

VIEW FROM THE TRENCHES

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THE SHAMBLES - *VFTT* scenario analysis and AAR

WORDS FROM ITALY - does *ASL* depict the Italians well?

OBJECTIVE: SCHMIDT REVIEW - a look at the latest BFP module

BT SERIES FAST TANK - historical background

TOURNAMENTS GALORE! - reports from multiple UK tournaments

CRUSADER LADDER - updated

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COVER: Germans taken prisoners by the 4th Canadian Armoured Division at St. Lambert sur Dives, August 1944.

VIEW FROM THE TRENCHES is the quad-monthly British ASL journal. All comments are welcome. Even better, contribute. Write an article. Design a scenario. Share your ASL experiences with others. *VFTT* allows you to communicate with other ASLers. Don't be a silent voice.

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Back All issue of *VFTT* can be downloaded for free from:
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PREP FIRE

Well this issue took a bit longer than expected to produce! Having a 10-12,000 word dissertation to submit by mid-April for my degree course didn't help, but as is often the case nowadays the main reason for the delay was the lack of material being submitted for publication in *VFTT*.

'Til next issue, roll Low and Prosper.

Pete Phillipps

LASL

London's
Advanced Squad
Leaders

London's Advanced Squad Leaders (LASL) welcome ASL/ASLSK players or potential players. If you're passing through or staying over in London, you're welcome to come along and take part. There's no fee for taking part or spectating. We usually meet on the second first or Saturday of each month from around 9am until around 5.30pm. We are located in the lower ground floor of Starbucks, 37-39 High Holborn, London, WC1V 6AA. It's quiet and has space for up to 20 games. If you want to come along send your name and contact details to derek@doubleone-online.net to arrange a game and ensure there are no last minute problems.



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To purchase other third party products such as Critical Hit, Schwerpunkt, Bounding Fire Products, or Heat of Battle contact any of the following shops.

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PLAN 9, 9 Rosemount Viaduct, Aberdeen, AB25 1NE. Telephone (01224) 624 467 or e-mail them at plan9@ifb.co.uk.

If you know of other shops stocking third party ASL products let me know so I can include them here in future issues.



INCOMING

KOREAN OFFENSIVE

MMP will be releasing *Forgotten War* at Winter Offensive in January, along with the usual *Winter Offensive Bonus Pack*. Due to be published later in the year is another HASL module, *Hatten in Flames*.

KILLING FASCISM

The Swiss/Dutch design duo of Chris Mazzei and Peter Struijf, who have collaborated to produce 25 scenarios since 2008 (most of which have been printed in various *Friendly Fire* packs) will celebrate their 10 years working together by publishing their own independent scenario pack. Entitled *Death To Fascism* it will contain eight medium-sized tournament scenarios

and be released at *ASL Oktoberfest XXXIII* which takes place at the start of October 2018 in Cleveland, Ohio.

MORE FRIENDLY FIRE

Friendly Fire 12 will be released at ASLOK. As in previous years it will contain eight new scenarios. It should be available from several stockist, but can also be purchased direct from the Friendly Fire website at <http://www.friendlyfire.se/asl/ordering/> for 110 SEK.

THE FRENCH RETURN

Le Franc Tireur 14 will focus on the Italians, with 32 scenarios covering actions from

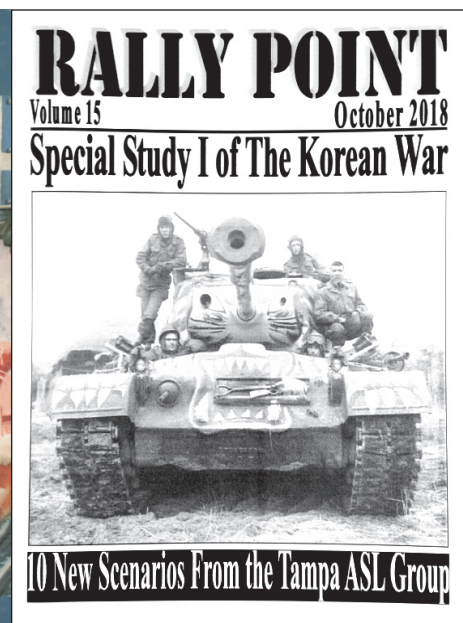
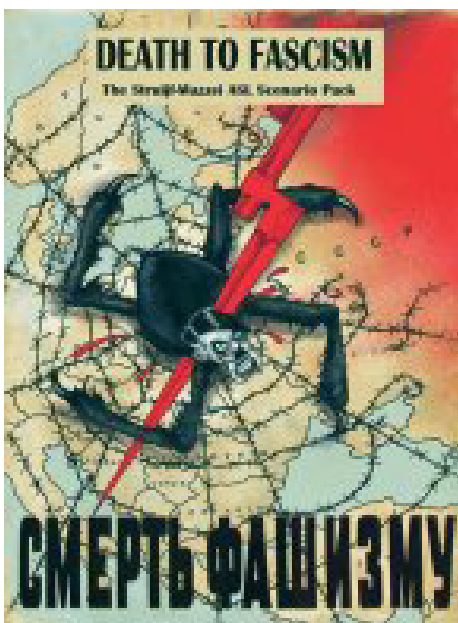
Eritrea, Abyssinia, Somalia, France, Greece, Yugoslavia, the Ukraine, Sicily and Italy, and even China. The 104 page magazine will also include two counter sheets containing Italian SMC and MMC, including several new Italian squad types for various elite units, as well as new aircraft counters.

SCHWERPUNKT DELAYED

Sherry Enterprises will be releasing *Rally Point #15: Special Study I of the Korean War* at some point in 2018. As the title suggests, the 10 scenarios will compliment the *Forgotten War* module being released by MMP.

There is no word on when *Schwerpunkt #24* will be released.

Ω



They Think It's All Over

INTENSIVE FIRE is now

Attendances have been dropping at INTENSIVE FIRE for several years now, from 29 in 2013 to just 13 in 2016, and I had considered not running one in 2017. However there had been some enthusiasm among those at INTENSIVE FIRE 2016 for me to continue, especially when it was noted that the 2017 one would be close to my 50th birthday (21st November), so it was decided that there would be one in 2017 but that it might be the last one.

In the end a total of 19 players attended, almost half arriving on the Wednesday and most of the remainder throughout Thursday. There was little gaming taking place though, with just two games played on Wednesday and six on Thursday (and three of them were games I played!)

A surprise curry night to celebrate

my birthday took place at a curry house 5 minutes from the hotel on Thursday evening - well it was a surprise to me, everyone else seemed to know about it! Shame there was no birthday cake, but the curry and beer went down well.

Friday Mini

A week before the tournament, Derek Cox offered to run a mini-tournament on Friday using scenarios from the new *Friendly Fire II* pack. This proved very popular, with most players taking part.

Group A:

Semi-finals

Gerard Burton vs. Richard Dagnall
Martin Meyers vs. Will Binns

Final

Gerard Burton vs. Martin Meyers

Group B:

Semi-finals

Joe Arthur vs. Ian Morris

Dominic McGrath vs. Simon Stanisforth

Final

Simon Stanisforth vs. Ian Morris

Group C:

Semi-finals

Nigella Blair vs. Magnus Rimvall

Stefano Cuccurullo vs. Paul Legg

Final

Nigella Blair vs. Stefano Cuccurullo

Congratulations to Martin Meyers and Stefano Cuccurullo for winning their groups; there doesn't appear to be a result for the Group B final so I guess there wasn't one!



Above left: Joe Arthur looking happy while playing Brian Hooper.



Above right: Nigella Blair busy setting up or tidying up.

Below left: Martin Meyers (left) attempts a Bullshit attack against Derek Cox!

Below right: Indy Lagu gets to watch as Gerard Burton (left) and Richard "Cheating Bastard" Dagnall play.



Own Gaming

A couple of weeks before the tournament, I discovered that there were seven scenarios taking place on 21 November, so I decided to try and play them all over the weekend. In the end I managed to play five of them:

J60 Bad Luck vs Nigella - lost as the Germans

BRT1 The Hawk vs Nigella- won as the Japanese

O5 The Tsar's Infernal Machines vs Ian - lost as the Russians

DB24 No Respite vs Paul Case - won as the Free French

CH39 Bedja Blockade v Paul Case - won as the Free French

I didn't get a chance to play 'DB15 Smashing the Semoventi' or 'J117 The Triangle', but hope to play both at some point in the future to complete the set!

Fire Team Tournament

The turnout meant that there were just enough players available to form a single division of four teams. All the tournament scenarios had been selected based around the theme of endings and parties. Taking place on Saturday morning, round 1 was 'The Final Fling', with the scenario choices being 'SP074 The Last Tiger', 'SP202 Fiery Finale' and 'WP05 The Last Assault'. Saturday afternoon/evening was 'Party Time!', featuring 'BPB 07 Piece Of Cake', 'TEF1 02 The Last Waltz', and 'AP91 Parting Shots'. Sunday saw the 'End of the Road', with 'FrF75 Goodbye Brother', 'VotG09 Eviction Notice' and 'SP097 Twilight Of The Reich' on offer.

As it was none of the Fire Team captains played on Saturday evening as they all went to the pub instead!

The final INTENSIVE FIRE winning team was Task Force Morris, who won five of the eight games they played. A mad rush to get to the train station to catch a revised train departure due to last minute strike action meant there was no time to do a prize ceremony and take photos :-)

And with that INTENSIVE FIRE came to an end.

Possibly.

There had been talk over the weekend about running INTENSIVE FIRE 2018 but at a different venue, possibly Blackpool, while a couple of others expressed an interest in running an alternative to INTENSIVE FIRE. Expect to hear more regarding the future in the coming months.

Whatever happens, I'm pretty sure many of us will still be getting together in November 2018 for our normal ASL fix.

Ω



Ian Pollard (left): "Some people think it's all over."
Wayne Baumber: "I guess it is now."

FIRE TEAM PLACINGS

ELITE DIVISION

POS	TEAM & PLAYERS	PTS	OPPO
1st	Task Force Morris Ian Morris (3385) Joe Arthur (3000) Wayne Baumber (2860)	15	15300
2nd	Battle Group Staniforth Simon Staniforth (3255) Nigella Blair (2930) Ian Pollard (2760)	12	12120
3rd	Kampf Gruppe Burton Gerard Burton (3525) Stefano Cuccurullo (3000) Brian Hooper (2855) Magnus Rimvall (2825) Paul Case (2620)	12	11785
4th	Udarnaya Gruppa Mayers Martin Mayers (3575) Derek Cox (3180) Paul Legg (2590)	9	8790

Brian, Stefano, and Paul each played one game for Kampfgruppe Burton.

The **OPPO** value is the total value of the Crusader ladder points of the opponents beaten by that fire team.

From: Perry Cocke
Sent: 04 November 2017 02:00
To: Joe Arthur
Subject: Re: Pete Phillips - the United Kingdom editor of View from the Trenches 50th birthday

Joe,

Please provide the following thanks to Pete:

Happy birthday, Pete.
Thanks for all your great work in the UK and for bringing us VFTT all these years. Keep up the good work.

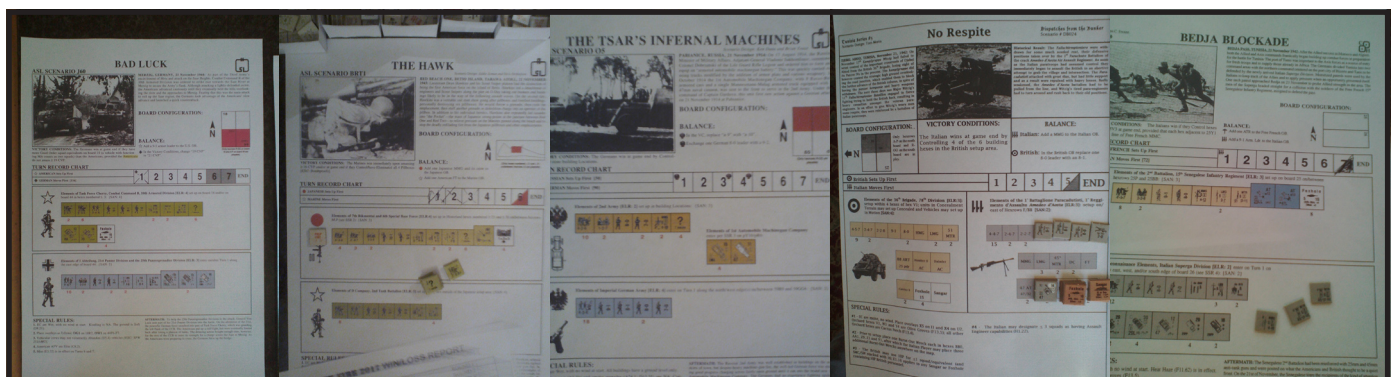
Brian, Perry, and the gang at MMP

PLAYER RESULTS

PLAYER	P	W	L
Joe Arthur	6	5	1
Wayne Baumber	4	2	2
William Binns	2	0	2
Nigella Blair	10	4	6
Gerard Burton	5	2	3
Paul Case	3	0	3
Derek Cox	4	3	1
Stefano Cuccurullo	3	2	1
Richard Dagnall	2	1	1
Brian Hooper	1	0	1
Paul Legg	6	2	4
Martin Mayers	6	4	2
Dominic McGrath	1	0	1
Ian Morris	6	2	4
Pete Phillips	5	3	2
Ian Pollard	3	1	2
Magnus Rimvall	5	3	2
Simon Staniforth	4	4	0

THE SCENARIOS

SCENARIO	ALLIED AXIS
126 Commando Schenke	1 0
AP 125 Ambush on South Knob	0 1
AP 126 Maryuma's Stronghold	0 1
AP 127 The First Virtue	1 1
AP91 Parting Shots	1 1
BRT1 The Hawk	0 1
CH39 Bedja Blockade	1 0
DB024 Tunisian Series #5: No Respite	1 0
FrF85 Junkers Junkyard	4 3
FrF86 Belgian Tigers	2 0
FrF87 Mormal Forest	2 1
J60 Bad Luck	1 0
O5 The Tsar's Infernal Machines	1 0
PBP7 Piece of Cake	0 1
SP202 Fiery Finale	2 3
SP74 The Last Tiger	1 0
SP97 Twilight of the Reich	1 2
VotG09 Eviction Notice	1 2
WO23 A Simple Solution	1 0
TOTALS	38 21 17



J60 Bad Luck, BRT1 The Hawk, O5 The Tsar's Infernal Machines, DB24 No Respite, and CH39 Bedja Blockade. All take place on 21st November....

HEROES BATTLE BEAST FROM THE EAST

Wednesday 28 February, 09:02 and I emailed HEROES 2018 attendees: EC are Wet. Ground Snow (E3.72) and Falling Snow (E3.71) are in effect.

THE PLAN

Depart Edinburgh 12.50pm, arrive Blackpool 4.45pm

THE REALITY

Depart Edinburgh 2pm, arrive Blackpool 1am

As wargamers we all know that “No plan survives contact with the enemy”. In this case the enemy was “The Beast from the East”, a massive winter storm that hit the east of Scotland on the day we were due to travel, having already hit the north east of England the day before.

The West Coast train we were due to travel on had been cancelled so we were put on an East Coast train and advised to change at Your. We were actually lucky to get out of Edinburgh as soon after our train left it was announced that all trains in Scotland would cease operations. As it was we soon came to a halt, due to a frozen point. Frozen doors became an issue later in the journey, staff having to use crowbars to force frozen doors open at each station stop!

We finally got in to York and barely got on the train to Preston - we'd have actually missed it if it hadn't been running 5 minutes late! And when we got to Preston we learnt that there was a replacement bus to Blackpool. On the upside we were the only people on it by the time it reached Blackpool and the driver very kindly dropped us off at the hotel rather than the train station, saving us a 10 minute walk. At least the bar was still open when we got in to the hotel at 1am :-)

Considering the state the country was in according to news reports, Blackpool (and even Preston) was remarkably free of white stuff. It was bitterly cold though, especially on the Thursday evening when a few of us went out to the pub to watch the football and

have a meal, a fact made worse as the pub we usually used had closed down and we had a bit of a walk to find an alternative!

Although the Beast did succeed in stopping half a dozen people from travelling, most people were able to make it safely to the hotel.

Which was not the Colwyn, which has been the venue for the last few years. Instead the owner Charles had moved us to The Headlands, another of his hotels in Blackpool, which was barely a five minute walk from the Colwyn; the Colwyn being at the north-west corner of the block and the Headlands being at the south west corner. This actually worked in our favour, as the Headlands had more space and better lighting, and pretty much everyone in attendance said they'd be happy to remain there in future.

A few friendly games were played on the Wednesday by the early arrivals, and over a dozen games were played on the Thursday.

As usual, the main tournament took place over Friday to Sunday, with one round on Friday, two on Saturday and Sunday. Prior to the event there was some uncertainty as to the number of people who would be taking part in the main tournament, and I had provisionally made arrangements for a preliminary round to take place on Friday morning. With some people unable to make it due to the weather it was unclear until late on Thursday night how many would be available to play in the tournament. As it was there were 16

available, the perfect number for a four round tournament

I'm not really a fan of TV show *Big Bang Theory*, although I have enjoyed the episodes I've seen. On the Saturday morning though, I had to download a copy of the latest episode which had been shown overnight in America, as the infamous SPI wargame *Campaign for North Africa* was making a guest appearance! I didn't pay much attention to most of the show, but the *CNA* sequences were amusing and pretty accurate!

The final was between Craig Benn and Gerard Burton, with Gerard grabbing victory in a game of 'J146 Ragnarok!' At the other end, Ray Porter won yet another Wooden Spoon, AKA the now traditional copy of a special edition of *Monopoly* provided for us by Michael Davies, in this case the *Lord of the Rings* edition - Ray being Lord of the Monopoly Editions!

As usual there were a large number of friendly games played throughout the weekend, although some of the pre-arranged games ended up being cancelled due to people not arriving. Martin Mayers and Damien Maher spent the weekend playing the campaign from Lone Canuck's *Purple Heart Draw* pack.

HEROES 2019 has been booked for the weekend of Thursday 7th to Sunday 10th March at the Headlands - hopefully the weather won't be quite so bad!

Ω

How much snow is falling in UK cities?

Wednesday to Friday forecast



Being stuck between Ian Morris (left) and Matt Ellis (right) has made Steve Hunt shrink!

PLAYER RESULTS

PLAYER	P	W	L
Ian Ainsworth	5	2	3
Craig Benn	7	5	2
William Binns	3	2	1
Mark Blackmore	8	7	1
David Blackwood	6	3	3
Nigella Blair	8	3	5
Gerard Burton	7	5	2
Andrew Campen	4	0	4
Paul Case	1	1	0
Michael Davies	7	4	3
Matthew Ellis	8	5	3
Jeremy Howison-Haworth	1	1	0
Alan Hume	2	0	2
Steve Hunt	4	1	3
Paul Legg	6	2	4
Martin Mayers	2	2	0
Ian Morris	7	3	4
Gary Norman	5	3	2
Pete Phillipps	2	1	1
Ray Porter	8	1	7
Nick Ranson	8	1	7
Pedro Santos	4	3	1
Ulric Schwela	5	2	3
Simon Staniforth	8	5	3



ABOVE: Gerard Burton (right) receives the Tournament Champion trophy

BELOW: For a change Craig Benn (right) had to make do with taking home the Runner-Up trophy

BOTTOM: Though as usual Ray Porter (right) took home the Wooden Spoon, yet another Monopoly special edition to add to his collection!

THE SCENARIOS

SCENARIO	ALLIED	
AXIS		
AP 121 Along the Vistula	1	0
AP 131 Crickets in Spring	1	1
AP106 Helluva Patrol Leader	1	0
AP32 Second Crack At Caumont	0	1
BFP-114 Engineering Defeat	0	1
BFP-116 Stop, Turn, Fight	0	1
BFP-146 Szacked	0	1
BFP-78 Operation Wheatfield	0	1
BFP-96 Hotly Contested Town	1	0
BRT1 The Hawk	0	2
BtB 10 Unplanned Attack	1	0
FrF49 One Last Mighty Hew	2	3
J117 The Triangle	1	2
J146 Ragnarök	2	3
J168 Katyusha's Embrace	1	0
J40 Might Makes Right	1	0
J60 Bad Luck	1	3
RPT102 Kleisoura Pass	0	1
RPT121 Fireball!	1	0
RPT84 Kiwi and the Cat	1	3
SP 266 The Hohenstaufen Hootenanny	0	1
SP 274 Balloons, Cakes and Ponies	0	1
SP102 le diable noir	1	0
SP11 Pomeranian Tigers	0	1
SP138 Lacking Co-Ordination	0	1
SP218 Varosliget Park	0	2
SP255 Anatoly's Ambush	3	5
SP258 Operation Blackwater	1	0
SP264 Meet The Old Boss	1	2
SP89 Assaulting Tes	1	0
SP95 Burn Gurkha Burn!	1	0
WCW8 The Last VC in Europe	0	2
WO22 The Cost of Non-Compliance	0	1
WO9 Sting 'em At Zingem	1	0
TOTALS	63	24
		39



TOURNAMENT RESULTS

POS.	PLAYER	P	W	L	CRUS
1	Gerard Burton	4	4	0	0 3300.0
2	Craig Benn	4	3	1	0 3335.0
3	Mark Blackmore	4	3	1	0 3266.7
4	Ian Morris	4	3	1	0 2776.7
5	Simon Staniforth	4	2	2	0 3075.0
6	Matthew Ellis	4	2	2	0 2975.0
7	David Blackwood	4	2	2	0 2800.0
8	Ulric Schwela	4	2	2	0 2772.5
9	Nick Ranson	4	1	3	0 2635.0
10	Nigella Blair	4	1	3	0 2365.0
11	Paul Legg	4	1	3	0 2365.0
12	Ray Porter	4	0	4	0 No Wins
13	Michael Davies	3	2	1	0 2715.0
14	William Binns	3	2	1	0 2655.0
15	Ian Ainsworth	3	1	2	0 2560.0
16	Steve Hunt	3	1	2	0 2365.0

The CRUS column is the average Crusader Ladder rating of the opponents beaten.

DOUBLE ONE 2018

As usual June saw over 30 *ASL* players gather at Writtle College for a weekend of *ASL* gaming.

Friendly gaming started on the Thursday afternoon and continued into the evening, only interrupted by the now traditional annual college hosted curry night followed by a few beers. Being an all you can eat buffet for just £10 per head and with drinks at student bar prices this is naturally quite a popular development!

Friday morning saw the tournament action start, with the various one day themed minis. The 'East Side Heavy Metal' and 'Rumble in the Jungle' minis proved popular, and two minis of each one were run.

The main tournament started on Saturday morning with players divided

into groups of 4 (roughly based on ladder rating) and playing in a Swiss system over 3 rounds. While the scenarios for round 1 (Saturday morning) and round 3 (Sunday morning) are announced in advance, round 2 (Saturday afternoon) is the 'Blind Panic' round, where everyone plays the same scenario, which is provided to them by Derek an hour before the round starts!

This year the mystery scenario was 'FF4 A Walk in the Woods' from the Heat



The author's set-up for FF4.

of *Battle FireFights! 1* scenario pack. All the scenarios from the pack take place on a unique half map board which is included in the pack, and this scenario features German troops attempting to clear a railroad that runs down the centre of a forest. Both sides get variable forces, and get to place two Concealment counters each on board - whenever a hex containing one of these was entered a DR would reveal whether it was just a Dummy or contained real Russian troops.

Saturday evening was also free pizza night, with copious amounts of Dominos' pizza provided by the organisers. These were soon demolished but not quite fast enough to beat the record established in 2017 of sixteen 12" pizzas finished in 9 minutes!

With the England game against Panama kicking off at 1pm and being shown in the



Above left: Smilin' Wayne Baumber battles Gordon Jupp in 'FE79 Motorcycle Probe'

Above right: Nigella Blair ignores Joe Arthur to wave at the passing camera.

Below left: Checking the rule: New School vs. Old School!

Below right: another game of 'FE79 Motorcycle Probe', this time featuring William Binns (left) playing Simon Staniforth.



college student bar, the trophy presentation took place there at half time! The mini tournament winners were:

- Burning Sky - Mick Essex.
- East Side Heavy Metal 1 - Gerard Burton
- East Side Heavy Metal 2 - Pedro Santos
- Kicking the Italian Boot - Gary Norman
- Rumble in the Jungle 1 - Will Binns
- Rumble in the Jungle 2 - Joe Arthur
- Operation Countenance - Gordon Jupp

The main tournament winners were:

- Group A - Marc Hanna.
- Group B - Simon Staniforth.
- Group C - Pete Phillipps
- Group D - Ian Morris
- Group E - Paul Legg
- Group F - Mick Allen

DOUBLE 1 2019 is booked for the weekend of June 20th to 23rd and Derek has plans to mark 10 years at Writtle College.

