throw WP instead. The number is one less, but you just might break him. I would only try this if I needed a two or less for WP or if I really didn't need the SMOKE that badly. If you have a tank, gun or mortar and you are putting SMOKE in an enemy unit's hex always try for WP first.



13. MORALE. Last but not least is your morale as a player. Every player at one time or another has broken and started to try rash maneuvers in hopes of salvaging an apparently lost cause. As things start to go poorly, some players, rather than regrouping and reevaluating the situation, begin whining about their luck and trying reckless things. They then seem amazed that their 4-3-6 didn't stand up to that 30(-4) IFT attack. His morale has broken. When a player's morale breaks, he starts contemplating and doing things that are incredibly risky. Ten percent of the time it will get him back into the game; 90 percent of the time he will dig his own grave. Many an IF shot, thrown out in anger over the inability to get a hit, has come back to haunt the firer. This is not to imply that at some point you may have to do very risky things, but it is not on turn 2 after a bad turn 1. If you ever start doing things and hoping your opponent rolls an eleven or twelve, your morale has been broken. The best thing to do is get a fresh coke or beer, take a bathroom break and when you get back pretend you are starting a new game in which you have a disadvantage. I know it's hard to do, but don't be reckless when things go sour, it just makes it that much harder to get back into the game. Regroup and try again on the attack. On the defense, cut your losses and fall back to the next line of resistance.

Well that's it for Tactics 101. I hope this proves to be of some help to the "FNG". I am not sure that these tactics are valid against "Fish" though, since he has beaten me the last 37 times we've played. I strongly hope that you will try to attend as many ASL tournaments as you can, as they really are a great time.

Good gunning and remember "Just Say No" to stacking! Commander, out.

☆