PLAYER RESULTS

PLAYER	P	W	L
Mick Allen	5	3	2
Joe Arthur	7	5	2
Joel Ayres	3	1	2
Wayne Baumber	4	1	3
William Binns	4	2	2
Nigella Blair	6	1	5
Stuart Brant	5	2	3
Gerard Burton	5	4	1
Michael Essex	5	4	1
Marc Hanna	3	3	0
Gordon Jupp	3	2	1
Indy Lagu	1	1	0
Paul Legg	5	3	2
Martin Meyers	4	0	4
Dominic McGrath	2	0	2
Ian Morris	6	4	2
Gary Norman	5	1	4
Pete Phillipps	4	2	2
Ian Pollard	6	3	3
Nick Ranson	4	0	4
Magnus Rimvall	5	2	3
Pedro Santos	5	3	2
Simon Staniforth	4	3	1
David Turpin	3	0	3
John Turpin	4	2	2

THE SCENARIOS

SCENARIO	ALLIED AXIS	
AP59 Taking Heads	0	1
BFP-102 Tolstoy Woods	1	2
BFP-107 Costly Baptism	0	4
BFP-38 Sugar Cane Shuffle	0	1
BFP-90 Early Morning Action	1	0
BFP-95 Obian Highway	1	1
Buck10 Buckeye Blitzkrieg	1	0
CDN10 Per l'onore d'Italia	1	0
DB051 Dash for Mt Croce	1	0
DB131 A Thorn In The Side	1	2
ESG119 Mac Wants the Flamethrower	1	0
FE79 Motorcycle Probe	1	4
FF4 Walk in the Woods	7	5
FrF87 Mormal Forest	1	0
FT215 Ghostly Attack	2	1
HS15 Hill 27	0	1
J150 The Sangshak Redemption	1	1
J183 A Real Barn Burner	0	2
J59 Friday the 13th	1	0
J68 Unlucky Thirteenth	0	1
LSSA11 Opening Fire	2	1
NOC SCENARIO NOT RECORDED ON	1	0
RP 138 The Chivres Shivaree	1	2
TOTALS	54	25
	29	

Ω



John Johnston (left) and Darren Orwin spent the weekend playing Kampfgruppe Scherer.

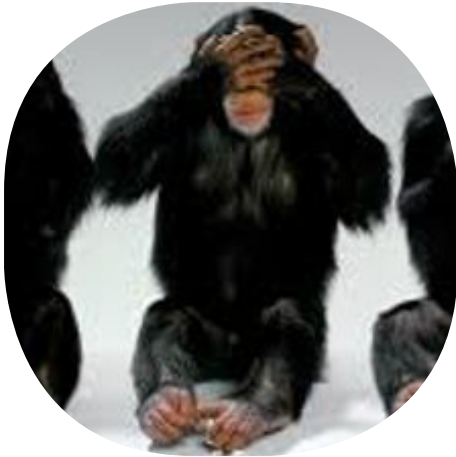


Bounding (First) Fire Blackpool

The UK's newest ASL Tournament

ESTD 2018

Bounding First Fire Blackpool is a new UK ASL event where the main tournament will be played using unpublished scenarios.....



The scenarios to be used in the main tourney have been supplied by BFP, fully play tested, from upcoming releases .

The tournament will be run with 2 rounds on Friday, 2 rounds on Saturday and a Final on Sunday.

Time limits for play will be generous but also enforced to be fair to all participants.



Regular visitors to the existing Blackpool tournament, HEROES, will know our welcoming host Charles and his staff.

Now relocated to The Headlands Hotel, this venue offers a large gaming area with separate restaurant and bar.

The hotel is easily accessible from the M55 and the train station is a 10 minute walk away.

BFP have been a strong supporter of the ASL scene for many years and we gratefully acknowledge their support of this event.

Further information on BFP and their products is available on their website:
<http://www.boundingfire.com/>

Contact Us

Do you have questions about the Tournament? Send us a message to boundingfirstfire@gmail.com, and we'll get back to you asap.

Thank you for your interest.

HEROES 2019

ADVANCED SQUAD LEADER TOURNAMENT

7TH - 10TH MARCH (THURSDAY THROUGH SUNDAY) 2019

HEADLANDS HOTEL, NEW SOUTH PROMENADE, BLACKPOOL, ENGLAND

THE EVENT

Following its success in previous years HEROES continues in 2019 to fill the gap for UK ASL action in the first half of the year. As normal the action starts on Thursday and continues through to Sunday so you can play in an ASL tournament and/or play friendly games (or even try your hand at a campaign game if you can find an opponent). The focus of the weekend will be the main tournament, in which players of like record are paired off to allow us to determine the winners - depending on numbers attending there will be four or five rounds. The first round will start on Friday morning and each round sees players choose from three carefully selected scenarios. Main tournament entrants are to be familiar with the rules through to the first half of Chapter G.

BOOT CAMP

Don't worry if you are a new player (someone who has only ever played five or fewer games against a live opponent), as there are plenty of chances to learn the game with an experienced player nearby to offer advice on rules. There will never be a better time to try your hand at ASL!

Remember, you can also drop in just for part of a day if you can't make it for the full weekend.

THE VENUE

The Headlands Hotel is familiar to those who have attended in the past and offers plenty of gaming room for the whole weekend, Meals and good beer are also available in the hotel, and numerous alternative food outlets are close by. The hotel is easily accessible from the M55 and the train station is a 10 minute walk away. Bed and breakfast is available from just £30 per person for a shared room or £42.50 for a single room.

THE COST

The weekend, whether you enter a tournament or just play games with the people you will meet, is fantastic value at only £15.00 if you register before 24 February 2019 (entry is £20.00 after that date).

HEROES 2019 HOTEL BOOKING FORM

To book your room simply fill in this form and send it with a cheque for £10.00 to cover your deposit (payable to HEADLANDS HOTEL) to Headlands Hotel, 611 New South Promenade, Blackpool, England, FY4 1NJ. You can also telephone them on 01253 341 179 to book your room.

NAME							
ADDRESS							
NIGHTS ROOM REQUIRED FOR (tick each one)							
THURS		FRI		SAT		SUN	
SINGLE ROOM				DOUBLE ROOM			
NAME OF PERSON SHARING WITH							

My ASL Life

A Reflection

Alan Hume

Well, yes, I've been playing since back in 2008/9 but I must admit I still consider myself a bit of a 'newb', I mean I still haven't played OBA or Pacific (let alone Night games) and I only ever manage to get in about one game a month if I'm lucky and I've never yet been fortunate enough to take part in one of those giant MEGAgames that you see being played at the tournies (maybe one day). So while I've been playing now for nigh on ten years it doesn't really feel like it (but at least I've taken the time to read the rulebook front to back, can't remember much of it but still) and, as I say, I still feel a bit of a 'newb'.

to discover *ASL* though, all those years of solid gaming yet I missed out (I guess I was always more focused on miniatures and *D&D* though rather than American boxed games, guess it's a British thing). *Squad Leader*, let alone *ASL* was barely on my radar.

I do remember though that a friend's older brother had copies of *Squad Leader* and *Cross of Iron* lying around back in the day but we were much too busy playing *Dungeons and Dragons* to pay them much attention (*D&D* is a great game though, Gary Gyax and Dave Arneson did us all

proud with it but, yes, it is vastly different from *ASL* but there's no reason why you can't play both, just ask Dave from the 2 Half Squads). A missed opportunity there I think, imagine, if I had taken up the game back then just how many games I could have under my belt now (maybe even as many as Dave from the 2 Half Squads :-))

So when I was finally introduced to *ASL* (thanks Rod), it was a confusing time, the game was expensive, crunchy, very crunchy and rather hard to find (it sure wasn't available at my friendly local game store, though now they will get it in stock



if you ask nicely). And of course, there was that darned rule book to get through. Still, I persevered.

Overall I found that buying into the game was hard, I experienced what many other newbs have discovered that much of the game I desperately wanted to play wasn't available (unless you were willing to pay exorbitant Ebay prices). I was lucky in that I could get *Beyond Valor* and even *For King and Country* (it was still available at that time) but a new copy of *Yanks* was a long way (read YEARS) off and don't even mention *Red Barricades*. If I wanted to play Stalingrad I would have to take my chances with Rod's old battered copy. Luckily I bought a copy of *Festung Budapest* when it first came out so at least I didn't miss out there (I still haven't actually played it though I have punched, and clipped, the counters). Regardless, overall, the experience of trying to buy into the game was not like anything I had come across before (every other game I ever played I jumped in at or near the start so never had to worry about anything being out of print) and it was, to be honest, rather off-putting (but still at least I had the British). And there was so many different manufacturers to consider, what to buy? Who to buy from? Most games I played had only one company behind it, *D&D* with TSR say (though of course there was always the excellent Judges Guild to consider) but *ASL* had a myriad of different manufacturers each vying for your gaming dollar. What to do? Well, I guess like many others I vowed to only buy 'official' MMP products but, being honest, that didn't last too long as there was simply too many other 'kewl' goodies out there to get my grubby mitts on (and not all of them expensive either), there was *Schwerpunkt*, Lone Canuck and of course the indispensable Le Franc Tireur *Rat Charts* (not to mention Battleschool's awesome dice). My collection grew but still I wasn't satisfied I wanted a nice, new, shiny copy of *Yanks* and I was overjoyed when MMP finally released it (so much so that I had to buy two copies :-)) I guess the Americans are my favourite *ASL* army (not Olli's though), even though they seem to break all the time. Too many Clint Eastwood movies perhaps?

Still, what have I learned, what have I actually gained from my time pursuing this most vexing of pastimes? Is it any different to any other game that I've ever pursued. Well, yes to be honest, yes it is. *ASL* is so darn thorough and all encompassing that it's not so much a game as a lifestyle and it's adherents are almost religiously attached to it. There is much to be said for this. *ASL* truly is a game that people care about and dedicate a whole lot of time too (time that perhaps could be better spent elsewhere but I doubt it) but the game gives back, it's not

a one way street. Still, I guess playing and learning *ASL* is a lot like learning a foreign language, you get back what you put in.

I have to admit I have made many friends through *ASL* (or got to know old ones better) and I have to admit that I'm not a person who makes friends easily, I suffer from paranoia so life is difficult enough at times without throwing other people into the mix. But yes, I have made some really good, true friends through playing *ASL* (and they accept me even with the paranoia which is more than I can say for some of my old friends who I never see anymore and I'm beginning to think have probably ditched me).

So not only have I got an all consuming hobby (gotta clip those counters, gotta clip those counters!)

I have made new friends who, fingers crossed, I hope will stick with me for the long haul. I've learnt a lot too, I've rediscovered my love of WW2 (I grew up listening to my WW2 vet Dad's stories) and have thrown myself back into the books in a big way, so much so that I have (for a while now) been having a go at writing my own *ASL* scenarios and, for the most part, I have been enjoying it, it's a challenge, it's educational and it diverts my paranoid brain from worrying for a few minutes at least (focusing on *ASL* really does help me as it pushes all the paranoid crap out for the duration of the time that I'm fixated on *ASL*, it's not just a game it's therapy!) Pete has been kind enough to publish some of my scenarios here in *View From the Trenches* and, together, we hope to publish a charity scenario pack based on the actions of the Royal Scots. Exciting stuff! I'm rather proud of some of them I must admit, 'Tiger at Bay' featuring late war Italian fascist forces is certainly different and the only thing stopping me from doing more scenarios based on the RSI is simply the language barrier, I just could never find enough information on them in the English language so I guess I'll leave that one to the Italian players out there (though, admittedly, they might not want to cover this seeing as the RSI were the bad guys and all). Honestly, I'm surprised there isn't more out there on those guys, they were German equipped and trained for the most part so a tad more together than your average *ASL* Italian (a nationality I don't believe is well represented in the system, their elites at least should be truly elite, after all, a para is a para is a para whatever country he belongs to, you just don't mess with those guys).

The game itself is a challenge (and then some!), truly, *ASL* is the most complex, the most detailed game I have ever (in all my many years of gaming) come across. Sometimes the game feels like it is needlessly complex and just being

deliberately obtuse (those are the days I throw my rulebook at the cat in disgust, he ducks luckily I wouldn't want to have to pay the vet bill if that baby hit him) but most days the logic filters through and I manage to grasp the reasoning behind the crunch (I still feel very sad to think that Don Greenwood seems to have left *ASL* behind after all, it was his baby, but still, that's his right and it's not for me to say otherwise).

I went down to HEROES 2018, my first ever *ASL* tournament and while I only lasted one round (abandoning the tournament to concentrate on playtesting some Royal Scots scenarios) and most certainly had a paranoid attack worrying that I had offended folks when, patently, I hadn't it was a very worthwhile experience. I got to meet many *ASL*ers both folks I already knew and folks I didn't and learned a trick or two by playing new opponents. It was fun to see everybody's kit and their individual solutions to that age old problem, 'how do you store your counters'. Olli put me onto *RAACO* and I have been buying the cheap Chinese knock offs ever since. I think it is the perfect storage solution for sure and, if you buy the imitation stuff, not too expensive.

I plan to attend HEROES again next year so John Martin, Pete and me will be rolling down the highway playing some loud music and hoping for a win in Spring again next year. Road Trip! I have to admit I am very much looking forward to it. Pete was good enough to book me in early so that I don't miss out on a room this time (I didn't know if I could make it or not this year and by the time I decided to go all the rooms were taken).

I must admit the hotel was excellent, friendly people, great food and cheap beer!! Pete really knows his stuff and a better, smoother run tournament I don't think you will find anywhere (though Pete likens his events management style to that of a duck, smoothly floating on the top of the water, serene and calm while underneath his legs are paddling away like crazy!)

So yes, I have gained much from discovering *ASL*, possibly more than all my other years of gaming put together (I've been playing games all my life, first family games with my folks in the seventies and then *D&D* etc from about 1980 on) and I only wish I had discovered it sooner. Still, for what years I have left before me I hope to be bellying up to the table and getting down to some serious *ASL*. After all, life's too short not to.

Ω

Objective: Schmidt Review

Craig Benn

I'll start by listing the reviewer's (known) prejudices. I'm a big fan of BFP and have most of their stuff but not everything. I like some (but not too much) chrome, prefer combined arms to pure infantry, and love PTO. What I like most is variety – my ideal product is *Blood & Jungle*, lots of different nationalities and tactical situations. Fortifications and OBA welcome. My nightmare boredom product would be *another* Stalingrad city fight with stacks of elite Germans.

So for me the designer's main challenge in *Objective: Schmidt* (henceforth *OS*) is to stop it all feeling a bit samey. Not a problem for *Blood & Jungle* (*B&J*), and even *Crucible of Steel* (*CoS*) had lots of different AFVs, another 'nationality' in the SS, and intricate defences.

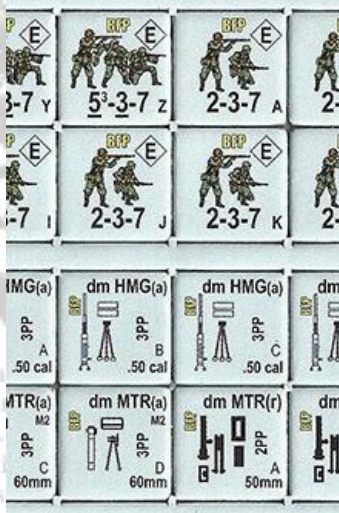
OS has fewer scenarios (17) than either pack. It is ...a bit like a historical study - but with no geoboard scenarios. The nearest equivalent is *Valor of the Guards*... but with only one campaign and two unconnected maps. The scope of the fighting is limited to a six day period in early November between the US 28th Infantry Division and a hodgepodge of Germans. BFP have made some good design choices to cut down on that samey-ness feeling...but the nature of the beast is what it is.

Production Values

It is *shiny*, as you would expect from BFP. Metaphorically shiny because it looks pretty and literally shiny as the maps are quite glossy. One thing missing is a magazine with historical information/designer notes/articles – I have to say damn the additional cost this makes me sad.

Counters

Two full sheets of 1/2 inch counters and one of half sheet of 5/8 inch. Normal



BFP fare - a bit brighter than their MMP counterparts with coloured silhouettes and a watermark. Mine didn't have any printing issues and were nicely centred. They were however quite loose – ready to drop out and start playing straight away.

Most are duplications of existing counters to allow you to play all the scenarios and campaign with just *Yanks* and *OS*. The usual Infantry and leaders for both sides as well as extra Shermans, M10s and PzIVs. There is quite a bit of captured Russian and American equipment in German colours including some SU-152s as well as some older German machine guns. The Americans get the M29 Weasel which is a double small, fully tracked un-armoured transport.

Wait a cotten-picking minute...no?!...they wouldn't dare surely...not even Critical Hit would...well actually Critical Hit already have...but BFP? You realise Mark Pitcavage is gonna be pushed completely over the edge when he sees this?...

5-4-7s dude. 5-3-7s too. Both sides assault engineers have left the path, jumped the shark and gone rogue. I mean I can see the need for non-uber engineers generally - and the particular reasons cited in *OS* (casualties and rebuilding) are reasonable enough. Still surely it could have been done with a mix of 5-4-6/6-6-6s and 5-4-8/4-4-7s and some additional SSRs?

Maps

Wow. I think there may be some map overcompensation issues here. The Schmidt/Kommerscheidt map is absolutely *feckin* huge. The hexes are large than normal size – 28.5mm vs 21mm at widest point. I reckon this is about 35% bigger than a

standard *ASL* mapboard hex but of course seems even bigger because the *area* is $1.35 \times 1.35 = 1.82$ (unscientifically). Now if that wasn't enough, the entire battleground is 52 x 44 hexes big. How big a table do you need? You need a big *feckin* table. Again unscientifically I reckon 4 feet 10 1/2 inches by 3 feet 2 1/2 inches. It isn't one map of course but four - as a single map that big would probably warp the fabric of space-time.

The two Vossenack maps are ridiculously huge as well – they might have normal sized hexes – but collectively they're...*well...Eighty six* (that's right eighty six) hexes long by thirty hexes wide! That's 5 feet 2 inches by 1 foot 10 inches of your table gone right there.

But are they purty? Sort of – it's *Hex Draw* rather than hand painted but none the worse for that. They do however look like the sort of cold rainy November battlefields they're supposed to represent. There are mainly stone buildings of various villages and not a lot else except wind and rain swept hillside. There is a *lot* of open ground and a lot of elevation changes. Slopes and barbed wire fences for variety. The Schmidt map has 11 different levels and Vossenack 14 – in fact the browns start to look a bit similar on the latter.

Despite this being part of the Hurtgen battle there are virtually no woods – the Americans had broken through one belt and got into the open. There are plenty of long open lines of sight – all in all terrain that heavily favours the defender.

And yes - some of you will want to laminate these pretty quickly to avoid creasing.

The Rules

SSRs; these are not too outlandish. One thing I like is that surrender cannot be refused, and Berserkers don't kill Prisoners. This fits with what happened historically – a US aid station treated wounded of both sides and was overrun by the Germans who let them get on with it. Given that the default CG setting seems to be No Quarter and Hand to Hand, this is a nice change.

Cellars only exist in multiple-hex buildings but there is an extra 0.5 MP for vehicles to cross each hexside to represent the near-mud conditions and ten consecutive turns of rain creates mud.

The only "grudge" SSR's are fortifications with HIP units in them are also HIP in concealment terrain (seems



reasonable) and US CE armour leaders in a M4A3 increase ROF to 2 (meh –but I can live with it).

Scenarios

Do you think there might be a high proportion of big scenarios with lots of squads and lots of AFVs?... well if you thought that *you might just be right*. There's also lots of OBA – only three scenarios have none, four scenarios have one side with OBA but not the other, and the remaining ten give both sides OBA.

Is it overkill? Well, 'OS6 General Fleig' which is not *that* large, pits 26 German squads and 8 vehicles against 13 American squads and 3 vehicles. Yet it has 3 German (all 70-80mm) and 2 US OBA modules (80 and 100mm) and a (one use) US fighter bomber (the air force's only appearance).

I'm in the not overkill camp. I like OBA generally, it's a needed antidote to kill stacking and more realistic to include it. Other opinions may vary of course – I'm just warning you. Chas Smith has tried to compensate for the inherent randomness sometimes with a SSR that makes every chit draw black – except extra draws for concealment. I'm not sure I approve as both sides sweating the chit draw is part of why

OBA is fun...it certainly makes the OBA more powerful, but given attackers generally have to cover a lot of open ground it *may* be needed.

The OBs also seem pretty SW heavy at times – to use just one example in 'OS-3 Schindler's Limp' a group of 13 squads from a German fortress battalion has no less than *nine* machine guns. You realise the inherent squad FP includes one squad MG don't you Chas?

Chas Smith is indeed the designer of all 17 scenarios, with 10 (and the CG) on the Schmidt/Kommerscheidt map and 7 on the Vossenack map. The initial US attack on the former villages met very little resistance, and the fighting largely involved a desperate (and ultimately doomed) US defence with little counterattacking. Accordingly nine out of ten scenarios involve German attacks.

The fight for the Vossenack ridge had a bit more to and fro – four of the seven scenarios involve American attacks including the monster 25 turn 'OS17 The Worst Place of Any'. As this has variable purchases for both sides, you might be excused for thinking this is a substitute for a CG on the Vossenack map – but it isn't - as it just covers the initial US attack on 2nd November.

Of the 17 scenarios, only

two could be classified as small (with a combined OB of less than 20 squads), and another 3 as "medium-small" (in the 20-25 squad range). Most are large but not huge, with the ones on the Schmidt map generally a bit larger, for example seven out of its ten scenarios have 20 or more German squads.

The real monster is 'OS5 Disaster at Schmidt' which uses just over half the map with 70 German squads and 23 vehicles against 52 American squads with no vehicles or A-T guns. They do get three OBA modules including a 150mm and some A-T mines. And a more detailed look at the US OB reveals no less than 23(!) ROF3 weapons (8 HMGs and 6 .50cal HMGs and 6 60mm mortars and 3 81mm mortars).

To me that immediately sets alarm bells ringing – any German squad that shows its face is going to be broken and double broken into nothing. Maybe you really do need all those vehicles to make any progress and the oodles of ROF3 mortars are the A-T weapons in lieu of the missing guns. But *really?* In my opinion too many high ROF weapons just eliminates the skill element and turns things into a dicefest. I also doubt it's historically justified as a HMG should require stacks of ammunition, and the Americans main supply route - the Kall trail- was impassible to wheeled



transport and barely passable to tracked vehicles. It smacks of putting in either historical or TOE allocations of weapons – but the overarching principle shouldn't be a 1:1 counter/weapon ratio. *ASL* support weapons tend (again in my opinion) to be overpowered in the game engine – the correct principle should be 'design for effect' – put in as many as are needed as long as it's not too outlandish. Having not played this yet I can't say for certain there *isn't* the right amount of SW – but I suspect.

One good thing – and very much in line with modern scenario design principles – is the lack of -2/-3 leaders. There are only a handful scattered across all 17 scenarios and the vast majority have none.

Another positive is the comparative lack of elite troops. The Americans start the early scenarios with approx 50% 1st liners and 50% 2nd liners and deteriorate a bit as the fighting goes on. The Germans are all over the place with plenty of conscripts and second liners representing Ost and fortress battalions but also some elites and 1st liners.

Here is my experience of playing the scenarios...

OS-1 Conscript Counter (5.5/10)

This is very much the classic story of resistable force meeting movable object as 6 morale Americans attack over open ground against ELR1 German (actually White Russian) conscripts. It's a neat concept and there's something oddly compelling about playing such a terrible OB. In theory the Yanks should constantly break and rally while the Germans - skulking in stone buildings - will disrupt and surrender as soon as a MC comes their way. *Except...* the VC involve there being only two or less Good Order German squads at game end. It looks pretty easy to put 2.5 squads in houses at the SW edge on high ground. It's going to be very hard for the Americans to even get into LOS of there by game end, particularly if it rains.

In my one playing I didn't even need to do that, by concentrating my defence on the high ground and skulking, the GIs were kept comfortably at arm's length. My opponent rated this a 5/10 and I'd only give it a 6. Nice idea but flawed execution.

OS-3 Schindler's Limp (8/10)

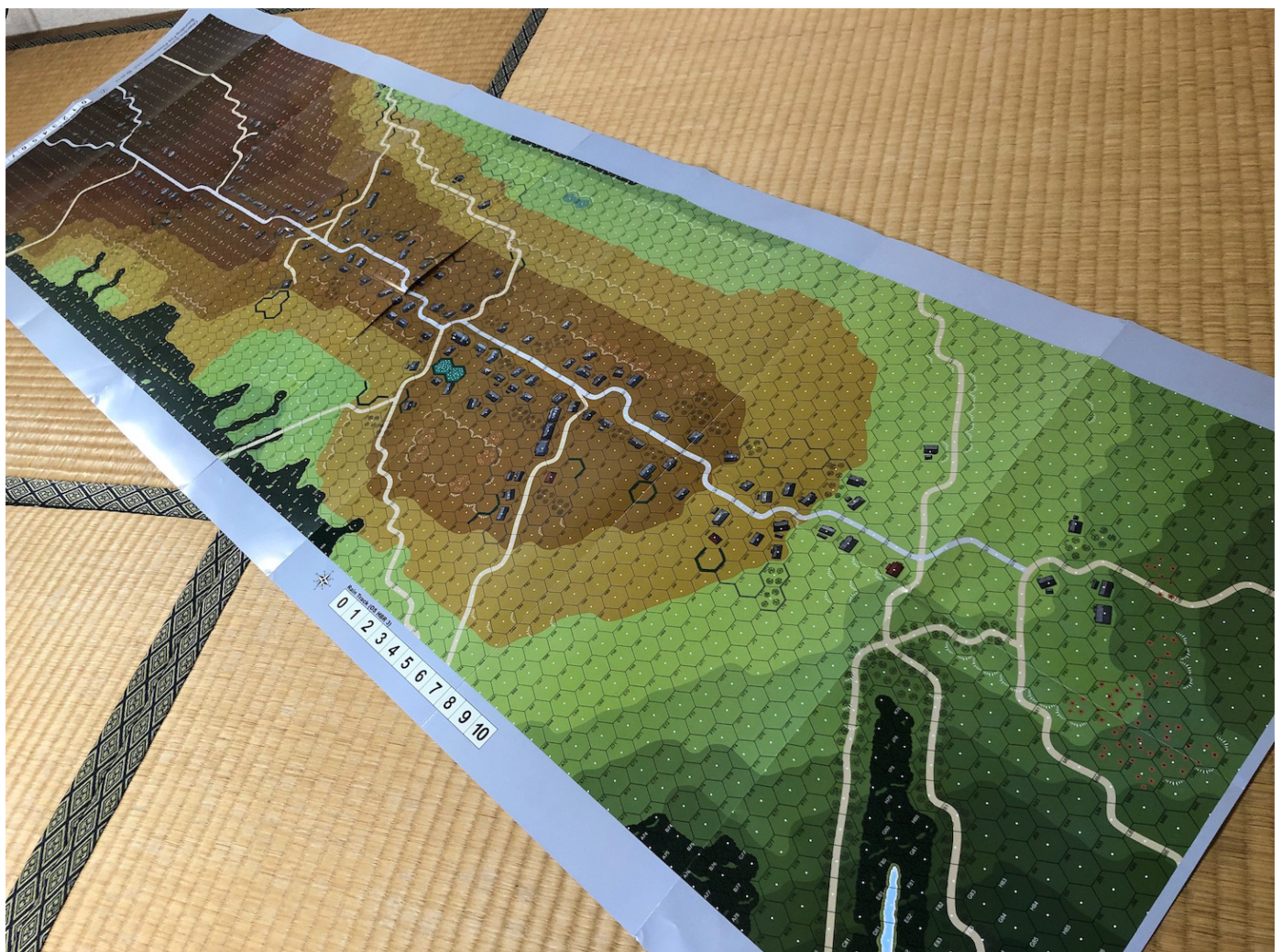
13.5 squads of Americans face off against 24 German who also get 3 Jagdpanthers and four Panzer IVs. That may sound uneven but low quality troops,

staggered entry and attacking over open ground against 3 heavy and two medium machine guns as well as two 60mm mortars make it a more even proposition.

The Germans have to capture about half the buildings in the US set up area in 7.5 turns. On turn 1 they get 15 mainly conscript squads who really have to attack up a narrow finger of stone buildings. This leaves them quite bunched up to the US OBA. In my playing I was lucky this deviated but even taking it slow and careful the conscripts really suffered. In fact getting them adjacent to key positions so they disrupt and surrender can be a useful tactic – Guards can't shoot if there are more prisoners than guards!

On Turn 3 the Jagdpanthers arrive with decent troops but their entry area is open and rain prevented smoke. Even with Armoured Assault and spreading out this proved unpleasant.

By turn 4 I really felt like I'd hit a brick wall having lost 6 squads and a couple of leaders without even scratching the Americans. It was particularly frustrating when having broken some squads I was unable to re-DM them for lack of firepower. Some barbed wire fences (which stop you CX'ing if you want to cross) prevented any maneuver to exploit a temporary opportunity. It wasn't like I was being silly





with my guys either.

Yet then within a turn the momentum completely swung. The Jagdpanthers were able to VBM, I won a melee, some key US positions broke through snipers/OBA/fire and the PzIVs came in on a flank. As the Germans you need patience and a decent PMC but it is doable. Even though losing my opponent really enjoyed it giving it an 8 (a good sign) – a little more frustrating for the attackers but I'd give it an 8 too.

OS-11 Kickoff in Hurtgen (6/10)

14 squads of Americans with 5 Sherman's attack down the Vossenack ridge against 7 squads of defenders. The Germans lack any long range A-T weapons apart from a single 50mm mortar, and some scarce 80mm OBA. The VC are absolutely brutal though as the Yanks only get 7 turns to control all the buildings in the German set up area and have a 21CVP cap with Immobilized tanks counting (and 6 AT mines to dodge).

My opponent hated this giving it 5/10 and conceding on the 3rd turn after the German MMG did some fearsome shooting and a HIP schrek toasted a tank. He thought it was impossible to clear the full VC area in time. I think he's wrong – it certainly looks tough, but it was a poor attack. The tanks Smoke and WP are the key to getting forward and with 6 morale troops you can't afford to give too many -2 shots. It has a nice asymmetrical feel to it but it does look a long way to go so I'll give it a 7/10.

OS-14 Drive 'Em Out (7/10)

The smallest scenario in the pack with 11 squads of pound shop assault engineers (5-4-7s) counterattacking 6 squads

of Germans. No doubt it will see the most play as its only 5 turns and takes about 2 hours to play.

The battlefield is in the middle of the Vossenack ridge and the US have to seize most of the on-map buildings. My opponent was lukewarm giving it a 6/10. He considers himself an aggressive player but ran out of time to clear all the defenders and thinks it's pro-German. I disagree again giving it an 8/10 – while time will tell if it's balanced I thought he was unlucky in his morale checks and it could have gone the other way. The Americans certainly have to push hard and take some risks as the entry area is very open (though wide) but the defenders are brittle. Certainly fun to play.

The Campaign Game

Ultimately of course, most people are going to buy this for the Campaign Game – it's not as if the *ASL* community is short of scenarios. And I think this is where OS stands out.

There's definitely a gap in the market for a CG that is beginner friendly and light on rules but still gives interesting choices for both sides. OS ticks nearly all the boxes.

Why is it good?

Seven dates is about right, with no night dates (5 German & 1 US attack chit)

CG rules are basically a stripped down version of Red Barricades with fewer terrain types and no reserves (pay for on map set up, retain off map or move them from the board edge).

A real minimum of CG chrome, and the only terrain type beginners will be

unfamiliar with is barbed wire fences and slopes (and a slope article is provided)

Very different feel to the typical city fight

Decent armour game as you get enough CPP to buy some toys and there are long LOS

Toys especially for the US are cheap, and there's enough points left over after maxing out on infantry to make them worthwhile buys

Lack of HMGs and -2/-3 leaders. Infantry companies get MMGs at best and there are few negative DRMs on the leader tables.

Real mix of troop quality

The rhythm of the campaign is

1) A strong initial German attack blunted slightly because the bulk of their forces has to cross a decent chunk of the map before getting into contact

2) The Americans if they can hold on start getting a modest advantage in CPP to catch up

3) On Date 6 of 7 the Germans get a lot of extra points and can buy Panthers *and* get a -2 historical DRM for a last gasp attack. Even if the German player isn't making much progress this will encourage him to see the CG out to the end.

The only downside is that one side defends while the other attacks and campaigns are more fun when you get to do both. It lacks the ebb and flow of *Kampfgruppe Peiper* or *Riley's Road* but it's hardly unusual in that. A related point is

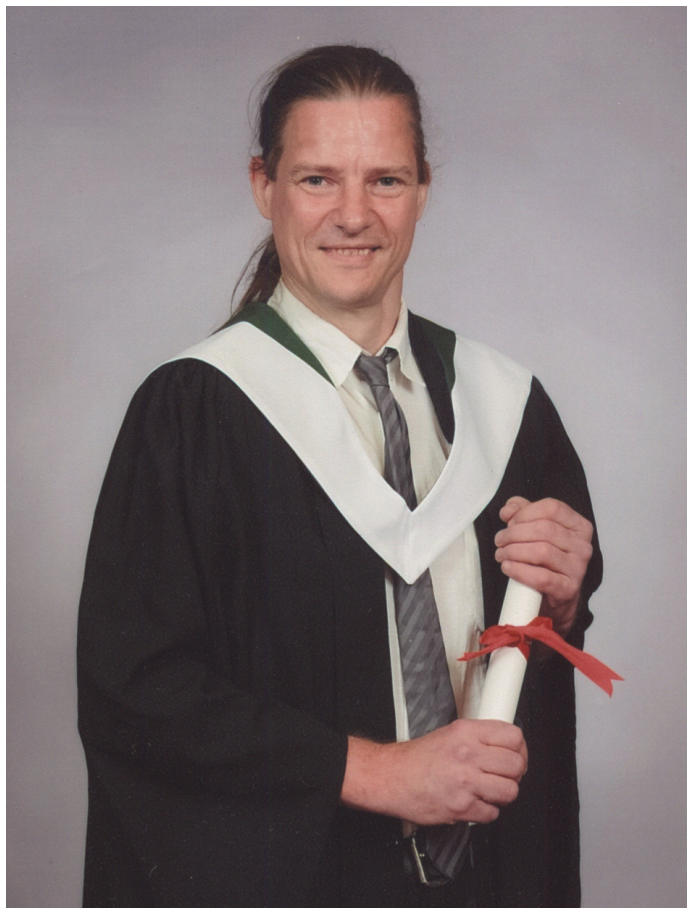
that the CG starts with the Germans having already retaken Schmidt. A good third of the map is not really going to be fought over. I can see the sense in this, but a second larger 12 date campaign covering the initial American attack and the Schmidt fighting might have appealed to some.

In Conclusion

Ultimately *OS* falls into the nice to have rather than must have category – but it’s pretty darn nice. There’s a very different feel to the fighting – both sides are quite fragile and poor play will get brutally punished. The attacker in particular will have to make the most of their assets and you’ll have to rethink the overall balance between Prepping and moving. This most certainly isn’t Stalingrad.

The campaign looks small enough to be playable but meaty enough to appeal to both beginners and grogs. Meaty in OB choices but not in rules – there are only 5 footnotes. After a tendency to more and more chrome in CG’s this may well be *the* campaign game you’ve been waiting for. In some respects is a typical BFP product – the scenarios are too big but darn it’s pretty. Yet there’s a subtler feel to it, more of a problem solving vibe than a head on clash of strength vs. strength. It’s a worthy addition to their catalogue.

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Gained a 2:1 BA (Hons) Events Management degree after four years hard work, and celebrated the achievement with quite a few of these :-)

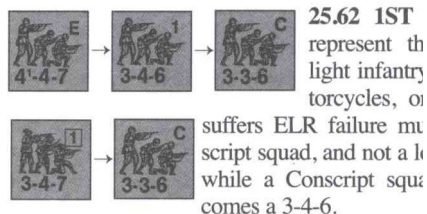
Words From Italy

About Infantry With 3FP And 6ML

M. "Oxpinguin" Lombardi

In 1990, after perusing my copy of *Hollow Legions*, I typewrote a letter to The Avalon Hill Game Company. I never got answer; maybe the postal sail ship got lost at sea. After twenty years I resort to new technologies to express the same concepts of then: Italian MMC – and generally all troops with 3 of FP – are too weak to suit in the *ASL* game system. You could think that this article has a chauvinistic interest or, worst, ideological: I state that *Advanced Squad Leader* has no power to amend, avenge or excuse anything. It's just a cardboard game and these words are just about that: gaming, enjoying the game. And the **ItASLIans** are not funny to play. My aim here is to demonstrate how the organization of values on the Italian counters is damaging the gaming experience.

In case you forgot, take your Italian counters from the *ASL* counter mix, look the values: the Italian Elite infantry squad is a 4-4-7 (smoke exponent 1) – like a 1st line Russian infantry, seldom smoking. There are two kinds of 1st line infantry, both with 3 factors of firepower, the 3-4-7 and the 3-4-6. Conscripts, native infantry, rear line units and ELR failed units are all represented by the 3-3-6. On their broken side non-Elite Italians' ML is lower by one – 5, usually.



The 3-4-7 is intended for the Bersaglieri and Carabinieri units, while the bulk of line infantry in scenarios should be represented by the 3-4-6, so Italian 1st line infantry sports both the weakest factors of their gaming system, only 3 of FP and only 6 ML – after the publication of *Armies of Oblivion* they hold firmly the banner of the weakest infantry in the game.

Moreover, these units are accompanied by rare leaders and support weapons prone to breakdown.

If you fight with the Italians you find that bringing them forward in face of moderate opposition could be a disappointing experience; in a fire fight against enemy infantry with 4FP the Italian fires on a "1-column left disadvantage," if you try to form FG, stacking or grouping ADJACENT, this exacerbates your ML disadvantage or makes you feel your lack for good leaders. Your MG break down,

your artillery fails to fall. There is nothing strange in reports of some gamers shunning the scenarios with Italian counters; they are too weak to normally contend against any enemy.

The reason for this leitmotif is intended to depend from the strategic weakness and unpreparedness of Mussolini's Italy for WWII. None can overestimate how much "imperial" Italy was not ready for a war when it declared in 1940, anyway this is not a reason for making the ten soldier group so weak at tactical level; Eisenhower is commonly quoted that four weapons had won the war; A-bomb, Dakota, Jeep and bazooka - so: who would exchange his bazookas for unarmed jeeps in a *ASL* scenario? The strategic level reflects on the tactical level through complex steps and you never got an explanation about the fact that a Greek squad is always absolutely stronger (not with better morale: stronger in firepower) of an Italian squad.

ASL Annual 89 contains an article about the Italian army, titled '8 Million Bayonets'. The article encompasses some part of modern Italian history, military analysis as for the early '40 and *ASL* reading of the Italian counters. Besides some minor imprecision, it describes how things are with the ItASLIans, not why they are this way, nor examines the effects of making a fighting structure in *ASL* with ineffective infantry as bones.

Turning all around the point of discussion to search for the causes of Italian feebleness at lower tactical level you could blame individual weapons; the rifleman ordnance was from the Mannlicher Carcano model 1891's family of bolt action, 6.5

mm or 7.7 mm rifles and carbines. These weapons have a bullet with low stopping power – even firing squads complained about it's inability to stun the victims when hitting non vital flesh – anyway it is able to kill like other rifles, moreover in our discussion is a fact that the Japanese also used a 6.5 mm bolt action Arisaka – and a 7.7 with a weak ammunition – and they had been granted a 4 FP for 1st Line infantry. So, it's not an individual weapons problem.

The lighter pain is the ML, it can be easily accepted that infantry has a 6 ML, they may always rally and Italians have the same GO "Morale profile" of the Americans, an effective army delightful to play.

Italian SW suffer also, by an hasty transformation in *ASL* counters: at that time there were yet the amount of details you find today on little gems like the Japanese 50* MRT and it seems that not much study was made on these systems. A foible, not the real weak point of Italian OOB.

The main weakness is in the firepower: a 3 of FP, coupled with the low morale, dwarves the normal Italian in front of any enemy on the *ASL* board. It seems that reflects how the Italian infantryman is not taking part in the fight like a Russian, a Belgian, a Pole does, how the soldato keeps the head down ignoring the efforts of the squad NCO – with ridiculous results. With the "1-column left" disadvantage against a 4FP army you must hope that the scenario's designer had given you overwhelming numbers to win a fire fight. A 3 FP squad is not even able to harm somebody sat in



Alpini of the Tridentina Division marching through a muddy valley during the advance into Greece in October 1940.

a stone building, in the same hex, at upper level; +3 DRM and the single Italian squad without a leader is unable to obtain a MC. Italian weakness defies war rules; if there are a few, one is that partisans are unable to resist against formed infantry without a tactical advantage. Not in *ASL*. Pit ten partisan squads against ten Italian 1st line infantry in any terrain in *ASL*, with a 7 ML against a 6 ML the partisan will win almost everywhere. Maybe they'll lose in the open desert, where the one hex advantage of Italian infantry in Normal Range could tell. Ah, yes, the infamous desert partisan.

Farce is hit in CC, with half squads. The Italian is reduced to 1 in FP, so falls victim to all enemies with a 2. A Yugoslav gun crew or four Britons stepped out of a Bren Carrier, attack an Italian infantry HS 2 to 1, and are attacked 1 to 2. Somebody could say that this reflects the morale weakness, but the Ancient Holy Book said that morale has no effect in CC. In *D&D* terms, the HS generated by 3 FP squads are the Kobolds of *ASL*. Untermenschen, underdogs, weaklings. The 3FP limping affects also the Axis Minors, that at least enjoy a ML 7 for 1st Line squads – nobody is as soft as the Italians – and the absurdity of that grading is touchable in several scenarios. The worst is scenario 'J48 Blood Enemies', by historicity and logic of counter mixes; it depicts internecine fighting between Serb and Croatian soldiers of the Yugoslav army, so the sides had the same rifles, same training and same doctrine, and anyway for the infantry the Serb use 4-5-7 counters, the Croat 3-4-7. This can be explained only with racist reasoning if not with the gaming fact that you have a bad counter mix.

EXERCISES IN IMAGINATION

All summed up, Italians in *ASL* induce a close combat frenzy in any enemy, players look with contempt to their OOB when setting up and designers have an harder time to make a suitable force for their ideas. There are combat situation that happened in the real war that you cannot re-enact in the *ASL* system because the counters do not suite to reality, with the Regio Esercito's battles this happens often. If you got convinced that the Italian infantry – and in general the line infantry with 3 FP – should be depicted in a different way, we could imagine a "house rule" solution. I read that somebody proposed Italian counters with higher values for new scenarios, I would prefer to imagine a solution that does not creates a dichotomy between "Old Italians" and "New Italians" and would allow to play all scenarios with the same counters, correcting the worst absurdities of the Italian line infantry without altering the balance – mainly in FP – on the map. Thus, I envisaged some solutions to the 3 FP comedy.



The crew of a 47mm anti-tank gun prepare for action somewhere in Russia in 1942,

A simple one could be to consider the Italian 3-4-6 and 3-4-7 like having 4 FP (and their HS 2 FP) when firing in Defensive Fire with PBF or TPBF, and in CC.

Another could be to make a full parallelism with the German counters: if the Italian elite squad is a 4-4-7, like the German 2nd line infantry, the Italian 1st line infantry, one step under, should be depicted by the equivalent of the German Conscript squad, the 4-3-6. 4-3-6 for the infantry, 4-3-7 for the Bersaglieri, without conscript drawbacks. Both these ideas slightly alter the quantity of firepower casted in the scenarios.

Daring to produce new counters, a third option I envisaged was to substitute each pair of 3-4-6s with two pieces, one each of different squads, a 4-4-6 and a 4-2-6, in the effort to maintain the balance of firepower and pursue what was the historical organization of Italian infantry at tactical level, at least on paper; in doctrine the Italian line infantry was organized in twenty men teams with two LMGs that was intended to split in two groups, a firebase element with nine men and the MGs and a "manoeuvre" 11-men all rifle element. Bersaglieri squads would be represented with non-Elite 4-4-7s and 4-2-7s.

An ulterior option would be to make a counter to represent the 1FP missing from action, the soldiers keeping under cover and not taking part in the fight until it becomes absolutely necessary. A 1FP SMC firing on enemy only when the enemy is very close and when keeping the head down would become suicidal more than taking part in the fight. This 1FP "soldier" counters should be stacked with all 3FP Italian squads at the moment this fires PBF or when CC combat is declared. It could be a 1-2-6 SMC that does not disappear. Use the Vehicle crew

considering it a SMC, like a Hero (taking note of the real vehicle crews appearing), that disappears if fails a MC, or is Wounded, remains alone in a hex, or is HOBbed into a normal Hero.

A complicated option would be to have the Italians in *ASL* "disaggregate" in face of close range combat: before firing PBF or in CC an Italian 1st Line squad is substituted by a 2-2-7 E HS, an HS of the type usually generated by the squad (an 1-2-6 or a 1-2-7) and a 1 FP "soldier" SMC. Under this options Italian non-Elite may not recombine.

Or as last idea, the 3FP non Elite squad is composed not of two HS, but by four "teams." 1-2-6 or 1-2-7 represents not a HS but half of it. When a 3 FP 1st line or lower squad suffer a K combat result or fails a MC while Broken they appear as two teams in place of the HS. A team is worth half of an HS for purposes of VP value, portage capacity, stacking, PP as passenger. Two teams may combine their portage capacity in a combined effort of 3 PP. A team has the Size, the ability to fire a SW and recombine like a HS; its CCV is 2 and one team may combine with another unit to give a "+1" to CCV like a SMC.

All these are just hypothesis, all to escape 3 FP factor's ridicule. If you believe that the 6 ML (5 broken) for 1st line saps your superior command ability with infantry, a rule leveraging on the collective and imitative behaviour of armed men under command could be that a non-DM broken 6 or lower ML MMC enjoys a -1 DRM to Rally when stacked with a GO leader and GO MMC.

These rules would make the Italians slip from the absurd effects of the 3FP

situation on the exchange for a more complicated way of playing with a short ranged army; enemies may play on Normal Range advantage, it's true, but I think that a game of outmanoeuvring and outranging will be more funny for both the players than one of out firing and overmatching by printed factors.

OTHER TRANSLATIONS FRON ITALIAN TO ASL

I take the chance to further discuss other characteristics of the Italian army in WWII in *ASL* terms. Concerning SW I'd modify three weapons.

Breda 30 LMG



This was an advanced and fine weapon – on the design table. Engineers were not aware of the practical problems of weapon deployment, so the problems rising obscured the design advantaged – if any survived the reality of combat. The advantages of a long barrel and the usage of the same cartridge of the infantry rifle were eclipsed by the facts that the Breda 30 was unstable, impossible to fire accurately without a rest, the rapid change barrel lacked an handle and the lubrication system needed continuous cleaning. Moreover its rifle bullet had a low energy and a rounded nose, making the Breda 30 a reduced threat even to the slightest armour. Reports of combat use I remember were all critical about this design. I'd reduce Normal Range to 4, the AP to Kill to 3 and give it the same breakdown profile as the PIAT: B10, R2, X6.

Breda 37 HMG



This sturdy system had a very low rate of fire and was fed with clips, anyway it was a successful design. Besides the detail that it was dubbed by designers as an "assault weapon", its heavy, long barrel, the 8mm bullet, a low rate of fire, and a lubrication system easier to maintain than the Breda 30's all allowed this machinegun to service long in action before overheating. It was an accurate weapon, with long range, reliable and the soldiers learned how to feed clip after clip for continuous fire.

The commanders deployed the defence around these systems and the soldiers made all efforts to keep the HMGs with them. Normal Range should be raised to 14 and B to 12.

The lightened "assault" version should be a counter FP5, NR12, ROF 2, B11, 4PP, R2, X5 and would be generated simply exchanging a HMG Breda 37 for it in a Rally Phase.

Brixia Light Mortar



This weapon also was an "assault weapon" and reported to be effective in Yugoslavia against partisan caves – both things do not realize in *ASL*, where light mortars are a quite ineffective against caves and a second choice in assaults. This is because the Brixia 45mm was a grenade launcher, a kind of weapon quite misunderstood in *ASL*. These systems were trigger fired and elevated at angles lower than 45°: at long range they launched their ammunition in an high trajectory to bombard like a mortar, at short ranges they were able to lob the grenade on a flat curve into enemy positions to hit soldiers defiled just behind a protection. All "grenade launchers" should be allowed to execute Direct Fire against Infantry Target Type at ranges from 1 to 4 hexes like a upper scored Gun, with ROF 1. According to statistics the following should also be treated as grenade launchers: US 60mm M19, British O.M.L. 2-in and Japanese type 89 heavy grenade launcher.

The Brixia was able to reach the same range both with flat and with curve trajectory, it was supplied with HE and SMOKE bombs, but in *ASL* the capability to lay smokescreens had been ignored. It might be allowed by SSR.

SIBERIA CONSCIOSNESS AND UNPREPARATION

It's well known how the Italians were sent in out-of-area operation with the same shoe from Libya to Russia. If this was a nuisance in the desert, it was lethal in Russian winter for the common infantryman. Alpini had a mountain boot and some units received valenki felt boots; the rest of the soldiers on foot risked to lose it and life in very frigid weather. So: Conscript Italian MMC suffer Extreme Winter penalties (E3.74) on a Original DR double 5 also.

On the other side the Italians sent to fight in Russia had received

indoctrination about the dangers of being taken prisoners by the Russians and sent to Siberia. That information didn't anticipate reality bad enough, of the men sent to prison camps they survived in a proportion that ranged from 10 to 25 percent only, depending from sources; the Italians tried to avoid capture by Russians and in several instances fled captivity when close to the front. In Russia HOB modifier for non-conscript Italian MMC is +2 and Ssurrender on HOB Final DR 10 or 11 is NA.

ITALIAN SPECIAL TROOPS Ascari

Italian colonial troops were formed in Africa since the start of colonization that was made from Rome more by money and local leadership than by colonist. Trusted commanders created a personal connection with their soldiers that fought bravely for their leader, often led against ethnic enemies. Until the war under fascist banners appeared as a fair bet, in Libya and Eritrea they sided for their masters; Ascari were good for light fighting and guerrilla, easily demoralized by artillery shelling. Their fervour plunged with the first invasion of Cyrenaica and the conquest of the A.O.I.; the most of personnel was dismissed or deserted and only a veterans remained under service showing a loyalty that defied defeat. From 1950 the Italian government is paying retirement fees to the surviving Ascari, in 2006 there were still 260 of them in Eritrea.

Askari are allowed by SSR and are used for indigenus infantry commanded by Italian leaders in Libya and in Ethiopia. Use Axis Minor counters. Askari vehicular crews are represented by 2-2-7 infantry crews. Askari are Stealthy. Askari suffer a +1 DRM when checking Morale in a hex under effect of a FFE counter.

Camicie Nere

Black shirts were organized in combat units taken from the ranks of the MVSN (Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza dello Stato, volunteer militia for the State's security), an armed militia own and originating from the Partito Nazionale Fascista of Mussolini. After their first good results against rebels in Libya in the late '20s they were more and more integrated in the Regio Esercito. They took part in the war against Ethiopia, Spanish Civil War, in all campaigns in the Second World War.

After the Armistice the Black shirts in the South, after disbandment of the MVSN, were absorbed in the Italian army under Allied-backed Badoglio government of the Regno d'Italia while the units in the North formed the backbone of the army of R.S.I., the republic lead by Mussolini in the territory under Axis control. These last units got different levels of support from the Germans – some unit being re-trained in Germany and armed to some extent with German weapons.



Italian soldiers (Blackshirts) during Operation Barbarossa

Black shirts were composed by nationalist volunteers, political fanatics, as much as patriots, people hoping in civil career advancements thanks to military service under Fascist party and people that hoped in avoiding the worst of the war by staying out of the regular army: until armistice, their results were amply different. The most of unit being under armed and badly commanded, and lightly equipped, this units where considered of little utility by the Regio esercito. Some Legion got forged by combat, the most failed the trial of combat, often when trampled by combined warfare or left stranded in lost battles; somehow usable in counterinsurgency the units easily broke discipline and behaved like an armed mob, looting and mistreating the civil population of invaded countries, being perpetrators of atrocities more frequently that the regular army. For that and for their political alignment Black shirts were an hated target of partisan activity and when employed in counterinsurgency showed no mercy with partisan or “suspects”. In the last part of the war, after absorbing former prisoners of the Germans, teenagers and die-hard veterans of Mussolini’s wars they were involved in the fits of civil war in Northern Italy and in ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia. Some of Black Shirts units fought with fanatic determination and got a grim reputation with the partisans and even facing regular Allied armies.

“Black shirts” will not surrender to Partisan via the RtPh method (A20.21). Partisan may Massacre “Black Shirts” and vice versa. In 1944 or later “Black shirts” may be granted by SSR Assault fire and panzerfaust usage, as much as no captured use penalty if using German or British SWs, and treat Germans as Allied nationality. For

most combat active units consider using directly German SS.

Arditi

These units root their origins in First World War, when Italian infantry regiments had a component of Arditi Esploratori (roughly translated as “bold scouts”) intended by Italian doctrine for aggressive reconnaissance. With trench warfare most of these men were squandered in actions in No Man’s Land. The survivors formed “death companies” that received volunteers as replacements and were officially formed in 1916. From them, small groups of hand picked soldiers were formed in groups to raid the Austro-Hungarian trenches and undertake infiltration and coup de main missions; Arditi relied on pistols, daggers and hand grenades for combat and excelled in night or fog-masked stealthy attacks. A kind of commandos, they obtained spectacular results as much as utter failures with total loss of the unit. At first the Italian High Command encouraged the idea of single soldiers specializing as Arditi commandos, but banned the institution of special units: only in 1917 the Italian Army formed official “Arditi” battalions at Army level to be used for special missions, with inherent flamethrowers platoons and sections sporting the world first combat proved submachineguns, the Villar Perosa 9mm MGs.

After the Great War Arditi veterans became involved in political turmoil. Arditiism was one of the ingredients of the early “Fascismo” recipe, while communist and socialist soldiers formed “Arditi del Popolo” units to defend lower classes suburbs from violence of Italian Freikorps. After WWII that involvement made Special Forces suspicious to the Republican institutions until the ‘90s.

The experience of Arditiism influenced the Regio Esercito in WWII because most of the officers had fought during the First World War and Arditi detachments were commonly formed in operative units; Arditi platoons’ presence is recorded in Russia, Libya, Greece. On one side the battalion commander had platoons to be trusted for the more dangerous missions, on the other pooling the best soldiers together sapped the strength of the other squads, spoiling the chance for experienced soldiers to teach the recruits at informal level.

Arditi usage is an option to the Italian player and is possible if in the Scenario uses A16 Battlefield integrity, the date is before April 1943, and there are at least 10 Italian Squad-Equivalents in play. The Italian player gets a number of “Arditi rolls” equal to one fourth (FRU) of the overall total of Italian Squad-Equivalents in play. He may spend a roll for “Arditi” on a MMC in a RPh and an individual Squad or HS can be “Arditi rolled” only once a turn and the results secretly recorded and displayed a game end or when the ability is used. The “Arditi roll” is successful on a dr lower than the ELR of unit rolled for. There is no damage for a failed “Arditi roll”. A successful “Arditi roll” Battle Hardens the rolling unit. A successful “Arditi roll” lower by two than the ELR of unit rolled for bestows also -1 CC/CCV DRM bonus. A successful “Arditi roll” lower by three than the ELR of unit rolled for bestows also Stealthy bonus. All bonuses are cumulative. Arditi Alpini are Commandos. An eliminated Arditi unit BPV value is counted three times for ELR calculations.

Ω

COMING SOON!

Le Franc Tireur 14

This issue will focus on the Italians and include two countersheets with new unit types.

Full color Italian counters!
Birds of Prey: Air Support explained
And a BUNCH of scenarios!

N°14 LE MAGAZINE DES FANTOMES D'ASL



THE SHAMBLES

Grumble Jones

The Shambles is one of the 16 scenarios that were printed in VFTT100. As I wrote there at the time, "they have only had a limited amount of playtesting so if you want a balanced game look elsewhere. But if you're interested in playing for fun, then give them a try, and let me know how it went." Which is exactly what Grumble Jones has done here.

For those of you who are not aware of his blog, Grumble Jones puts out one new ASL scenario every month, "offered for fun only and as a thank you to the readers of [his] blog" For a monthly dose of ASL fun, visit his site at <https://boxcarsagainasblog.blogspot.com/> - Pete



For our recent game Dan Best and I decided to try something new. We selected a scenario from *View from the Trenches*. Specifically, our evening scenario would be 'The Shambles'. This scenario set in the dark days of the Normandy Campaign was designed by Shaum Carter and Charles Markuss. To date there are no recorded playings of the scenario in ROAR or on the *ASL Scenario Archive*. This is a tremendous shame as this scenario is tremendous fun! And hopefully by the time this AAR concludes you will know two things:

- 1) This is an awesome scenario and
- 2) Canadians did not burn down the White House in 1812. We'll kind of skip over the whole Lundy's Lane thing...as just one of those historical misunderstandings between friends!

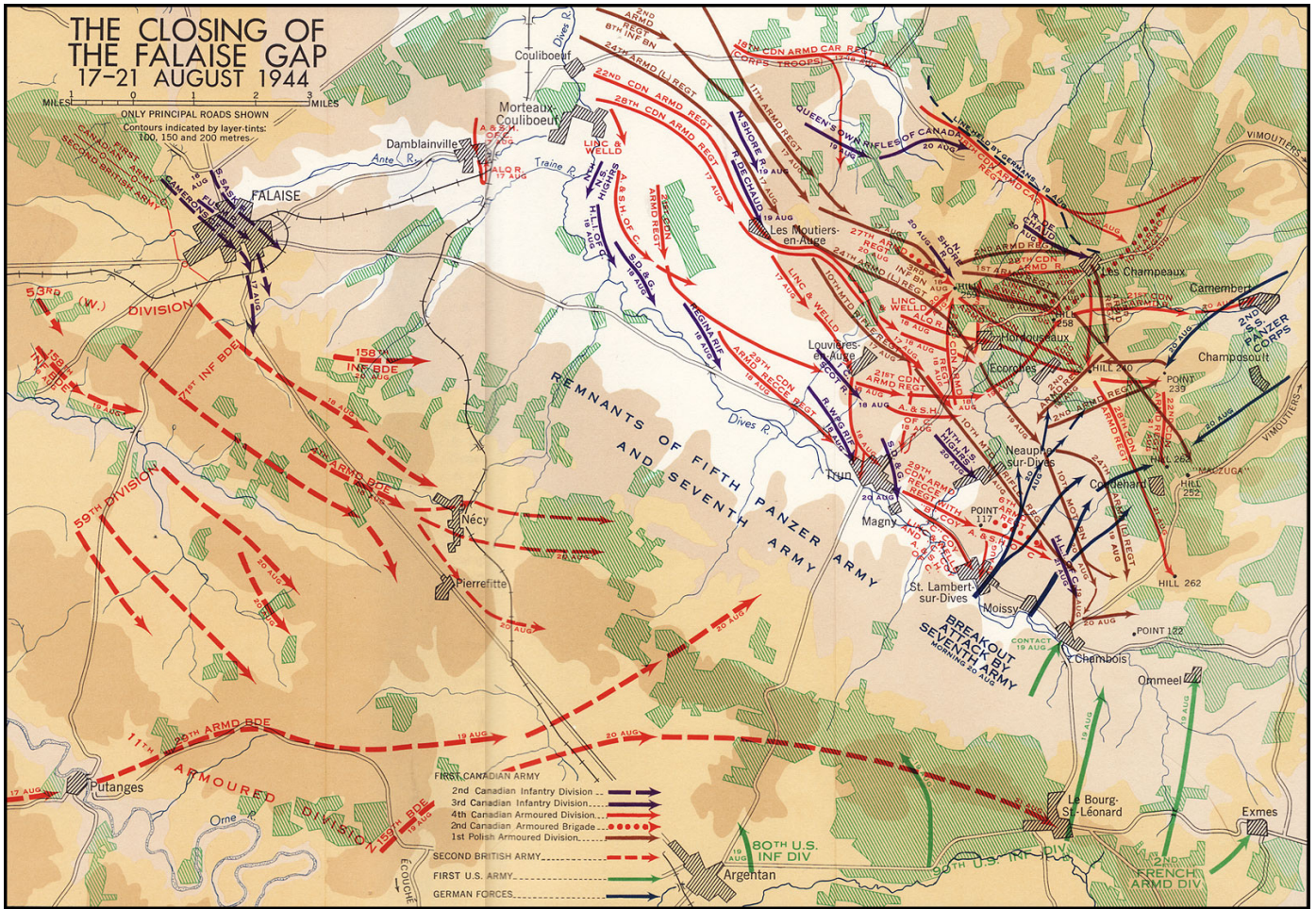
Those of you who are long time readers of Grumble Jones know that I am particularly fond of fielding Canadians in *ASL*. Can't really say why...but perhaps its in my blood. My Grandmother's parents were French Canadian. So a little French-Canadian to go with my Scots-Irish blood gives me some panache...eh!?!

At any rate, I really do like playing the Canadians and after rolling sides, I would end up commanding the Canadians and assume the role of scenario attacker.

BACKGROUND

In August 1944 the Allied attempted to seal the Falaise Gap and complete the elimination of the German Fifth Panzer and Seventh Armies. A successful effort would have dramatically altered the course of the war on the Western Front. As we know, the Germans did manage to escape with a large veteran cadre of panzer men and infantry, who would incredibly be refitted and back in action at the September battles at Arnhem and the December battles in Belgium. A nod





to the abilities of the Germans to keep their forces in the field.

‘The Shambles’ takes place at St. Lambert sur Dives, Normandy on August 19th, 1944. A Canadian Battlegroup led by Major D. V. Currie would be the main Allied force attempting to seize and hold St. Lambert sur Dives and halt the escape of the German 7th Army. It was a tall order, but one, which Currie and his Canadians would ultimately see to a successful conclusion.

The Canadians would find themselves matched up against the remains of the 21st Panzer Division. It would be an epic fight that would result in a Canadian victory as the Currie’s force took control of the village and went on to hold it for thirty-six hours against all German counter-attacks. An amazing accomplishment. The big question for me was...would I match the historical accomplishments???

Major D.V. Currie would be awarded the Victoria Cross for his conspicuous bravery in Normandy. His Victoria Cross would be the only VC awarded to a Canadian soldier during the Normandy Campaign and would be the only VC ever awarded to a member of the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps.

I believe the 9-2 Armour Leader included in the Canadian OOB represents Major Currie. I’m sorry to say that my 9-2 bit the dust hard in the scenario that follows. So many apologies. I lost him to a HIP 4-4-7 with a panzerfaust. I tried to keep him safe... honest I did.

SETUP

As the scenario defender, Dan would command elements of the 21st Panzer Division deployed as Kampfgruppe Rauche. Such a fitting name as Dan’s Germans would set this battlefield on fire. Smoke, smoke and more smoke as Dan burned the mutha-#@%\$@ down.

The 21st Panzer Division is one of the storied units of the Wehrmacht. They set the deserts of North Africa on fire with their exploits under Rommel and once reorganized would serve Rommel again in Normandy. They would be the only Panzer Division to counter-attack the invasion beaches and nearly retook Pegasus Bridge. They would fight hard throughout the campaign. And they would bedevil Patton in the Vosges before being dealt a truly bad hand and finding themselves in the Halbe Pocket. Seems almost criminal that they would be destroyed in the death spasms of the German Ninth Army at Halbe.

Dan’s force would consist of 6 x 4-6-7s, 2 x 4-4-7s, led by a 9-1 and 8-1 with 2 x LMGs, an MMG, an HMG, and a Panzerschreck. For support they would have 1 x Panzer Mk IV, 1 x Tiger 1, and 2 x 88L AA Guns. A tidy little force with some solid punch to hold onto a very narrow front with

THE SHAMBLES^{VO.12}

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HISTORICAL ACCOUNT

LOCATION: St. Lambert sur Dives, Normandy

DATE: 19 August 1944

COMMENTARY: As the battle for the Falaise Gap drew to a climax, troops of the Canadian 4th Armoured Division sought to close the exit for the retreating remnants of the German Seventh Army. Major D. V. Currie’s battlegroup of 175 men, 15 tanks, and 4 self propelled AT guns sought to occupy the village of St. Lambert sur dives.

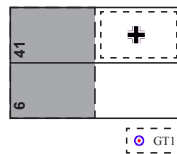
In the first of an epic series of actions, for which Major Currie was to be awarded the Victoria Cross for his conspicuous bravery and extreme devotion to duty in the face of the enemy, the Canadian battlegroup successfully occupied half of the village before being counter-attacked by the Germans. In the following thirty six hours, the Canadians succeeded in holding the village against repeated counter-attacks, thereby ensuring the fate of the encircled Seventh Army.



TURN RECORD CHART

+ GERMAN Sets Up First [xxxx]	1	2	3	4	5	6	END
o CANADIAN Moves First [xxxx]							

THE BATTLEFIELD AND CONDITIONS



Only hexes R-GG are playable.
Treat all Level 2 hill hexes as Level 1.
The stream is Deep.

EC are Dry with No Wind at start.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

The Canadians win by Controlling 50% of the buildings with a four hex radius of 41X5 (inclusive) at game end.

SCENARIO SPECIFIC RULES:

None

+ Elements of Kampfgruppe Rauche, 21st Panzer Division set on any whole hexes of mapboard 41. The German player may set up HIP two MMC and any SMC/SW which set up with them.
Balance: reduce the game length by one Game Turn.

ELR: 4
SAN: 4

o Elements C Squadron, 29th South Alberta Regiment and B Company, Argyll Sutherland Highlanders of Canada, 4th Armoured Division enter on GT1 between 6R10 and 6FF10 inclusive.
Balance: increase the game length by one Game Turn.

ELR: 4
SAN: 3

Counter artwork taken from Virtual ASL (VASL) and used with the permission of Rodney Kinney (programmer) and Carl Fung (artist).





terrain controlled access into the village. Throw in the Panzerfausts and this was a force to be reckoned with.



As the scenario attacker, I would command elements of Major D.V.

Currie's Canadians. This force would include elements of C Squadron, 29th South Alberta Regiment and B Company,

Argyll Sutherland Highlanders of the 4th Armoured Division. They would achieve everlasting fame during the fight at St. Lambert sur Dives.

My force would consist of 9 x 4-5-8s, 3 x 2-4-8s, led by a 9-1, 8-1, 8-0, and 7-0 with 3 x LMGs, an MMG, an HMG, 3 x Piats, and 3 x 51 MTRs. For support I would have 11 x 75* Sherman Tanks, 4 X 76LL

Sherman Fireflies, and 4 x 76LL Archers with a 9-2 Armour Leader.

YEAH BABY...that's a lot of armour...19 Tanks!!! Yeah bring on that one Tiger Tank...I'm ready for ya!! (Dan would bring on that Tiger Tank...much to my later deep regret. Never taunt a Tiger...it's not a good idea...just say'n.)

DAVID CURRIE

David Vivian Currie was born in 1912 in Saskatchewan, Canada. He joined the Canadian Army in 1940 and was commissioned as a Lieutenant. By June of 1944 he had been promoted to Major and given command of a squadron in the Canadian Armored Corps' South Alberta Regiment.

The unit was deployed to France in mid-June 1944 following the Normandy landings, and in August took part in Operation Tractable, the battle to capture Falaise.

Currie's small mixed force of infantry, armour and self-propelled anti-tank guns seized the village of St. Lambert-sur-Dives on August 20th and spent the next 36 hours fighting off repeated German attempts to retake the village and open a hole in the Falaise Pocket. In the end the German attempts failed, losing 300 dead and 500 wounded, as well as seven tanks, twelve 88mm guns, and 40 vehicles. 2,100 captured Germans surrendered to Currie's force.

In December 1944, Currie personally received the Victoria Cross from King George VI, the only Canadian to receive the Victoria Cross for actions during the Normandy Campaign. He is still the only Canadian Armored Corps soldier to receive a VC. He later reached the rank of lieutenant colonel, and after leaving the army served as Sergeant-at-Arms for the Canadian House of Commons.

Links

<http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/vcg-gcv/bio/currie-dv-eng.asp>
<http://canadianwarheroes.com/citations/world-war-2/major-david-vivian-currie/>
<http://www.canadaatwar.ca/page27.html>
<http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/war-conflict/second-world-war/general-22/homecoming-of-major-david-currie-vc.html>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Vivian_Currie



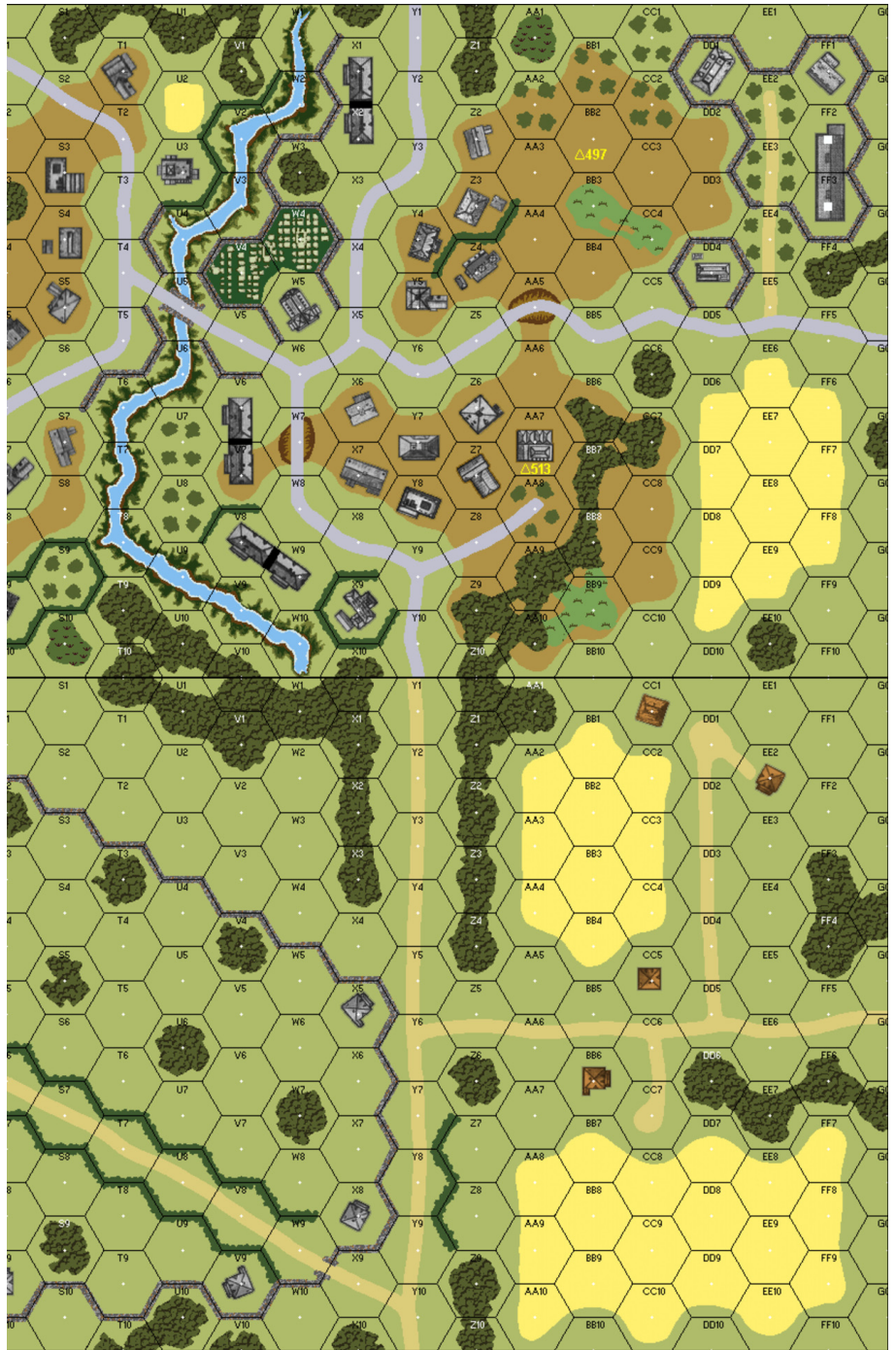
The Germans would set up on Board 41 with 2 x MMC HIP. I hate HIP squads... let me repeat...I hate HIP squads.

The Canadians would enter on Turn 1 from the south edge of Board 6.

There are no level 2 hills and the EC are Dry with No Wind. The dry part would certainly fuel the fires we would see in the later phases of the battle.

My attack plan was fairly restricted by the terrain. The best tank country was on the right and naturally I expected the 88s to be concentrated there. The centre would be controlled by German MGs and the left with the marsh hex would be a limited flanking opportunity.

So word of wisdom to the Canadian player...you will lose tanks...you will lose a lot of tanks...do not be troubled by this. These losses can be withstood. Lower your head and drive forward.



FOR CANADA

The battle begins. I placed my Fireflies on the left with my 9-1 and HMG. The rest of my force was headed up the middle and on the left. My objective was to get up to the centre woods as quickly as possible. My three mortars would be deposited behind the far left tree line. Their job would be to provide smoke for the Turn 2 Advance onto the hill.



Turn 1 went well for the Canadians... except on the left. The Firefly with my 9-1 and HMG would come under LMG fire.



And he would Pin and then on his bail Task Check roll a "12"...oh good grief... first roll is a 12. Wound severity would be a "5"...and Lt. Johnson had not only fallen off the Sherman...but was run over by it. Just like that my best officer was dead on the field....



After the trauma of watching their CO be crushed by one of their own tanks... my boys shook it off and made ready for Turn 2.



As I had feared...the right was a killing ground with both 88s and the Tiger 1 making mincemeat of my armour.



On the plus side, I knew the centre and left were without 88s...my 9-2 Armour Leader would advise the armour of the next phase.



In the centre, I would have a stroke of luck as my Sherman's MGs stripped the concealment of Dan's 8-1 and MMG. Unfortunately, I would MALF my MA (but thankfully fix it the very next Rally Phase.)



Turn 2 - my mortars made the two smokes I had planned.



Next up, my armour moved ahead full steam. Part of my thinking was to get Dan's Germans to fire the panzerfausts from inside of the stone buildings. But Dan's first HIP squad appeared with the Panzerschreck...but missed. "Big Thunder...no Rain." And then Dan couldn't initially roll a panzerfaust. This had the unanticipated consequence of final firing and/or pinning his infantry. An opportunity for my infantry had been opened. Dan would finally get a panzerfaust and knock out the lead tank on the centre road, but it would end up breaking the squad. Another lucky break for the Canadians.



As I moved ahead, I also revealed the second 88..ugh...



Back on the left. Dan's boys in the woods would end up being Dummies.



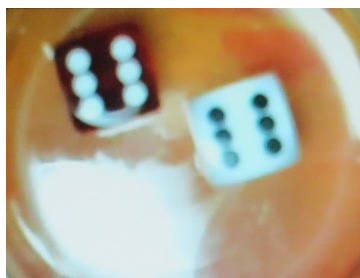
"Ha ha...the Canadians fell for it... they are shooting up the Dummy unit in the woods... ha ha..."



On the right, I decided to send more armour into the field of death. I wanted to keep Dan's Tiger 1 shooting and not moving. Of course neither option was really desirable...



But then another piece of luck came my way as the second 88 prepared to fire...



Dan would roll boxcars and MALF the gun.



With his 88 MALF'd on the hill, I could start sending tanks and infantry forward.



In the centre, I would go into CC with Dan's forward 4-6-7. They would hold me in Melee for almost two turns and take out a full 4-5-8, before I would finally eliminate them.



Back in the killing fields, more of my armour went up in flames. Nearly every shot was blazing wreck.



With most of my armour eliminated or fleeing on the right, Dan moved his infantry towards the centre. His 9-1 and HMG were needed.



As my armour blazed...it began to spread into the dry fields and woods. Flames were spreading....



Dan would move forces from both the right and the left flanks into the centre. The battle for village had begun in earnest.



On the left and centre, my forces plunged ahead. But disaster would befall me on the left flank. As my 9-2 Armour Leader guided his Sherman Firefly onto the hill...the second HIP German squad appeared and nailed me with a Panzerfaust. But Dan would also have more bad luck himself as he MALF'd his remaining 88.



In the next Rally Phase, Dan would destroy his 88. I would also destroy the other 88. I would take another risk and try to trail break through the woods on the hill. I would bog and this would soon have very dire consequences for that Sherman. On the left, my tanks were converging on the Mk IV.



The Mk IV was still in motion and when it attempted to stop in the next Turn, my Firefly would light it up.



After destroying the Mk IV...my Firefly would hear the ominous sound of a Tiger Tank approaching from the rear. I would swing my turret around and Intensive Fire. I missed, but I would be ready in my next Prep Fire. The Tiger missed with it's Bounding Fire shot.



In my Prep Fire, my Firefly would fire and take out the Tiger. With that, the Germans had lost their final anti-tank asset.



With the Germans reeling, my boys plunged into the village and began taking victory locations. I needed at least 10 buildings for the win.



Meanwhile the fire raging on the left exploded and blazed the woods hex with my bogged Sherman. The tank would be lost in the flames...yet another tank taken down.



At the conclusion of Turn 4, Dan's Germans were all either KIA or DM'd. My Canadians had the necessary building locations for the win, so Dan offered the concession and we called it game over.



CONCLUSION

It had been a tough and bloody fight for both sides. Canadian and German armour was burning throughout the smoke shrouded village. Infantry losses had also been heavy. But in the end, the weight of Canadian armour was too much for Dan's Germans. We both thoroughly enjoyed this scenario and would recommend it to those of you who have not played it. It is a free download form the *View from the Trenches* website.

As always, my thanks to Dan for another great Saturday of *ASL*. 'The Shambles' was one for the history books and I'll not soon forget our toe to toe struggle.

This AAR is dedicated to those Canadians who gave their lives for the cause of Democracy and freedom in Normandy.

Ω



Currie (left of centre, holding a revolver) accepting the surrender of German troops at St. Lambert-sur-Dives, France, 19 August 1944.

The BT series fast tanks

Michael Davies

In this article, I'll cover the early history and development of the BT series fast tank, describe platoon organization, and go on a bit about armament, engines and suspension. I will also try to very briefly outline the Soviet Deep Battle or Deep Operations Military Theory which influenced Soviet operations and tank design. Finally, I will give an outline of historical BT use by the Red Army.

Mechanization and Deep Battle

The Russian Civil War taught the Red Army a great number of tactical lessons, Cavalry was useful mainly for movement off the road and rail net, the value of heavy weapons or armoured vehicles in small company sized engagements was noted and the need for an operational approach to warfare. The Red Army "won" but fully expected further conflicts to develop along its borders.

In the 1920s the Soviet Union's strategic defence plan was to spread communism to other countries, encouraging civil insurrection or outright war then allying with them. This caused unrest in a few countries and did lead to warfare in Spain and China. The Red Army was in effect the second line of defence, based on a large citizen's army composed of factory workers and agricultural labourers, stiffened by professional soldiers, defeating enemy invasions by solid morale and numbers. Its first major conflict was against Poland; after some initial success the Red Army was roughly handled, outmanoeuvred and defeated. To their credit the Red Army and Soviet Government resolved to learn from the conflict, by building defences to slow attackers and by mechanising the army.

The strength of defences varies from mutually supporting concrete bunkers fronted by wire, tank defences and mines in Eastern Europe, to basic log bunkers on shallow hills patrolled by cavalry and armoured car units in Mongolia and the Far East.

Deep Operations or Deep Battle was an Operational Theory developed by the Red Army in the 1920s and 30s. It owed a little to the Brusilov Offensive of 1916 but had much greater scope. It was accepted that enemy defences consisted of several lines of defences, backed by further reserves, logistical and communications centres behind the lines. The depth of these defences was estimated to be 60-80 Km behind the front line. The greater the penetration of the enemy lines the more disruption any attack would cause. The basic operational

unit was the Front, composed of several infantry armies with a mechanised corps, air army, and cavalry division. Roughly 1000 tanks, and 1000 air units would be used. In Blitzkrieg similar strength units would be pushed down one road net, finding a way round strong defences leaving their destruction to supporting infantry. Deep Battle spread the attack over the front reinforcing any breakthrough success, and unusually feeding units into battles the Red Army was winning by destroying enemy units.

For Deep Battle operations the Red Army planned to produce four main types of armoured vehicles:

- Tankettes and armoured Cars for scouting, liaison, patrolling, and infantry support (T-27, T-37/38, BA-10, BA-20 and small numbers of other armoured cars)
- A light tank for infantry support and to assist the medium and heavy tanks (T-26)
- A fast tank for support and exploitation of a breakthrough and to support cavalry divisions (BT Series)
- Heavy and medium tanks to penetrate enemy lines (T-28 and T-32/35).

Several foreign tanks were examined with the aim of either adopting ideas or producing licence based copies. When looking for a fast tank design the Soviets were interested by the work of American designer and inventor J Walter Christie. His designs favoured fast lightly armoured and barely armed designs with a "convertible suspension" that allowed his tanks to be run on tracks in combat situations or wheels when travelling by road to the front. In 1930 the Soviet Union agreed with Christie to purchase two Model 1940 Pattern Tanks as well as patent and licensing for production

of copies in the USSR. Christie's greatest problem was obtaining an export licence, which he overcame by shipping two turret-less tanks as "Commercial Tractors". This sort of worked but annoyed the US Government when they learned of the deception, was rather disappointing for the Soviets, and cost Christie a forfeiture of \$25,000 from a £160,000 contract. That said two turret-less M1931 (Model 1940) were in Russia and work could commence on developing the design.

The BT-1 tank

The BT-1 designation was applied to an earlier fast tank design in 1927 which made very little progress and never made it off the drawing board.

In some respects, the turret-less Model 1940 tanks were the first in the BT series. Initial testing showed flaws in the design which started to worry Soviet engineers. The project was revitalised by intelligence reports that Poland was considering buying Christie tanks. At the time Poland was a credible external threat to the USSR and encouraged development of the BT series as a counter to Polish fast tanks. Curiously the Poles heard of Russian interest in the M1940 and cancelled their order to concentrate on developing their 7TP Tank based on the Vickers six-ton tank, which was also key to developing the Russian T-26.

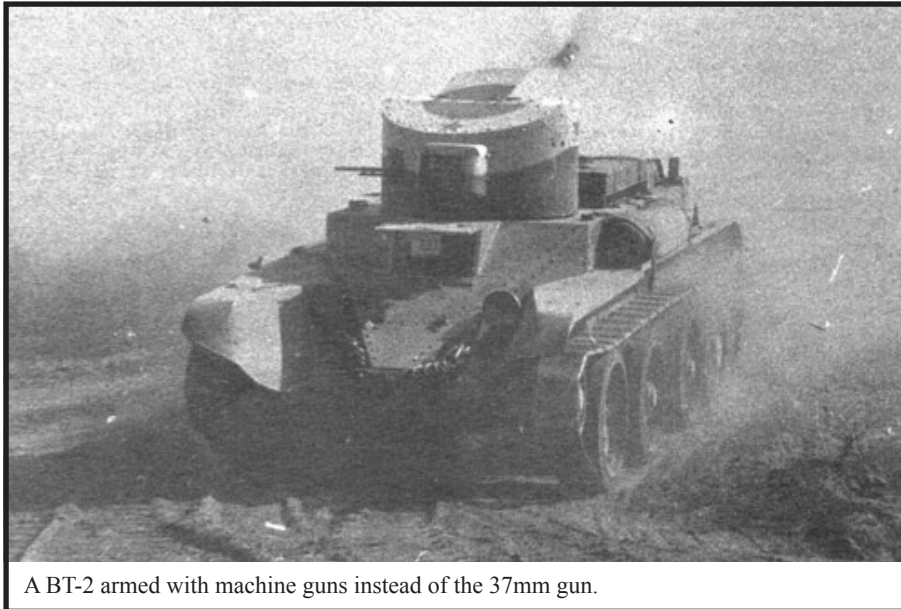
So, the Russians moved forward trying to develop an armed and turreted fast tank.

The BT-2 tank

The original Model 1940 design had a one-man turret originally armed with a single machine gun, then a 37mm



A BT-2 undertaking trials.



A BT-2 armed with machine guns instead of the 37mm gun.

gun was added. The Soviets opted for a simple conical design with a two-man crew of commander/gunner and loader. By November 1930 three tanks had been completed and had been armoured with mild steel plate. All three tanks took part in parades in Red Square.

Production accelerated in 1932 with nearly 400 Tanks being completed, a very small number still had mild steel turrets, and some mild steel hulls. By the end of 1933 a total of 620 tanks had been produced as production switched to the BT-5.

At the design stage the idea of arming the tank with a single machine gun was discussed. It was decided though that even a small gun and CMG would be more effective. The first gun considered was the 37mm PS-2 based on an earlier Hotchkiss design. However, the Red Army was producing licence copies of a German Rheinmetall B-3 (5-K) 37mm which was to be adopted as a standard artillery piece, so it made sense to fit that instead. The CMG would be the DT1929 a 60 round drum fed LMG of 7.62mm calibre.

The PS-2 Gun was cancelled, and it was found that turrets designed for it would not allow the 37mm B-3 to be mounted with a CMG. The Red Army preferred an MG being mounted, so a new offset ball mounting for a CMG was implemented. Early run models left the factory with just the gun and no MG. Later point it was found that production of the B-3 had been delayed so there would be a shortage of guns for several months.

As another interim solution twin anti-aircraft DT machine gun mountings were fitted in place of B-3 guns. This resulted in tanks mounting three machine guns capable of delivering 1,750 RPM (cyclic), or 180 rounds in under ten seconds if the crew got excited about something. It was decided the third machine gun was not needed so most were removed and an armoured plated

covered the hole.

The DA and DT series machine guns fired Russian 7.62x54R rounds. By the 1930s the round had been improved several times, with specialised armour-piercing and high explosive rounds available. For tank machine guns the preferred ammunition would be the M1930 type D heavy ball, design to extent range and impact, although the Standard M1908 L light ball for rifles was also used. Most of the specialist ammunition tended to be used by snipers and for aircraft or anti-aircraft units. The drums held 60 rounds; in the field these would be loaded by hand from boxed ammunition. The only known autoloader was simply a wooden plank that held the drum, it improved loading speed but not dramatically. Listed ammunition stowage varies, in part because some sources maintain the drums held 63 rather than 60 rounds, something that should have been resolved years ago. The MG armed BT-2s carried 40 drums or 2,400 rounds, the 37mm gun and coax DT armed tanks carried 43 drums and 92 main gun rounds, or just the gun rounds for tanks without MG armament.

The DT and DA machine guns had a cyclic rate of fire close to 600 RPM emptying a magazine in ten seconds. In action 125-150 RPM was more often used, firing in short controlled bursts. From a vehicle mounting fire was very accurate. After 1000 rounds of steady firing the barrel would need changing, but if the firer was just emptying one magazine after another maybe 240-300 rounds would start to damage the barrel. On occasions crews were happy to dismount from the vehicle and use their machine guns outside. The DT gun was much liked by its users, it had a reputation for reliability, tolerable accuracy, was as close to idiot proof as any weapon can be and decidedly lethal.

The B-3 Gun was based on the

German PaK 37 L45 but predated the PaK 35/36 and missed out on some of the refinements of that gun. Even so the gun was serviceable with a rate of fire of 10-13 rounds on a field mounting, rather less inside a tank turret. Like any small calibre guns starting with one round in the breech the first few rounds fired would be very fast. Rate of fire would be slowed by the build up of cordite fumes. Although Russian ammunition was a copy of German rounds their performance was reduced by poor production standards. Whenever possible captured German ammunition would be used. The most common round fired would be High Explosive, with a smaller number of APHE armour piercing High Explosive Rounds carried. Two types of canister round were developed, but these tended to be issued to anti-tank units for close defence and very rarely used. It's doubtful many canister rounds were ever used by any BT tanks in combat.

For the 1930s a dual purpose 37mm gun was adequate for engaging enemy armour and a credible threat against infantry when used in conjunction with MG armament.

Later as the 45mm gun was adopted for service an attempt was made to shoe horn one into the BT-2 turret. It was too big, and the idea left for later marks of the tank.

Frontal armour was 10-13mm, just enough to stop pistol and rifle rounds and to give some protection against blasts. Machine gun fire was still a threat as an attack by dozens of bullets was more likely to find a gap in the riveted armour with bullet splash, penetrate by repeated hits in the same general area or even be made using steel cored armour piercing ammunition. Although thin by WW II standards 10mm steel plate was common during the 1930s.

The engine was a licensed copy of the Liberty Aero 12 Cylinder V, generating 343-400 HP. This gave the 11 ton tank a tracked cross-country speed of close to 40 MPH, twice the speed of most other "fast" tanks. Switching to wheels could be done in around thirty minutes and allowed an incredible 69 MPH on roads. The potential to travel so fast ensured development of the BT series continued, despite ongoing transmission problems caused in part by the powerful engine.

An attempt to fit a radio for commanders tanks was frustrated by interference from the engines electrics and abandoned.

BT-2 tanks used flags as the main tool for communication with others within the unit. These could be waved from an open turret or poked through a small hole in the turret roof. Soviet, British, German and USA tankers used a three-flag set of red, yellow and green throughout the war

and for about a decade afterwards. Fairly complex orders could be conveyed quickly, and the method was ideal for road marches and manoeuvres. In battle flags became less effective as visibility was reduced and crews more distracted by other events.

Other basic signalling devices were used including flares, torches, vehicle klaxons, coloured smoke, hand signals or firing armament to draw attention. In the 1930s only the British and German armies saw much point in radio communication. In the case of the BT-2 the ignition system prevented the use of radios, otherwise command vehicles might have carried a set. Without radio communications platoons tended to cluster together following the lead tank and only really using initiative to select targets, take evasive action and plot movement.

The BT-2 proved to be fast and was certainly a step forward for the Red Army, but it suffered from problems during production and frequent breakdowns in the field. At the very least it provided a valuable vehicle for crews to train in, but in combat it wasn't as good as it might have been. Some of the worst flaws were addressed when tanks were routinely rebuilt and improved during factory maintenance.

Some sources differentiate between early model BT-2 made using imperial measurement components and later BT-2 made using metric measurement components, sometimes calling these BT-3.

The BT-4 tank

The BT-4 was an experimental design for an infantry support version like the twin turreted T-26 tanks. It was to be armed with a right-hand turret containing a 27mm cannon and a left-hand 7.62mm DTMG turret. One idea is it might have been intended as a command tank with a radio fitted for BT-2 units. Possibly the idea may have been to address the shortage of 37mm guns. In any event it is doubtful more than a few experimental models were made, and it certainly did not enter series production.

The project was overtaken by the BT-5 which could be radio equipped and was armed with a 45mm gun.

There are line drawings, graphic art and photographs of BT-4 tanks doing the rounds and even a 1/72 scale kit out there, because the idea of a fast light tank with twin turrets really does look good.

The BT-5 tank

The BT-5 was in series production from March 1933 to 1934 with around 1,946 being produced. It was an improvement on the earlier BT-2 with better armament, as well as some radios in command tanks.

In 1932 the Soviets designed several 45mm guns that were intended to use



A BT-2 platoon on manoeuvres in the early 1930s.

considerable stocks of French Hotchkiss 47mm ammunition. The gun had mostly been used since the 1880s on Russian ships for defence against small fast-moving torpedo craft. Small calibre weapons were going out of fashion for that role and larger 4 or 6-inch guns were mounted in more modern ships. By machining off the drive band 47mm shells could be fired from a 45mm gun. Adopting a larger calibre also allowed for a larger explosive fill in shells and the potential for greater armour penetration.

The 45mm 20-K tank gun entered service in 1932 being placed in the turrets of several Soviet tanks. The gun was mounted with a CMG. The first guns developed were quarter automatic due to recoil problems mainly caused by the shell characteristics and design adopted. This slowed rate of fire slightly but flat out a crew could get off 15-20 rounds in a minute, the limit of fire being accessibility of ammunition and cordite fumes within the vehicle. Development continued and later 45mm tank guns had semi-automatic fire and electrical firing. A

stabilised sight was developed which fixed the vertical plane of the gun onto a target, with the gunner needing only to aim by rotating the turret. This allowed moderately accurate fire on the move even at speed. The sight was discontinued as it was expensive, further most crews struggled to use it and simple switched it off to use optical sights instead.

The first HE round produced was the UO-243 HE FRAG, containing 118g of explosives, about the same as a hand grenade; this was later increased to 135g in the UO-243A which had a steel cartridge case to reduce cost. Both shells could produce serious wounds within a 15-20 metre radius and might throw an occasional small fragment to a considerable distance perhaps 200 metres. As well as shrapnel, the explosion would cause some blast effects and additionally the impact of the shell would cause some structural damage. The explosive content was a considerable improvement on the 22g (less than an ounce) of explosives that filled 37mm



A BT-2 knocked out in Finland in August 1941,, shows how the 37mm gun was slightly offset from the centre.



A profile of a late-type BT-5.

rounds. A 45mm HE round was roughly equivalent to a hand grenade, but with greater range, and the ability to penetrate light cover, blow a door off its hinges or knock a small hole in a door or window. The explosive filling was originally TNT, later the more powerful Russian explosive A-IX-2, composed of RDX and Aluminium Powder, with about 1.54 the blast effect of TNT. This increased both blast and fragmentation effect.

The first APHE-T (Armour piercing High Explosive Tracer) round was the UB-241M, a 47mm Hotchkiss round machined down to fit a 45mm barrel. It contained a fair sized explosive charge of 77g, and a base fitted tracer. It was replaced by the UB-242 that contained a 58g explosive charge but was designed specifically for the 45mm gun and was both cheaper to produce and more effective. The UB-243 followed with a smaller explosive charge of just 19g but slightly better armour penetration. The short-range performance of 45mm rounds against armour was noticeably better than that of 37L guns, but at longer ranges poor shell design reduced accuracy and there was a greater penetration drop off than for the 37mm gun. Its weird physics but the shell designs truly were that bad.

Later APCR rounds were developed though probably not issued to BT units.

Three different shrapnel/canister

rounds were used by the Red Army but there are few accounts of their use. It's possible some were used by BT units but nothing I've read suggests they were.

Although the performance of the 45mm 20-K gun was less than it might have been it was still a pretty good weapon compared to the 37L gun, and very decent when compared to the machine gun or light cannon armament of some of its foreign contemporaries.

An unsuccessful attempt was made to fit short 76mm guns in the BT-5. There were issues with recoil and space that weren't resolved in the time available and the project shelved.

The Red Army began production of a viable tank radio receiver in 1931 followed by a transmitter in 1932. Called the 71-TK-1 "Shackal" (Jackal in English). It was a valve radio, robustly built and designed for vehicular transport. It was fitted to several Soviet AFVs and worked well.

The best performance was with the set warmed up, engine off, which gave a voice transmission range of up to 40 Km, but more often around 30 Km. Range could be extended by using Morse to maybe 50 Km. In motion transmission range dropped dramatically, to around 10-15 Km for voice Transmission, and close to 25 Km for Morse. For the 1930s this was pretty good

and sufficient range for traffic between tank platoons and companies.

The receiver was powered by batteries, which were good for 15-20 hours of operation. The transmitter drew electrical power from the engine and vehicle batteries giving a longer potential power supply, the limit was heat generated by operating. After operating for half an hour, the set needed to be switched off for twenty to thirty minutes to cool.

Operating the set required a working knowledge of Morse, and familiarity with radio equipment.

Radio equipped tanks could be readily identified by the clothes-line antennae, an insulated handrail with a whip radio inside. It was a clever design that protected the antennae and provided a hand hold for the tank crew and riders. The downside was the distinctive appearance marked the vehicle as a command tank and drew enemy fire.

The intention was to equip platoon and company commander tanks with radios. Of a total run of 1,946 BT-5, 325 were radio equipped so there was a slight shortage of radio equipped tanks mainly because radio production fell behind requirements. Each radio cost about 2100 Roubles but that was a fraction of the overall cost of a tank.

Line tanks carried 115 rounds of 45mm ammunition, radio tanks 75. Both types carried 43 drums of DT machine gun ammunition, for a total of 2,580 or 2,709 rounds depending on the number of rounds in a drum. Most sources claim 60, some favour 63.

To address the problem of noise within tanks from the Engine and Weapons use most BT-5 tanks were fitted with TPU-3 Interphones a system for crew members to communicate with each other. This had voice communication and additionally coloured signal lights. Crews also made use of hand signals, shoves and taps.

Both the BT-2 and BT-5 used either the Mikulin M-5 Engine, a licensed copy of the American Liberty, rated at 400 hp, or in small numbers a reconditioned Liberty Engine. Engine production was limited and restricted the production of the BT-5.

The BT-5 was an improvement of the BT-2 with better communications and more powerful armament. The design continued to focus on speed.

A small number of late production BT-5 had diesel engines.

The BT-2 and BT-5 series needed in field maintenance after around 150 hours of running, and a factory rebuild after 450 hours. Tanks could run for longer at the risk of permanent engine damage or the failure of other components. Crews noted a tendency for the tracks to fail. Tracks were designed to last for 2,000 km but in the field reliability averaged 700 to 800 km, improving to 1,200 km in the BT-7. The BT



The command version of the BT-5 on exercises in 1935.



A BT-5 captured during Barbarossa in 1941 is examined by German soldiers.

series tracks were designed for quick change which helped with repair work but track failures were inconvenient on road marches and much more serious in combat.

The BT-6 tank

The BT-6 was an experimental vehicle with welded armour, a diesel engine, and carrying more fuel. Intended to extend range. Only one was built and the project shelved to concentrate resources on the BT-7.

The BT-7 tank

Two BT-7 were produced in 1934 an artillery tank and a radio tank, both were subject to evaluation with concerns being raised about the artillery tank. From 1935 onwards, the BT-7 was the only series being manufactured, with production continuing till 1940. In total 5,556 were made, making it the most numerous BT series.

The main constraint on production was the availability of engines. The BT2/5 series had used the M-5 petrol engine. Testing of a possible replacement, the M-17 petrol and BD-2 diesel engines, favoured the M-17 and this became the first engine used by BT-7.

The M-17 was based on a German BMW aero engine, built under licence with German technical support. The aero engine powered several Soviet 1930s planes. As the Mikulin AM-34 was developed to replace the M-17 a modified engine for use in tanks was developed to use up what was becoming spare capacity. The result became the M-17T (tankoviy or tank), with a revised cooling and ignition system, other changes and down rating from 500 hp to 400 hp. The engine had similar power output to the earlier M-5 but was easier to produce in numbers, made use of production capacity

no longer needed for aircraft and was more reliable.

After limited testing the M-17T was found to be too powerful for the BT transmission. The fault was soluble, but machinations between rival design teams and the ongoing purges in Russia led to arrests, imprisonment and in some cases shootings. After some terror fewer transmission faults remained but were still a feature of the BT-7, T-28 and T-32/35 which also used the same engine.

BT-7 series engines needed in field maintenance after around 200 hours of running, and a factory rebuild after 600 hours. Track life was intended to be 2,000 Km but still averaged closer to 700-800 Km, and less if thrown by transmission issues.

Considerable work was done improving the BT turret. The intention was to use the same turret to mount either the 45mm K20 or 76.2mm howitzer, in roughly equal numbers. This would have allowed tank platoons with a mixed close support howitzer and anti-tank capability, as well as a small number of assault gun or artillery units. The first design produced was rejected by the Army. Instead of a coaxial MG the turret featured a ball mounted gun which considered a step backwards by the Army. There were also issues squeezing the 76mm gun into a small turret on a narrow vehicle.

For a year BT-7 line tanks were equipped with BT-5 tank 45mm turrets, with 500 tanks produced in 1935.

Another T-26 turret mounting a 76mm gun was trialled for artillery tanks, but with only very small numbers being produced, perhaps just one, maybe as many as five but probably just one. Eventually the design team decided to try fitting a turret from the T-28 which worked well in trials, with five being produced in late 1936, and 130-150 produced in 1937. The Army generally

preferred the BT-7 with 45mm gun and production of the artillery tank ceased that year.

The gun was the KT-28 based on the 76mm Regimental Gun M1927, an infantry howitzer used by infantry and cavalry regiments. It was intended to deal with field fortifications, and soft targets such as infantry or transport. The tank gun was used in both the T-28 and T-32/35 Tanks. It was a short howitzer of 16.5 calibres firing a range of munitions. Several HE rounds were used, filled with either TNT, or later during the Great Patriotic War a more powerful Amatol mixture. Amatol itself is less explosive than TNT but is cheaper to manufacture and when mixed with TNT produces a more effective blast by supplying additional oxygen to the explosion. Shells were supplied in 5, 6 or 8 round boxes usually opened, and the round stowed in the tank. Exceptionally boxes of ammunition would be carried either in the tank or on the engine deck. Explosive filling ranged from 627-816g, a decent amount of explosive. Most of the damage caused would be from fragmentation and blast, but a near miss would usually be considered very unpleasant by soft targets. The blast radius would be like a smaller round but more intense. Lethal within 25 metres and a serious threat to personnel out to 75 metres. Against troops in cover blast damage could cause injury even if fragments were stopped by sandbags or concrete etc. The shell effect could be adjusted by setting the fuse manually to maximise fragmentation by allowing penetration before exploding or blast by setting the fuse to contact. The difference would be marginal against personnel and of more importance against cover.

Two Armour Piercing Tracer (AP-T) rounds existed, UBR-353 and UBR-354; they contained a small HE charges and a tracer which might start a fire but was primarily to assist aiming and confirming a target had been hit. They could be used against tanks, armoured trains and concrete emplacement.

Incredibly a High Velocity Armour Piercing Tracer (HVAP-T) round was developed, the UBR-354P. This was a sub calibre tungsten carbide round, fitted with a ballistic cap. It's doubtful it was issued to BT tanks and you must wonder what velocities it could develop from a short 76mm gun.

Two shrapnel rounds existed, the USh-353D and USh-354G, the projectile was around 260 lead or steel balls with a small black powder bursting charge. They were rarely issued and infrequently used. Maximum range would be at most 300 metres.

A High Explosive Anti-Tank round (HEAT), the UBP-353M, was developed during WW II. Unusually it was fitted with a base mounted tracer. It is doubtful any were

used by BT tanks, a few might have been used during the Liberation of China.

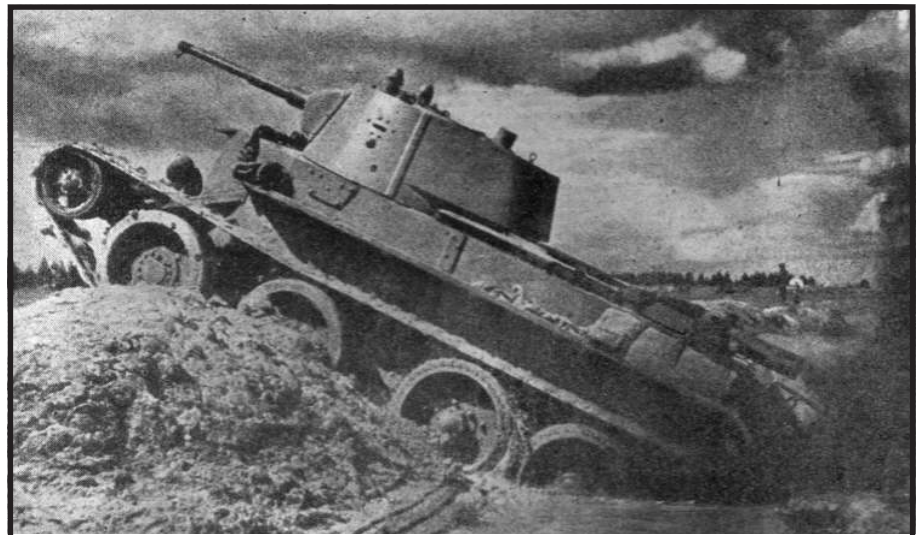
Two incendiary rounds, the UZ-353 and UZ-354, were developed containing 150g of thermite and black powder. Thermite is a mixture of powdered metal and metal oxide which generates intense heat in the region of 2500-3000 Celsius when burning. It is mostly used to weld railway tracks, but the military use it to start fires, ignite wooden structures and destroy fuel and ammunition stores.

The smoke round was the UD-354, the smoke mixture contained yellow phosphorous, tin chloride, and sulphur trioxide, which would be ignited and dispersed by a small TNT charge. The main use was to develop smoke screens, but it could also be used as a spotting or targeting round to range on a target. Very occasionally the round was fired against personnel with the intention of causing choking or casualties from phosphorous burns. Smoke rounds were issued and used by BT artillery tanks.

Post war an explosive gas round was developed but only entered service after the last Soviet BT had been mounted on a plinth outside a museum.

The T-28 turrets were designed for a medium tank, intended to smash through lightly fortified lines of entrenchments and wire entanglements with the occasional hardened wooden bunker. Defenders were to be suppressed by MG fire and mostly high explosive gun fire with the occasional AP round for gun emplacements or any enemy armour that might have been in the area. The KT-28 was intended to serve as a dual-purpose gun, useful against soft targets with just enough penetrative power to take on enemy tanks most of which would be as well protected as an FT-17. The Soviets had brought into the idea of breakthrough tanks engaging multiple targets from several different angles. To do this the T-28 mounted two bow machine gun turrets, and the main gun turrets had a coaxial machine gun to supplement the main gun firepower. The designers also liked the idea of a rear mounted MG for close defence, an idea that was also featured in the KV and IS-II tanks. Another idea gaining popularity in the 1930s was to fit an anti-aircraft MG to deter attackers. This was the P-40 mounting for the DT MG, sometimes with an oversize sight, more often not. If attacked by a 1930s biplane the commander would spray a drum full of sixty rounds in the general direction to encourage the pilot to go and look for a horse and cart or at least a tank without an AAMG.

Fitting T-28 turrets meant that the artillery version of the series the BT-7A line tanks carried 50 main gun rounds, radio tanks were restricted to just 40. Very few BT-7A carried 71-TK-1 radios, at most 11 out of the 130-155 or 156 produced.



Side view of the BT-7 Model 1937.

One issue with the 76mm gun was blast damaging the engine when fired through the rear turret arc. Several rounds would need to be fired before this was a serious problem, and crews were encouraged to not fire over the rear hull.

At least one BT-7A was fitted with an F-32 76mm gun, the same gun as the KV-1, this had a longer barrel of 31 calibres, making it more effective against hard targets. The idea was a bit late as significant number of T-34 and KV tanks were entering service with the T-34 intended to replace the BT series.

An improved 45mm turret was developed. The standard armament was a 45mm gun with a coaxial DT MG fired by the loader. Some tanks were fitted with a rear machine gun for close defence, and a smaller number with a P-40 anti-aircraft mount. Machine guns could be switched between mountings or dismounted for use by the crew. 188 main gun rounds were carried in line Tanks, 146 in radio equipped ones. A mix of HE and AP rounds would be carried tending towards a higher proportion of HE rounds, but local ammunition supply could influence the mix. Line tanks carried 2,394 MG rounds in 60/63 round drums, radio tanks 1,953. I would guess most of the rounds would be heavy ball. For each MG mounted you could add another drum. The number of MG rounds carried compares to the 1,000 rounds carried by an MG in an infantry section. Maybe half of the ammunition carried could be expended in a day's fighting. Tank crews tend to prefer engaging with the MG as it was easier to clean. Every time the main gun was fired the entire crew would be busy swabbing the barrel afterwards. Even so if an armoured target appeared or enemy troops were in hardened positions the gun would be used. Tanks were ideally fitted with two periscopic sights and a third stabilised sight for the main gun. As sights were expensive

and in limited supply sometimes the gunner's sight was not fitted. The stabiliser required a high level of training and was discontinued as most crews didn't use them.

An estimated 2,596 line BT-7 were produced, as well as 2,017 BT-7RT radio tanks. Command tanks tended to be radio equipped, but it would be unusual for every tank in a platoon to be radio equipped.

In 1938 a sustained effort was made to develop a diesel engine BT tank, the BT-7M. The engine chosen was designed by a team led by Konstantine Chelpan based in the Kharkov Locomotive Factory, a 12-cylinder V-12 Engine called the Khariv B-2 in Russian, or Kharkov V-2 in English. It was water cooled and used some aluminium components to reduce weight and improve performance. Although beset with early problems it would become the engine used in most Soviet medium and heavy tanks, using fuel injection and superchargers to boost performance for the heavier vehicles. Output for the early engine fitted in the BT-7M was close to 500 hp. Early engines suffered from maintenance problems and needed attention after around fifty hours. This was eventually improved to 200 or more hours which was pretty good for a 1940s tank. Tragically early maintenance problems, and the Greek ancestry of Konstantine Chelpan drew attention from the NKVD who arrested and tortured him in 1938. He confessed to spying and was shot. The Soviet Union lost a talented engineer who was cleared of treason by a Soviet Court in 1956.

A total of 788 BT-7M were produced, production ending as the T-34 and newer light tank designs replaced it. The BT-7M was significantly more expensive than the earlier BT-7, although it offered improved reliability and easier maintenance, and dramatically increased range up from 160km to 520 km.

The BT-7M was probably the best the series could be. Fast, with an impressive range, adequate firepower, painfully thin armour, roughly equal to other contemporary designs.

Specialist and Experimental Vehicles

BT series tanks were used as the basis for several specialist and experimental vehicles. Some work was done to develop a BT tank for river crossings, starting with the BT-2 and later the BT-5. Initial work aimed for a fully amphibious vehicle, later work aimed for one that could ford deep rivers. After a series of accidents and partially successful experiments, the idea was shelved.

Work to develop a 76mm artillery tank has already been described above. At one stage in the design work a different idea was explored. Rockets were fitted to a BT chassis, with the idea of firing these at high important targets. The first experiments used two 305mm Rockets on a BT-5; they could be fired, but legitimate concerns were raised about their vulnerability to enemy fire. Smaller 132mm rail mounted rockets were tried next, with additional rockets carried in the tank. Firing worked, but to reload was difficult and required the crew to leave the vehicle. As a one, well two shot weapon the idea would have worked if the crew fired

them on contact with the enemy. It made more sense to stick with dedicated truck mounted rocket launchers that exploited the weapon's range.

Work on BT flame thrower tanks tested turret and bow mounted flame guns. The design offered no real advantage over others based on the less expensive and slightly better protected T-26 flame tanks, so series production of BT flame Tanks didn't happen. There was some attempt to develop a radio-controlled BT flame tank which was useful but only served to assist in the development of a radio control T-26 which did see action.

About twenty BT-5 were fitted with pressurised chemical projectors, some saw action generating smoke screens. It's likely the design could also have been used for chemical warfare, but they almost certainly weren't.

About 50 or so surplus BT-2/5 were converted to a fast engineering vehicle by removing the original turret and replacing it with a T-37/38 MG turret and a small portable bridge. These worked and were used in exercises and presumably actual conflict.

BT tanks were also used as a test bed for a lot of other ideas that didn't make it to series production; specialist trench crossing, fascine carrying, a flying tank, mine clearing vehicles, a command tank and even an APC.

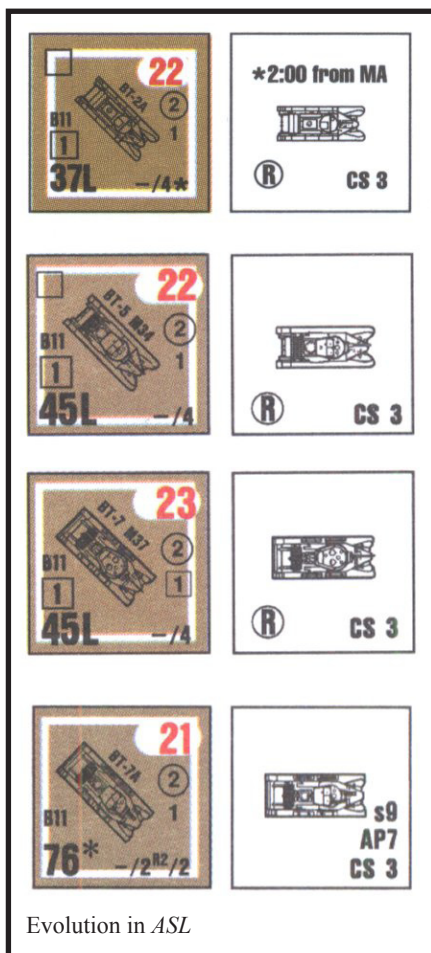
BT tanks could be found in several larger formations. The largest of these would be a tank corps of up to 600 tanks plus armoured cars. Generally, corps were below TOE strength averaging between 400-500 tanks, and around 100 armoured cars. The corps was made up of two light tank brigades, a motorized machine gun brigade, a motor rifle battalion, artillery, signals, and miscellaneous supply and service units. Total manpower could exceed 12,000, about the size of a German Panzer Division.

BT tanks were also formed into independent light tank brigades. These usually contained around 200-240 BT tanks depending on platoon size, a small number of armoured cars (up to 28), a motorized rifle battalion, signals, service and supply train. A small number of T-26 flame throwing tanks were included. A few units included a platoon of either fifteen T-37/38 or BT tanks in a reconnaissance unit, but more usually armoured cars were used for the task as relatively few T-37/38 were made. Although corps included some towed artillery, the independent brigades do not appear to have had any, relying on 76mm artillery tanks.

In the early 1930s heavy tank brigades focused on either the T-28. Heavy tank platoons were just three tanks. At full strength 136 T-28 would be supported by 37 BT tanks, and ten flame throwing T-26. There was one T-35 brigade, of 94 T-35, 44 BT and ten flame throwing T-26.

Cavalry became popular during the Russian Civil War as it was more mobile than infantry and could operate effectively in the spaces between troop concentrations. Division sized units were used, including a machine gun squad and several artillery units. From 1936 BT-5/7 Tanks, T-37 and armoured cars were included in the TOE. The mix of armoured units varied, some divisions having all three types of vehicle, some omitting the armoured cars and/or T-37 squadrons and others having an extra tank squadron. In some cases, the mix was determined by what was available, though in the case of divisions assigned a specific sector of operations the allocation was based on the type of patrolling and fighting it was likely to undertake.

The main weaknesses of Soviet armour in the 1930s were shortcomings in maintenance and the limited numbers of radios and signallers at virtually every level within a unit. Given time armoured units could assemble well balanced units mixing BT with artillery and infantry support. If pressured by enemy action communications broke down and actions could become increasingly chaotic. Both weaknesses would be difficult to address.



Platoon and Troop Organisation

In the early 1930s Soviet armour was organised into platoons of three tanks, with three platoons making a company, commanded by a one or two tank HQ section. In 1937, the size of tank platoons in armoured units was intended to be increased to five tanks. For most cavalry units platoons remained at three and were usually referred to as Troops, which were organized into Squadrons.

For most combat missions, a platoon would be the smallest unit committed to battle. Planned operations tended to assign more platoon sized supporting units of other troop types, as well as air and artillery support if available.

Whenever possible all BT platoons would be comprised of the same mark, with an artillery tank if available and command vehicles equipped with radios. Gradually the number of tanks fitted with Radios increased and some platoons were fully equipped with functioning radios and crews able to use them. In most cases the radio allowed platoon leaders to talk with company HQ, with flags being used for communication within the platoon.

Further problems were caused by logistic weakness, failing to issue ammunition and fuel to combat units, poor crew training, and dislocation when the Red Army occupied new territory moving away from established bases and defence lines.

Conscription and Crew training

Before the Great Patriotic War most crews were conscripts, with soldiers drafted for three years. The first two months of army life were basic training, followed by specialist training for tank crews. Drivers were given six months additional training, while tank commander/gunners received ten months; loaders received almost no additional special training. Training continued during enlistment and if combined with active service could produce very capable crews. Ideally crews would train in the vehicles they would serve in. Unfortunately ammunition for both the main armament and machine guns was limited with modest allocations for training. Some trainees only fired a few rounds of gun, or a single MG drum before going to war. Some drivers learned in older tanks to save wear and tear on newer equipment, even then driving practice was limited by fuel availability and maintenance issues with vehicles that had been hammered by novice crews. Some drivers had only two hours actual driving experience as they climbed into their tanks to fight the Germans. Several drivers had taken part in fighting in the Far East, or driven during the "liberation" of territory in Eastern Europe though many of these had left the army before Barbarossa. Drivers also performed most of the routine maintenance on their tanks. Loaders did get to practice loading dummy rounds in static gun mounts, easy enough with 37mm and 45mm rounds, 76mm rounds are bigger but still light enough to lug around. The loader was expected to help with maintenance, refuelling, stowing ammunition and supplies. The commander/gunner learned how to aim and fire the main armament, operate the DT machine gun, how to use the radio (including Morse code for the 33 letter Russian alphabet), commanded the crew and interacted with other tanks. Between them all three crew members would share routine tasks. The three-man crew would have to work harder than a four or five-man crew. Probably the hardest job would be maintaining the tracks, followed by loading ammunition, refuelling, maintaining the engine and weapons. Units would have a mix of newly enlisted conscripts and more experienced crew members with two or three years' service.

Crews were trained to fight outside of the vehicle when tactical circumstances required it, or when it had been immobilised. One or more DT machine guns could be dismounted, allowing the



The BT-7A artillery support tank was armed with a 76.2 mm howitzer.

crew to become a light machine gun team. Additionally, tanks would carry a small number of grenades for close defence, generally these would be used when outside of the vehicle but in extreme situations they might be lobbed or rolled from an open hatch. It is highly likely the crew would be equipped with some small arms. Nagant M1985 revolvers would be the most likely in the 1930s, later automatic pistols and perhaps even sub machine guns could have been available as well as carbines.

BT Tanks in Action: The Spanish Civil War

The Soviet Union provided support to the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War, supplying equipment and some technical support. Most of the tanks supplied were between 281-311 brand new T-26 and fifty BT-5. There were shipped from Russia with the 50 BT-5 arriving in May 1937 on the Cabo Palos. The T-26 were intended for infantry support and used in small numbers in that role, though on occasions they would operate independently. Results were generally good, not the least because the 45mm gun armed tanks had a tremendous range advantage against machine gun armed Italian and German tanks and was effective against soft target. When the BT tanks arrived, they were kept in reserve until an operation to support their speed and range could be exploited.

Well some bright spark thought the best use of the fastest armour on the planet was a direct frontal attack against the small but solidly built town of Fuentes de Ebro on 12 October 1937. The operation began with a 50 Km night road march, with the attack proper beginning around noon. I suspect the idea was to quickly storm the town with fast moving tanks carrying Infantry riders. The attack began without artillery support but with all tanks firing a round then gunning their engines and speeding towards the enemy. Travelling at speed over

rough terrain some infantry fell off. As the tanks passed through friendly trenches there was an exchange of fire with some further casualties, but the attack was still going close to plan. As an alerted enemy prepared their defences, the attackers struggled to find a navigable route to the town. The attack slowed as the enemy opened with a small number of 37mm Pak 36 guns and field guns which started to cause tank casualties. The BTs gave a reasonable account of themselves, expending much of their ammunition before withdrawing. Of the 48 tanks that started the attack 19 were lost with other damaged or suffering crew casualties. The attack failed due to the lack of artillery support, limited infantry support, negligible reconnaissance and a near complete lack of intelligent planning. The BT tanks had been conserved as a unit, well maintained and crewed but squandered in an ill-conceived attack. After the battle BT Tanks were split into smaller units and used for infantry support.

The war gave little insight into the future of armoured warfare. It did encourage the idea that tanks might fight tanks in wars and that something better than machine gun armament was needed for that. It was also obvious that the next generation of tanks would need adequate protection against small arms, and it would be nice to have armour resistant to 37/45 mm projectiles, or even 70-76 field guns. In Germany work began on the Panzer III, and its support tank the Panzer IV; in Russia the T-34 idea flourished.

Soviet-Japanese Border Conflicts

In the 1920s the Soviets had assumed the next war would likely be with Poland, developing the BT series to provide a fast tank for a mobile war. In the 1930s Japan was a growing menace in the east. Tsarist Russia had expanded eastwards for centuries and had waged war with Japan in 1904-

5, losing influence in China and Japan. The Soviet Union had a loosely defined border with its ally the Peoples Republic of Mongolia and Manchuria. The Empire of Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 creating the puppet state of Manchukuo, with Japanese forces based in the country. This created tension worsened by frequent border violations. Some of these were honest mistakes errors in navigation or misinterpretation of maps, others were deliberate provocations, reconnaissance missions and attempts to infiltrate spies. In 1935 several shooting incidents occurred with some killed and wounded. Clashes tended to be between small cavalry patrols though on occasion a force of one or two companies might be engaged. In 1936 planned small scale military operations involving tankettes, armoured cars, aircraft and artillery clashed in border disputes. The general feeling was that failing to dispute the border would result in the loss of acres of sparsely populated steppe and more importantly the loss of face. In 1937 the Japanese invasion of China alarmed the Soviet Union, with Stalin concerned that he might face a war on two fronts. Soviet weapons were sold to China including tanks, artillery and aircraft as well as small arms and other equipment, and supported by several thousand advisors. The intention was to keep Japan busy, though the effect was mainly to annoy the Empire. Tensions escalated.

The most aggressive power in the region was the Japanese Kwantung Army, an effective Military unit that also had political and geographical ambitions that had previously led to the conquest of Manchuria. It had considered invading Soviet territory next intending to go as far as the Ural Mountains, but mainland Japan was strongly against the idea. The Army did learn of Soviet plans to build positions on hills to the west of Lake Khasan (nowadays close to the North Korean and Chinese borders 130 Km southwest of Vladivostok). The Soviets saw the area as part of their territory, the Japanese didn't and made a diplomatic object to the occupation. The Soviets declined to move, and the Japanese decided

to make a more forceful objection.

Both sides built up forces, the Japanese committing one division of around 7,000 men and around 37 artillery pieces; the Soviet Union would commit a much stronger force of a three division rifle corps, over 22,000 troops, 367 armoured vehicles, 237 guns, and 250 aircraft. Most of the tanks were T-26 designed for infantry support, with 81 BT-7 used for divisional and corps reconnaissance which were also committed to the fight. The Red Army was in prepared positions with tanks dug in for close support. The conflict opened on 31st July 1938 with a night attack by the Japanese 75th Regiment steaming up Changkufeng Hill to attack about three companies of the 32 Rifle Division dug in with some armour and artillery in support. The attack went extremely well with ten Soviet tanks destroyed and the entire garrison killed or forced to retreat East. ASL scenario 'AP111 The Katanas Come Out at Night'; represents this action.

Eventually Soviet numerical and material advantages pushed the Japanese off the hill and a peace was concluded on 11 August 1939. Japanese casualties were around 1600, Soviet losses were much more severe, close to 4000 personnel and between 46 (Soviet claim) and 96 (Japanese claim) tanks destroyed and another 40 damaged but repaired. Although the action was a Soviet victory in that the heights were once again in their control there was disappointment about the army's performance, with much of the fault attributed to the local commander Marshall Vasily Blyukher, a decorated Hero of the Soviet Union who was arrested and disappeared. It is likely he was accused of spying and a post war investigation suggests he was beaten to death during interrogation. Soviet tanks had been lost to the small number of Japanese 37mm anti-tank guns and 75mm field artillery, and to close assault by Japanese infantry using grenades, petrol bombs, small arms fire and even bayonets. It is likely had Soviet armour not been present then infantry casualties would have been much higher.

Neither side was happy with the results, all along the border minor incidents

occurred at intervals. The next clash was on the borders of the Soviet Union's ally Mongolia and the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo. It began with Mongolian cavalry grazing to the east of the Khalkhin Gol River. Nowadays that would clearly be in Mongolia but in May 1939 there was a difference of opinion about ownership with a larger force of Manchukuo cavalry who attacked and drove them back over the river. A larger force of Mongolians return the next day and was big enough to be left alone. The Manchukuo forces asked the local Japanese garrison troops for help. A Japanese attack drove the Mongolians east before being defeated by a Soviet and Mongolian counterattack. Both sides sent additional forces to the region with Gregory Zhukov taking command of Soviet and Allied forces in the area.

The Kwantung Army launched an air attack on a Soviet air base in Mongolia in June without permission from the High Command. This probably made war inevitable, but generals in Tokyo were still hoping to avoid another large-scale conflict. Skirmishing continued, mostly between aggressive cavalry patrols throughout June.

In July the Japanese launched an attack with about ninety-six tanks and close to four infantry regiments, to cross the Khalkhin River into Mongolian territory and destroy Soviet forces there. Zhukov responded very quickly launching a counter attack spearheaded by the 6th and 11th Tank Brigades. Close to 200 armoured units were deployed, mostly BT 5/7, with a few T-26 flame thrower tanks and perhaps sixty armoured Cars. Both sides mainly used their armour against enemy infantry and cavalry units, with the Japanese attack being halted then pushed back, then savaged trying to cross back over a pontoon bridge. The Japanese lost forty-two tanks and tankettes mainly to 45mm fire mostly from Soviet anti-tank guns; a small proportion were lost to mechanical failure and artillery fire or air attack. Red Army tank losses were more severe; forty-six BT tanks destroyed and thirty -six were damaged, a handful of T-26 tanks and forty-five armoured cars were destroyed. Losses were mostly attributed to 37mm gun fire, as well as some to 70mm infantry gun fire, and a proportion to close assault by infantry.

Fighting continued for the next two weeks, mostly aggressive patrolling with one heavy assault by Japanese infantry supported by artillery which failed to break through. Both sides were at the end of long supply lines and struggling to maintain or reinforce the position.

Zhukov managed the supply situation better and built up reserves ready for an offensive using a fleet of somewhere between 4,000-10,000 or even 20,000 trucks, the higher figures being claimed by the Japanese. Early probing attacks in



BT-7 advancing at Khalkhin Gol, in 1939

August were repulsed by the Japanese, with sporadic shelling till 20th August when Zhukov finally launched his attack, intended to surround and destroy most of the Japanese Army. Heavy shelling and bombing were followed by a direct frontal attack to pin the Japanese in place whilst armoured and motorised forces flanked them. By the 25th an entire Japanese division was surrounded. It refused to surrender and was gradually reduced by bombardment and ground attacks. Few escaped but the local Japanese commander still wanted to fight until a cease fire was agreed in September.

The Soviets lost 253 tanks and 133 armoured cars. Japanese 37mm guns were credited with 75-80% of the losses, 15-20% to field artillery, 5-10% to Molotov cocktails and smaller percentages to aircraft, close assault by infantry and land mines. Soviet designers took note of the losses, giving thought to increasing armour thickness on tanks, and making changes to reduce vulnerability to petrol bombs, grenades and even bayonets. The Japanese increased the calibre of their basic anti-tank gun to 47mm and looked to improving tank designs.

The BT series had performed tolerably well, conducting a 370 mile road march to reach the front, and sweeping round the flanks of the Japanese position. Undoubtedly mechanical failures were an issue and resistance to enemy fire lamentable, but the fast tank had proved its worth against a resilient and capable enemy.

Poland

Stalin still thought the Japanese might have another crack, keeping a respectable force in the east to protect the border. Uncle Joe was also concerned about Germany in the west. Originally the Soviet Union had planned to export revolution to its neighbours, to either incorporate them in an empire or reduce their threat level. Stalin moved away from this idea to a more classical mix of force and hard diplomacy. In August 1939 the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany forged the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact that defined spheres of interest for the two powers. In secret Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, as well as parts of Finland and Romania were split between the two signatories. In effect the Soviet Union could invade or occupy with the country's consent without risking a war with Germany.

In September 1939 Germany invaded Poland. Stalin maintained a huge force on the Polish border of two fronts, somewhere between 450,000-800,000 troops with perhaps as many as 4,736 tanks including 1,764 BT series. Both fronts included an armoured corps as well as several cavalry brigades. Most of the BT-7 series were concentrated in the armoured brigades of the tank corps, with smaller number of older



BT-7-1 in operations, carrying soldiers

BT-2 and BT-5 in cavalry brigades. Initial the Polish border was defended by twenty border protection battalions of roughly 1,000 men with some heavy weapons and artillery.

After the Germans approached Warsaw and the Japanese signed a Peace Treaty, Stalin launched a liberation operation to protect parts of Poland now that the government had collapsed or at least was very near collapse. Polish forces were initially ordered to withdraw and engage the Red Army only in self-defence, but the speed of the Soviet advance and its unwelcome nature led to a series of fire-fights along the border. Pitched battles did occur with Polish resistance stiffening as locally organised militias and troops trying to withdraw to Romania were drawn into the fighting. Undoubtedly Poland went down with a fight, and the performance of the Soviet Army was lamentable, struggling to gain territory despite massive superiority. About 1,275 of the Red Army's tanks suffered mechanical failures or were damaged in accidents, with many other tanks using up their track and engine reserves shuffling around Poland. Combat losses amounted to 1,920 suggesting the liberation was not popular. Winning the campaign created a future logistical problem for the Red Army as considerable additional maintenance was needed and several units would need to relocate from their barracks in the Soviet Union to quarters in Poland.

The Baltic States

Stalin sought alliances and agreement to station troops in the Baltic states of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. All three countries were aware of the "liberation" of Poland and had mixed feelings about an alliance. Mutual assistance pacts were made in September and October 1939. Germany's invasion of France and the Low Countries in May 1940 made Stalin anxious as he had

expected stronger resistance in the West and felt Russia would be next once England left the fight. He decided to occupy the Baltic States; first troops occupied the countries, then elections were called which empowered governments who decided to join the Soviet Union by the second week of August. Some fighting did take place but with very small numbers of troops involved.

The act of occupying the Baltic States involved 300-400 Km road marches which even unopposed wore out tracks and engines. Following the occupation Soviet forces were based in the newly liberated territories, the majority in Lithuania. Most armoured units left purpose-built barracks with driving and firing ranges to occupy infantry and cavalry barracks that lacked ranges, garages and adequate storage facilities for fuel and munitions. The Stalin Line of fortified regions was judged to be too far from the new front and a new Molotov Line was started.

Given enough time and resources the Red Army could have complete a new defensive line, improved the barracks, and repaired their 1930s designed tanks or replaced them with more modern T-34s. If Britain held out the Red Army would be ready for a war with Germany in 1942.

The Soviet Union used the threat of military action, backed by German and to a lesser extent Italian diplomacy to annex Romanian territory in June 1940. Romanian forces withdrew in the face of overwhelming force, which was probably a wise decision. Again, Soviet troops would need to locate to new bases, construct new defence lines and deal with the maintenance issues associated with the liberation.

Finland

The Soviet Union had concerns about the security of Leningrad and access from

that port to the Baltic. The Finns were approached with a view towards exchanging territory and leasing the Hanko Peninsula and some Baltic islands to establish a Soviet naval base and some outposts. Negotiations started in 1938 but were hampered by neither country liking the other and although the Soviets were offering much larger territories in exchange there would be economic and social damage to Finland.

Predictably negotiations stalled, forces were massed on the border and after shelling Mainila one of their own villages the Soviet Union declared war and invaded. Stalin expected the entire campaign to last three or four weeks, given superiority in numbers, and near total air supremacy. Things didn't go the way Joe planned.

The Finns and Soviets had been constructing fortifications since the 1920s, with the Finns making a determined effort to improve their anti-tank defences since the summer of 1939. The strongest defences were in the south, with some substantial and expensive concrete bunkers, connected by trenches with barbed wire and some anti-tank obstacles. Finland had been a base for the Imperial Russian Navy and had a small store of old 6, 8, and 10 inch guns, and some spare 30 cm thick armour plate. The guns were incorporated into the defence grid, and the armour plate used as a covering sloped over some concrete bunkers. Finland had very few anti-tank weapons, the best being Swedish or licensed made 37 mm Oerlikon guns which could deal with most known Soviet armour. No ATR were available at the start of the Winter War, until some Boys anti-tank rifles were purchased from Britain and some more from the Germans after Dunkirk. In the early phase of the war Finnish infantry relied on grenades, axes and hammers, crowbars, shotguns, improvised

explosive devices and Molotov cocktails to destroy armour, and tank obstacles for protection. Ditches were the most common defence, with granite boulders being dug into the ground to trap armour, and log fixed at turret height intended to damage the turrets or armour moving quickly through trees. To the north the defence was intended to be more flexible, dancing around Soviet units struggling through a nightmarish tangle of marsh, lakes and forest devoid of roads and largely unknown to the attacker.

The Soviets committed close to 425,000 troops and 2,500 tanks to the opening attack; eventually 760,000 men and over 6,500 tanks were deployed. Of these most were T-26 organic to infantry divisions, and light tank brigades. Some were T-28 tanks as well as a handful of KV-I, KV-II, and SMK heavy tanks, plus about 800 BT tanks in two brigades of the 10th Tank Corps and the 34th Independent Tank Brigade. Some BT may also have been present in reconnaissance units. The bulk of the BT units deployed were BT-5 and BT-7, mostly in the south though one battalion from the 34th was sent to Lapland later in the war.

The BT series were designed for rapid transit over steppe or grassland, ideally whilst not being shot at and did not fare well in broken terrain sprinkled with angry Finns. The 45mm gun proved effective firing against granite tank obstacles, and firing AP against wooden and concrete bunkers. Tanks were also used against Finnish marksmen and snipers using armoured shields. As expected, operations put a strain on the tanks engines and tracks, with additional casualties from driver error in harsh terrain as well as losses to Finnish attacks and defences. Officially the Red Army

acknowledged 611 tank losses, the Finns estimated 1,000-1,200. Post war historians have come up with much higher figures, up to 3,543 with 316 permanently lost, the rest being repairable.

Short story is the Finns lost, Russian casualties were crazy high, and the BT series showed itself to be useless against fortifications and less than ideal in broken snow-covered terrain.

After the war the Soviets tried to up armour the BT series but abandoned the idea as the vehicles were intended to be replaced by a new model of light tank or the T-34 medium tank.

The Great Patriotic War

In 1941 Stalin expected Germany to fight the war to the west to a conclusion before turning east to invade Russia as Hitler would not want to wage a war on two fronts. There was a slim chance of diplomacy ending the war otherwise an attack could not be likely before late spring of 1942. Plenty of time to consolidate and fortify the newly liberated territories, locate units to barracks and depots closer to the German border, time to produce T-34 and KV tanks and even enough to streamline Red Army units, concentrating heavy weapons at corps and army level, as well as disbanding the armoured corps to create handier tank divisions and brigades. Given enough time the Red Army would field a force of over 30,000 tanks, roughly half of them T-34 and KV with the rest new models of light tanks and for a year or two BT series and T-26 providing light tank support.

It was an overly ambitious plan. Not the least because the Red Army only had 25,000 tanks, with roughly 17,000 in need of maintenance or factory rebuilding. Work was delayed by finite machine shop resources and personnel, plus in the case of BT and T-26 tanks limited availability of spare parts. Soviet production lines and supporting manufacturing was concentrated on newer models with supplies for older vehicles no longer produced. Some components common to Soviet vehicles were available but workshops and factories had to put effort into sourcing parts. Track pins became scarce which is incredible considering how little effort is needed to produce them and that being short of just one immobilises a tank or at best forces it to drive in little circles.

Much of the above is understandable caused by an ambitious plan to update the tank park in the shortest time possible. More puzzling is the inability to supply troops close to the border with adequate fuel, munitions and crews.

What spoiled things was Hitler's decision to invade Russia in 1941. From February 1941 Axis forces assembled on



A Finnish BT-42 assault gun; a captured BT-7 with redesigned turret to fit the British Q.F. 4,5 inch howitzer Mark II (known as 114 Psv.H/18 by the Finns).

the Eastern Front, known to the Soviets but ignored to avoid the risk of escalating the situation. Between February and June, the Axis assembled a force of 3.8 million troops, about 4,000 AFVs, and over 5,000 aircraft. Opposing this were 5.7 million Soviet troops, maybe 7,000 aircraft and a massive armoured force. Perhaps more important were the Soviet reserves of 14 million who could be recalled once hostilities started. The invasion plan was an ambitious, a six-pronged assault aimed at Leningrad, Moscow, Kharkov and Smolensk before taking the Caucasus and setting the border in the east as the Ural Mountains.

The NKVD issued an invasion warning at 1:00 on 22nd June, the German attack started at 3:15 with bombing and artillery raids. The Red Army wanted to use armour supporting an infantry blocking force to blunt the thrusts of German armour. Unfortunately, the rapid tempo of the offensive didn't allow this, with blocking operations being confused and more importantly ineffective. In the opening three weeks of Barbarossa over 10,000 tanks had been lost, rising to losses of 20,500 by the end of 1941. About half the losses had been due to either mechanical failure, fuel shortage or surrendering after encirclement. Incredibly the rest were lost in desperate combat slowing the German advance. By Spring 1942 somewhere between 200 and 300 BT tanks remained on the western front, mostly in and around Leningrad. By the end of the year hardly any remained and were being used to train tank drivers to reduce wear and tear on newer tanks.

The swan song of the BT series was in the Far East, fighting the Japanese in 1945 with over 1,200 BT 5 and 7 giving useful service in China and East Asia, remaining as garrison forces until they were mostly scrapped in 1946.

Captured BT tanks were used in small numbers by the Finns, with some used to create self-propelled guns. The thinness of the armour was noted, with most tanks withdrawn to be used in tank schools teaching drivers and in infantry training. The Germans mostly stripped equipment from captured BT vehicles, before scrapping them for their metal content. Lack of parts was certainly an issue, as well as reliability and training, but the BT was obsolete before the 1941 invasion and even more so as the war progressed. There are some pictures of BT tanks in German service but not many.

Conclusion

The BT series of tanks were intended to serve as a fast tank capable of supporting cavalry units, as a light mobile element in heavy and medium armoured units and to conduct deep penetrations of 80-100 km into the enemy rear areas.



The Germans used many captured BT-7, which they designated PzKpfw BT 742r.

Designers emphasised mobility, shoehorning a big engine into the first BT tanks and putting even more powerful ones into subsequent tanks in the series. The BT-7M was powered by a diesel engine extending its range whilst making supply and maintenance slightly easier and cheaper.

Firepower was also important. The Red Army was keen on an effective gun with a coaxial machine gun from the early thirties onwards, when other countries considered one or two rifle calibre machine guns were adequate. Developing and fitting a 45mm dual purpose gun was a good idea with it proving effective in the Spanish Civil War against contemporary German and Italian tanks. Accepted 45mm shells generally had remarkably poor performance but this was offset by being bigger than most other tank guns. A bigger problem was the two-man turret and three-man crew. All the crew were overstretched performing maintenance, and in combat the vehicle commander had far too much to do.

The most serious weakness of the BT series was its armour, which was just about rifle bullet proof and vulnerable to armour piercing machine gun rounds. Losses to 37mm anti-tank guns and light field artillery of 70-77mm calibre were arguments for better protection, with some work attempted building on French ideas for sloped armour. The BT series design couldn't carry extra weight, with the idea moving towards a larger medium tank, the T-34.

Beyond that the BT series suffered from continual problems with track wear, transmission failure, inadequate number of radio tanks, limited crew training, and a tendency to mount more machine guns than the crew really needed. Further the ability to run on tracks and wheels wasn't really that useful in the field. Although the tracks could be fitted or removed in under thirty minutes it was an exhausting job and not the boon Christie had imagined it might be. Beside the Red Army had thousands of wheeled armoured cars that could travel on roads

already.

On balance though, the BT series tanks were adequate, comparable to other foreign tanks and built in enough numbers to compensate for most of its deficiencies. They had an important role in developing armoured tactics, training crews, developing diesel engines, as well as playing a role in several shooting wars.

In 1941 the main failing of the BT series was that it was not adequately maintained, either mechanically or in terms of supply. When the Germans invaded tanks were awaiting repairs or engine maintenance, short of ammunition and in some cases short of fuel. Incredibly a shortage of track pins, an item that really doesn't require a lot of effort to manufacture rendered otherwise working vehicles immobile. Despite logistical problems those that could did fight doing their best in an army that generally discouraged initiative.

In preceding conflicts, the BT series had performed well, able to provide effective close support for infantry and capable of engaging enemy armour with some prospect of success. The BT was certainly good enough. It also has a place in history in the development of the T-34 and even the KV/IS series, as well as many post war tanks, providing the basic engine design, the suspension for some and defining what would be the "Soviet" look of tanks, turret forward, sloping armour and a squat low to the ground configuration.

Certainly the BT series could have been improved, could have had better armour and been used more competently, but it deserves some credit for its service in the 1930s, scaring Russia's neighbours, fighting in several small wars and opposing the German invasion of Russia, inflicting some casualties and delay that helped keep Russia in the war.

Swedish Friendly Fire Tournament September 2018

Joe Arthur

My holiday plans were going to find me sitting in my car in Denmark in September with either the option of driving back to Calais and home or going to another destination. I looked for an *ASL* tournament in northern Europe in September and the Swedish Friendly Fire tournament popped up. Talking to Magnus Rimvall at DOUBLE 1 he very kindly invited me to stay at his house for a few days prior to the tournament for some *ASL*. Job done – the Swedish Friendly Fire tournament it was.

Magnus was so far into the Swedish countryside (which from what I saw consisted of trees and rocks, rocks and trees and sometimes trees growing on top of rocks – Magnus stated that Sweden is one big forest) that he did not appear on my sat nav. Luckily being old I could use the “stopping and asking people” method I used before sat navs came out. He has to be one of the few *ASL* players who can claim to have a moose visit his back garden.

The tournament director of Friendly Fire is Mattias Ronnblom who designs a lot of scenarios for, and publishes the *Friendly Fire* pack. Mr Desperation Morale is a huge fan of these packs, rating most as “highly recommended”. The tournament is part of a games weekend held by and mainly for the local Linköping gamers. Looking at what the other gamers were playing over the weekend it appeared to be mainly GMT

games. There are far more of those gamers than *ASL* players (sixteen *ASL* attendees this year). There were three rooms of board games and one room of *ASL*. It means that the hotel is booked solid for the weekend by games players and if you do want to stay there you have to book early.

The tournament is held in the Swedish “beauty spot” Rimforsa, which is 20 miles, 30 minutes drive from Linköping. The reason for this being that for the cost of an average hotel in Linköping attendees can stay at the Rimforsa Strand hotel, Fredrika Bremers Alle ‘2, Rimforsa, Linköping (www.rimforsastrand.se) which is next to a lake, has a sauna on the lake edge, and prides itself on the food it serves up. “Moten, Vardskap, Gastronomi” being its advertising slogan – “Meetings, Hospitality, Gastronomy”. They serve their own honey produced by bees kept in the hotel grounds. Home made cakes and biscuits along with a selection of snacks regularly appeared in the coffee area (and were much appreciated by Joe). The Saturday evening dinner was a three course gastronomic affair with a fish starter, steak main and dessert which took two hours twenty minutes to serve and eat. Joe was sitting in the lounge wondering what all these Swedes were doing.....

At ten p.m. on the Friday word went round “time for a sauna”. Joe wimps out

because he thought nudity and hitting people with birch twigs might be involved. Whilst hitting some UK *ASL* players with birch twigs would appeal (So, you won’t use a dice cup Pete? Thwack! You don’t want people telling you how to roll your dice? THWACK!! Hang on Pete – I’m just off to find a thicker birch branch.....) (*You’re just jealous that your puny cup is no match for a manly tower!! - Pete*) I had no reason to want to hit any of the Swedish players. The sauna was next to the lake and the idea was to go into the lake to cool off.

It is a posh hotel. Originally the event was held in a school and attendees slept on the floor. As people aged they wanted some more comfort and it has ended up at the Rimforsa Strand. The cost for accommodation and food for the Friday evening through to Sunday morning was €270. This is why Joe, not having a job or the Pfizer damages, slept in his car in the car park. If you want to know what the rooms are like I suggest that you look on TripAdvisor or the hotel website – I have no idea. Given the standard / location of the hotel it is probably one of the few *ASL* tournaments in the world where your wife / partner would be happy to go to with you. One Swedish attendee had chosen to arrive on the Tuesday and had a little holiday (saunas, rowing on the lake) prior to the games weekend.

It is possible to go cheaper – Magnus very kindly gave me the details of a hostel nearby. Still too expensive for Joe though. It is the Liljeholmen Herrgard Hostel, Liljeholmsvagen 8, 590 43 Rimforsa (liljeholmen.nu). Mr T on gamesquad.com states that this hostel is on the other side of the lake from the tournament venue. This is not a great distance but it is too far to walk. It’s in a pleasant building overlooking the lake, single rooms are pretty small but tidy and well-insulated (with a shower room along the corridor) and it costs less than the Rimforsa Strand hotel. Just don’t check in too late in the evening otherwise the place will be locked up - however you can inform the hostel in advance that you will be late and they will put the front door key in a hiding place for you.

It does mean that the tournament is tough to get to unless you have a car. Fly in and rent a car is going to be the way to attend. If you do take your wife / partner then they can use the car whilst you are playing *ASL*. Or maybe you can rustle up enough *ASL* players to split the cost of the



car four ways. This is a point to note for any tournament directors who are after foreign attendees – have the venue near an international airport in a cheap hotel / hostel. This may be why the Copenhagen tournament has so many foreign players attend?

The thing to note about the tournament is that it is a testing ground for the new *Friendly Fire* pack that is to be issued that year. This is the second Swedish tournament where the pack has been play tested. Earlier in the year, in May, some of the scenarios have been used in the Stockholm *ASL* tournament - attendees having the opportunity of seeing the scenarios prior to that tournament. The tournament director there is Melvin Falk. The Stockholm tournament usually throws up a few issues with some of the scenarios and they are adjusted / tweaked for the *Friendly Fire* tournament. Attendees to *Friendly Fire* have had the opportunity of seeing all the scenarios to be used in advance - there may be some small changes to these prior to the tournament. The scenarios played in *Friendly Fire* are rarely changed and the pack is sent to the printers shortly after the tournament. This method of play testing is why you have eight scenarios in the pack. There are four rounds in each tournament with a choice of two scenarios in each round = eight scenarios. Lots of the Swedish players (including Melvin) will also have been involved in the play testing of these scenarios outside of these two tournaments.

It means that the pack has been through a rigorous play testing process with some of the worlds top players involved in the process (Melvin is currently ranked number two on AREA, Mattias number eighteen). It all explains why the *Friendly Fire* packs are so good – not only have

they been play tested but they have also been through two tournaments. Next time you meet a Swedish player make sure that you buy him a beer and thank him – for he has probably been involved in making the *Friendly Fire* pack the excellent product that it is in some way.

There is one “normal” tournament in Sweden - the supporting fire tournament (supportingfire.com).

If we were to do the same in the UK Toby Pilling, Craig Benn and Mark Blackmore would have to design and play test the scenarios and two UK tournaments would have to be used for play testing. We all know that is never going to happen. It shows how precious the *Friendly Fire* packs are and how lucky the *ASL* community is that they exist.

What it means to the player who rolls up to the tournament with no preparation – you are going to get your arse handed to you on a plate by people who will have played these scenarios multiple times. You have been warned.....and yes I came eleventh out of sixteen thank you for asking. In what is becoming a bit of a tradition Melvin won the tournament.

It is also the reason why the attendees are almost wholly Swedish - this year the foreigners consisted of me and a bloke from Norway. Denmark is a short drive away (there is the bridge or ferry service) but no Danes attend. Magnus stated that this is because they sit down at the table and say to their opponent “another Melvin defence?”. I was doing the same – going over to Melvin’s table to see how he was playing / setting up the scenario. I learnt something new about the positioning of guns from him. If you are lucky enough to play Melvin make sure that you are the attacker. You will have a miniscule chance

of winning but it is better than the no chance you will have if you let him attack. Melvin, being a play tester and a gentleman, allows his opponent to choose the scenario and side that he wants in this tournament – he waives the tournament rules for scenario selection. What got me was that he wore a suit and tie throughout the tournament – maybe he had no time to pack?

François Boudrenghien, tournament director of the French Villeneuve d’Ascq tournament, tells a story about Melvin saying to an opponent “this scenario is unbalanced – I will give you five squads”. Turns out that the story was not quite correct – Melvin offered his opponent 6 extra British squads and a 7-0 British Leader. He declined the offer and only added 5 additional 4-5-7 squads and the leader. The gamesquad thread is here if you are interested in the scenario (FrF32 Hellenic Expedition) and the tournament (<http://www.gamesquad.com/forums/index.php?threads/asl-scandinavian-open-2009-scenario-list.80476/page-6>). Melvin has stated on Gamesquad “I like to challenge myself and if I think I got the favoured side I will try to balance it up before play. If I play the non-favoured side I see it as a challenge and hope my opponent makes mistakes , LOL”. So if you are lucky enough to play Melvin ask for some help in the form of a reduction or increase in forces – I know that I will.

What else to say about the tournament? It is held in one of the hotel’s large meeting rooms. It was usual to see a bottle of some sort of spirits kept by each attendee’s chair. On the Saturday evening there were a few players who were looking a bit under the weather – not as bad as Gerard at DOUBLE 1 (please see the front cover of *VFTT 89* for a picture of Gerard trying to play *ASL* after a bottle of wine – and Pete, that was cruel to put it on the cover.....) (*Moral of the story - don't fall asleep while playing an ASL tournament scenario :-)* - Pete) but going in the same direction.

The reason for bringing your own bottle was that alcohol is expensive to buy in Sweden. According to Magnus the way that the Swedes cope with that is to buy their alcohol in Germany or elsewhere in the EU and import it. Hence the bottles – buying that much alcohol from the hotel would be very expensive. Mind you on the Saturday morning after breakfast Andreas, the owner of Trojan Games (also an *ASL* player), was sitting down to a bottle of cava (Spanish sparkling white wine) with two other attendees. The alcohol may be expensive but it did not stop some people.....

Everybody appeared to be walking away with a copy of *Hatten in Flames* – which might explain how Andreas could afford that bottle of cava.



The tournament is four rounds starting with one on the Friday evening (five o'clock), two on the Saturday and one on the Sunday morning. Mattias also has some specific tournament rules.

Mattias does not believe in draws. If the game is not finished he will look at it and apply the following method:

50%-50% Each player makes a DR the player that rolls the lowest wins

60%-40% TD rolls a DR if the DR is 7 or less the player with the edge wins otherwise he has lost.

70%-30% TD roll a DR if the DR is 8 or less the player with the edge wins otherwise he has lost.

71+% or better, no DR is made, the player with the edge is considered the winner

Precision dice must be used if available. Dice towers are required (*no dice cups for the Swedes :-)* - Pete). So no noisy dice rolling in glasses please. That rule might be something to do with the alcohol consumption but you would have to ask Mattias.....

There appears to be one "grudge rule" to stop the practice of "freezing" an enemy tank by driving your tank into the same hex. If you do that and end its MPH in the same hex your tank is automatically turned into a wreck as if eliminated in close combat – so no Ssmoke or Crew Survival roll. At least that was my interpretation of this:

Tournament rule for: D2.6 Enemy AFV: A vehicle cannot voluntarily stop or end its MPH in Motion in an enemy AFV's hex (whether Known or not) unless it can do so out of that AFV's LOS (i.e. while Bypassing a hexside opposite that of the DEFENDER's Bypass AFV), or unless it can, at the moment and position of entry into that hex, attack that AFV (regardless of its To Hit possibility) and be capable of destroying or shocking it with an original TK or IFT DR of 5 (using a non-Depletable ammo type available to the vehicle). A vehicle thus barred from remaining in an AFV's hex may not attempt ESB in that hex, and may check if VBM is allowed out of that hex prior to attempting VBM (2.3), if the vehicle still ends its MPH in the hex it is immediately turned into a wreck as if eliminated in CC.

The other thing about the tournament was that it was a joy to talk to the person who designed some of the scenarios and to get his thoughts on them. Mattias' comments on the scenarios that I played are included in the AARs later on. I did thank Mattias for all the packs and told him that one memorable scenario of his that I had played was scenario 'FrF83 Phantom Army' in the blind round of DOUBLE 1. Mattias thought that was a bit cruel of Derek to use that for a blind round due to the number of SSRs in that scenario. He stated that it was the most SSRs that he had ever written for any scenario.



It seemed to me that Mattias was missing an opportunity with his *Friendly Fire* packs. Unlike the *Schwerpunkt* packs the *Friendly Fire* pack has no analysis. This is a great pity for you do not get to see Mattias' or Melvin's thoughts on the scenario. For instance there is a scenario in the new pack entitled 'FrF99 Boy Soldiers'. A bunch of fifteen year old Hitler Youth have to take some stone buildings from the Russians. Mattias tried it with all German conscripts but it proved impossible. Information like that makes the scenario more interesting (at least for me).

Some sort of analysis would stop idiots like me making stupid mistakes as well. In the scenario 'FrF97 Wrecking the Rentals' Joe looked at the Sherman counters and said – that's a 75*, so I can't take out those German tanks on the front. In fact the star was not a star but an asterisk which pointed you to a note on the back of the counter – DOH! It was a *75 gun. My opponent and I both agreed after the game that it was a piss poor counter design. What I had done was turn a finely balanced scenario that had gone through hours / days of play testing into a dog. Some analysis of the scenario might have prevented me from doing that?

It is also how you learn – seeing how a great player like Melvin does it hopefully improves your game. Unless you go to the tournament you will not see how Melvin plays the scenario. As I said earlier the art of positioning ordnance has changed for me after seeing his tactics.

Out of politeness I let Mattias read this article before giving it to Pete to make sure that what I said was true and his response to my opinion on the lack of analysis was:

"The reason I don't do scenario analysis is that they are essentially spoilers. It's more fun for everyone if the players

have to figure out that sort of thing on their own".

This is a valid point. I have been to tournaments where *Schwerpunkt* scenarios are being played and the defensive set up always seems to follow the analysis provided in the pack.

If you are interested – here are the scenarios that I played and where I went wrong (I seldom went right), together with Mattias' comments on the scenario:

Friday evening 5PM - 11PM FrF 99 Boy Soldiers vs. Lars-Robert Gregorsson

Lars bid G1 and I bid G0. He gets the Germans. I got to set up as the Russians with one Russian 4-4-7 becoming a 4-5-8.

I will not describe my set up – it was nothing special. If I knew how the tournament worked at that point I would have gone over to look at Melvin's table to see how he was doing it. Unfortunately at this stage I did not know how things worked.

Magnus told me that he had won this game as the Germans by going down the east board edge and taking the two victory condition buildings. This is what Lars proceeded to do. I revealed a 76L artillery piece on my turn one to duel with his 75* gun. I miss in Prep Fire – he rolls a double one in Defensive Fire. A critical hit which Melvin points out (he was walking past and heard the noise) destroys my gun and crew. The round is deemed to have hit the ammo box. My opponent now has one victory point and it is turn one. He then proceeded to generate three heroes and kept passing NMCs with 6 morale troops. It is at this point that I ask to switch dice. Lars

very kindly at the start of the game agreed to play using the backgammon rules for dice (essentially dice cups and dice towers, only four precision dice are used throughout the game, you can swap when you like). So we switch. Lars then placed a demo charge on my squad with an MMG in hex K9. He rolls a double one using my dice. That building hex turns to rubble and no spreading rubble falls onto his troops. To make things even better for Joe it now reveals my Russian squad that had just rallied and officer on the second floor of J8 to his machine gun kill stack and his artillery piece back in his set-up area. They are promptly fired on and break and are eliminated for failure to rout next turn.

At this point I had one squad in M1, a mortar with a half squad on the railway embankment and the AT Gun in the O3 building with two squads and the 8-1. I decide to go Pete Phillips on him and not resign (*something I've learned from the top players over the years.... - Pete*). By turn 5 I had a squad in M1, the half squad with the mortar on the railway embankment, an ISU 152 and the gun and crew left in the building. The squads being chewed up in close combat with minimal loss to my opponent. He advances into CC with my AT gun crew and Joe rolls a double one. Yay! Trouble is my opponent, being the attacker, had rolled first and rolled a three. I get an officer who is then promptly removed from the board with the crew. I was now left with one and a half squads and the ISU 152 which was wishing it had more machine guns. Joe resigns on German turn 5.

Would it be fair to say that I was diced off the board? It was at this point I wondered – was it worth the effort in getting here?

Mattias' comments

A common mistake that people make in this scenario is on turn one the Germans are too aggressive. Those Russian -2 shots kill. Advance both sides of the map board and keep the Russian guessing as to whether you are going for men over the railway embankment or going to take the two buildings.

The Russian set up options are limited.

Having played the Russians I can confirm that it is impossible to cover every avenue of approach. The Germans should always be able to find some way to move forward safely.

Saturday morning 9AM - 4PM

FrF 98 Amerikanskaya Suka vs. Stefan Fielder

I wanted to play 'FrF 100 Deutsch Lesson' because I took one look at FrF 98



and told my opponent "we're never going to finish that in time". He would not budge and wanted FrF 98 – I thought that he had probably played it before (Stefan has stated on gamesquad.com that he had not). We roll and he gets FrF 98. I end up with the Russians after the bidding is finished having bid R0 and he bidding G1. It meant again that one Russian 4-4-7 became a 4-5-8.

The scenario forces the Russians to attack the forward multi-hex stone building on board 71 with your five T34s and 6-2-8s. This is what I did. I sent a couple of squads up the other flank just to be annoying. The assault on the board 71 building did not go well because he managed to get his flamethrower into it which proceeded to kill two of my squads. I was never going to take that building.

The tank battle was me surrounding and killing one Panther, immobilising another, but one was still prowling around looking for what was left of my tanks.

On the FrF A board one of the squads went berserk and died and the other made it to one of the multi hex wooden buildings. At that point it was time up. Mattias was called in to adjudicate.

It was deemed 70-30 to my opponent. The dice were rolled and it was an eight. Joe loses another game. I did not play that scenario well and would like to have another go at it.

To win this scenario it appears to me that you have to win the tank battle. One mistake that I made was not to keep my M10 GMCs on the road so that they can whiz around the board causing my opponent grief. I did manage to get one behind his line which had a rear shot at a JgPz IV and it

promptly rolled a double six.

Mattias' comments

What the Russians do is dependant on the German set-up. When I played this in Stockholm as the Russians my opponent left the road on FrF A undefended and I was able to take the multi hex wooden buildings for a win.

The Germans have to have one guy on the road on the German left in order to leave some residual on the road, defend the front multi hex stone building on board 71 with some guy in the other multi hex stone building on board 71.

The Russians attack the front stone building on board 71 (no choice) and maybe get to the back wooden buildings on Board FrF A if possible.

Saturday evening 4PM - 11PM

FrF 95 Blood Red Snow vs. Christian Lindberg

Christian insisted on going for a run before we played so I said that in order to move things along I would defend and set up whilst he went for his jog. That means I played the Germans with no ABS adjustment. There are limited options for the German at set up so it was quite easy. Christian admitted that he did not play often (Joe had lost two in a row at this point). Christian did not realise the awesome firepower of the Flak 18 88L and proceeded to put three of his tanks on top of a hill just in front of that gun. Amazingly one tank survived and went for cover. The 88L got it a few turns later by intensive firing when it tried to get to a couple of my squads that were DM'd. My opponent resigned for the 88L had not only taken out the tanks but had been banging away at his infantry leaving

him with very little left. Looking back my dice were hot.

Magnus played this as the Russians and it is worth noting his game. Start up roll for the tanks – double six. Random selection roll is a double – both tanks immobilised. The German 81* mortar takes out another two of his tanks. Magnus resigns and goes up to his room to calculate the odds of what happened to him – about one in 40,000. You have to love *ASL*.

Mattias comments

He did not have much to say on this scenario. I was thinking of putting the guns in the trenches until he asked “why would you do that?”. Emplaced guns of course getting the +2 cover anyway and it allows you to spread out your forces more.

Sunday morning 9AM - 4PM FrF 97 Wrecking The Rentals vs. Magnus Rimvall.

Yes – it is called Sod’s Law. I was playing my host of a few days earlier. Magnus had lost two and I had lost two. We were the only players at that time to have that score so it meant that we had to play a game. Magnus choose FrF 97 and we bid. I bid German 3 – the highest that you could go. More on why I did that later. It meant that Magnus had three of his 4-6-7s turn into 4-6-8s.

I had looked at Melvin’s set up and he had the Marder cover one flank HIP in a forest and the mortar in the middle of the field on the other flank HIP in grain. The rest of the troops were concentrated on the central forest where they could have cover if DM’d and cover when falling back to the village to defend the Victory Condition as the game progressed.

Magnus and I had played this scenario back at his house with me as the Russians. It was where I had stated that the Shermans were a 75* gun. Playing the scenario it felt impossible for the Russians to win – which was why I had bid to the maximum on the ABS to get the Germans - G3.

Magnus and I could not finish the game in time and he was leaving for the USA and ASLOK on the Monday so we called Melvin over to adjudicate. He looked at the board and said “how many Sherman’s are left?”. Asking him why he wanted to know revealed what I had done and Joe looked sheepish.

I apologised to Magnus. What else can you do? At least he knew that it was ignorance rather than me cheating because at his house I had played the game the same way with me playing the Russians (and had tried to get a human wave going with men plus tanks – always wanted to do that). He had won that game as the Germans. Melvin was going on about multiple hits because of the white dot on the ROF number (I actually knew that bit). It was at this point

that Magnus and I agreed that it was a piss poor design for a counter. It had caused us to waste a lot of precious *ASL* time – we had played the thing twice.....

The only good point to come out of this is that I had the sense to realise that played this way the scenario was a dog and bid G3.

Melvin said the game was 70-30 to me and rolled the dice. Joe wins, but it was not really a win and Magnus has agreed to play that scenario again with me at some point just to see what should have happened.

Mattias’ comments:

Magnus and I were the only people left playing so I was not able to ask him – he had packed up and gone.

Given that Melvin’s first concern was how many Shermans were left it appears to be another of those scenarios where there is a tank battle and a separate infantry battle. In order win you have to win the tank battle.

So that was it. Would I go again? It’s too hard to get to and you need to do a lot of preparation. So the answer to that would be I would like to, but given the expense and time required, I doubt that I will see Rimforsa again. Should you go? Well you now know what is involved and what to expect – the choice is yours.

Ω



Friendly Fire Pack 12 contains eight scenarios featured in the Friendly Fire 2018 *ASL* tournament.

This scenario pack can be ordered from <http://www.friendlyfire.se/asl/ordering/>.

Price: 110 SEK (~12 USD)

Average Scenario ROAR Recommendation: 6.2

Average Scenario ROAR Balance: 34% - 66%

FrF93 Wiener Walzer Sestra River, Russia, November 23, 1941

FrF94 Death from Above Oblivskaya Airfield, Russia, November 26, 1942

FrF95 Blood Red Snow Rychovskiy, Russia, December 11, 1942

FrF96 The Flying Circus Sychovka, Russia, March 6, 1943

FrF97 Wrecking the Rentals Kovel, Poland, April 10, 1944

FrF98 Amerikanskaya Suka Zakręť, Poland, July 30, 1944

FrF99 Boy Soldiers Südpark, Breslau, Germany, February 19, 1945

FrF100 Deutsch Lesson Mehrhoog, Germany, March 25, 1945

GRABBING TITO

A look at HOB's Operation Rosselsprung Scenario

Oliver Giancola

Some time ago Rob Seulowitz and I wrapped up a playing of 'FF14 Operation Rosselsprung', an 11-turn, 6-board monster from the HOB *Waffen-SS II: Fuhrer's Firemen* scenario pack. What follows is a tactical analysis, a brief (relative to the scenario's size) AAR, plus my defence. Monster scenario, monster write up.

"No one expects SS paratroopers!"

Rob was looking to play a monster, and since this was on his list, I offered to try it with him. I had read about this action and wanted to try it in *ASL*. Briefly, SS paratroopers and glidermen swoop down to kidnap Tito in his mountain cave - and wipe out a partisan-held village while they're at it. We thought ROAR gave the partisans an edge, but looking at the card, the partisans

are probably more challenging to play. You don't have to be a math expert to figure out the Germans have a clear edge. They have three -2 leaders and seven! -1 leaders vs. Tito (10-3) and three -1 partisan leaders. The Germans also have a firepower edge, with 41 658s and 5 548s facing 24 337s and 27 527s. All of that is bad enough. The Partisans also cannot form multi-hex fire groups, which means they will be more vulnerable to fire as they stack in the same hexes to generate decent attacks (perhaps this pro-German weighting should come as no surprise given that the historical section uses the term "Arian" [sic], and it is from an all-SS pack).

But the partisans do have Tito. And given the way the cave is facing, there are really only 4 or 5 hexes on board 2 where the SS can directly come to grips with him. The SS can also throw DCs into the Cave

from above, which played into my set up.

"Let them come"

My strategy was to defend Tito's cave to the utmost, while holding the village for as long as possible. There really were not any surprises in my village set up. But in defending the hill, I essentially took a reverse slope approach. My main fear was that the SS glidermen would swoop down onto the hill in an Eben-Emael-style attack. This is probably what I would have tried. Accordingly, I built a line of trenches from the board edge up to the hill, so that my reinforcements could use that to move up quickly and under some cover. I even put my mortars back along the eastern board edge to fire on any SS on the crest, and also to fire Smoke up there should the Germans take the heights. Setting up directly on the level 3 hexes could be a mistake. For, as our game proved, just about anything that is visible to the SS will crumble under multiple long-range attacks. And the partisans certainly do not have range to fire back. I even put the AA guns just below the ridge, to fire on any SS to come up there. I also thought (and events proved me right) that the SS would avoid the direct approach and assault from the north and south of Hill 621. Again, my set-up (see sidebar) shows my initial dispositions based on these thoughts.

"Blood on the risers"?

After his Viennese waltz onto the open areas of boards 11 and 38, Rob rather vociferously argued that the partisans should strongly defend the landing zones. I had considered such a strategy, trying to shoot and kill as many SS as possible when they are most vulnerable - in their 'chutes or gliders. The partisans could make some weak attacks (mainly 1FP attacks, though at -2), but they would also be dispersed when the SS put their boots on terra firma. Given that it's 1944, these Germans land with their weapons, so this isn't going to be Crete. And with assault fire and Hand-to-Hand combat possible, not many 337s and even 527s will last against 658s. I could see the partisans being used as speed bumps only if they could set up in foxholes. I had toyed with such a defence, putting mortars on the small hills of boards 36 and 38, but again, I don't see such units lasting long.

Instead, my plan was to force the 658s to come adjacent, in open terrain, to Concealed partisans, who could maximize their slim firepower to blast them. And as it was, the partisans had a hard enough time doing that.

OPERATION ROSSELSPRUNG

WAFFEN-SS II: FF 14 *Design Credits: Scott Holst & Rob Banozic*

Battlefield Orientation:

11	36	18	2
			N
			↑
8C			

Play Balance:
German: Decrease Game Length to 10.5 turns.
Partisan: May exchange five 5-2-7s for five 6-2-8s.

TACTICAL OBJECTIVE: The Germans win immediately if they capture (not eliminate) Tito (see HSR4). Otherwise the Germans win at Game End if they control (or eliminate) the cave and all stone locations on board 3.

Historical Special Rules:
 1. EC are Dry with no Wind at start. All Streams are Dry. Place Overlay 2 on 38D2-D1. Before setup make a dr for each building hex on board 3. On a dr of 1-2 that hex is rubble (Falling rubble is NA). Kindling is NA.
 2. Partisans use Russian SW normally; captured use penalties are NA for Partisan use of any OH given weapons. 527/27s use their printed information/factors normally but are treated as being Partisans and are assumed to have an underlined ML. Partisans may not Deploy, Bore-sight, or form multi-location FGs.
 3. All trenches must set-up on board prior to German designation of drop points (but after rubble creation as per HSR 1). The Partisan Guns/ 82mm mortars may not use HIP; the AA Guns may not gain concealment after set-up.
 4. Place the Cave in 205 (CA:205/206). The Partisan 10-3 represents Tito and must begin the scenario IN the Cave. All Cave rules (G11) apply as though the Partisans and Germans are Japanese (EXC: Cave Complex is NA). Stacking capacity (G11.4) is per side. CC is allowed INSIDE the Cave.
 5. The Germans receive Air Support (E7) in the form of four Stukas with bombs in the first PFPH on board until Game Turn 2.
 6. Panzerfaust and ATMM capability is NA for the Germans. The German 548/238s are treated as Assault Engineers (H1.22) and are *not* SS. Only the German 548/238s and SMCS may use FTs without the Non-Qualified Use penalties (A22.3-23.2).
 7. No Quarter is in effect for both sides (20.3). Hand to Hand CC (J2.31) is allowed for both sides.
 8. Two Gliders may be secretly designated by the German player to transport the Sdkfz 2s and RCLs (in tow) per U.S. vehicle note 51. Each such glider has a capacity OF 35 PP.

Yugoslavian Partisans Sets Up First:
[ELR: 5] [SAN: 5] [357]

1st Battalion, 1st Partisan Brigade set up anywhere in the play area [EXC: see HSR 4]:

10-3	5-1	8-1	8-0	7-0	6-1	5-2-7
2	2	2	2	2	2	17
3-3-7	1-2-7	HMGC 7-8-16	HMGC 7-11-12	MMGC 4-1-12	LMG 1-1-1	2-6
24	6	24	6	6	6	6
MTR 50' (3-20)	MTR 82' (3-78)	AA 37L (8)	AA 20L (8)	Trench 14	Trench 14	Trench 14
2	2	3	7	7	7	7

Elements of the Partisan Officer Cadet School enter on Turn 5 from the west edge of board 2:

8-5	7-0	5-2-7	LMG 2-6
11	10	9	

TURN

German Moves First: [ELR: 5] [SAN: 3] [708]

500th SS Fallschirmjaeger Battalion enter on Turn 1 by Air Drop (E9):

10-2	5-2	8-1	8-0	7-0	6-1	5-2-7	3-4-8
2-2-8	dm HMGC 3-8	dm MMGC 3-8	LMG 3-8	DC 30-1	dm MTR 6-5-8	dm MTR 6-5-8	1-1mm
2	2	2	2	26	4		

Draufganger Group must enter on Turn 2 by Glider (E8):

10-2	5-2	8-1	8-0	7-0	6-1	5-2-7	54-8
2-2-8	dm HMGC 3-8	dm MMGC 3-8	LMG 3-8	DC 30-1	dm MTR 6-5-8	dm MTR 6-5-8	1-1mm
2	2	2	15	5			

LG 40 **RCL** **GL** **22** **GL**

75-811	T10 3PP	518PP 622PP +14PP
2	2	22

“Operation Rosselsprung”

I had essentially set up to defend the cave, with all but 2 MMGs going there. For both sides, it's challenging to figure out the right mix of units to defend and attack the victory objectives. Rob felt like he may have devoted too many units to the village, where he won handily. Defending the hill seems like the better way to go, as the partisans' best asset (Tito) is forced to set up there. He formed the point of a triangle, the base of which was along the east edge of board 2.

The Germans landed comfortably on boards 11 and 18. Only one stick landed off-board and that 9-1 group didn't come into play until late in the game. Tito did draw first blood by shooting a 348 in 36U4; having figured out Tito's maximum range with that shot, Rob proceeded to move and set up his MTRs on Hill 526.

This scenario is really two scenarios: one in the village, and one in the hill. In the village, nothing could stop Rob. He got a 10-2 led stack onto Hill 522, which began to neutralize positions one by one. With their 8-morale, 6-FP, MGs, abundant leadership, and ability to form multi-hex FGs, the partisans melted in front of the SS. The only hex of building 3M2 that wasn't rubble was 3M2. It made a lone tower that reduced my chances of skulking back up through that building on multiple landings. Eventually, it was just a refuge for broken partisans, unfortunate targets in a shooting spree.

Meanwhile, back at the Bat Cave...

The gliders landed leisurely on board 18. Rob realized that he could assault move and advance up Hill 621. Anything that I threw in his way didn't last long. I rather ambitiously shifted my tank to 2K7, thinking I could block some SS coming through the woods and open ground below. Back-to-back 4s, however, from a RCL on a board 18 knoll fixed that problem for the Germans. That seemed to sum up my luck (and Rob's) for most of the scenario. Rob later got a 658, MMG, and 10-2 on to Hill 538, from which (especially in 3W5) he managed to pick off some partisan positions on the back side of the hill. That was a good move, but I might have landed a glider or two over there to do the same thing only earlier (in fact, my AA gun in O4 was placed to hamper such a landing). In the end, Rob ran out of time. Yes, out of 11 turns.

The passage below, edited from an e-mail written around the time of our final playing, captures those last moments.

The Yugoslav partisans beat off the SS Orc Army for the win in “Operation Rosselsprung.” Overall, it felt grimly like “The



Marshal Tito (far right) with his cabinet and principal staff officers in Drvar days before the raid.

Two Towers,” with my troops holding out against hordes assaulting the tower of 3M2 and, at the other end, my mountain fastness.

The SportsCenter version for last night is this:

1. Rob is in excellent position on both the mountain and village with three turns left. The village effectively fell by turn 10 (of 11) -- although Rob almost blew it by rolling a DR 3 on a DC attack against a lone 8-1 in the last partisan-occupied building (3M2). If it had Rubbled (dr 1-2) he would've lost. Eh, sometimes you have to live life on the edge, I guess.

2. The first turn and a half of this 3-turn segment sees Rob rolling very well in the mountain (board 2) area. His Smoke goes down, his troops crimp in my perimeter a little more. He's got ugly stacks below the cave entrance. I start holding my head and cursing this as “Operation Brusselsprouts.” You know, “blech.” It was capped off by a 12 DR on the Tito .50 cal. My mind wanders and I start wondering if Tito can use the barrel in CC as a Dwarven hammer...

3. Almost immediately, my luck changes, as does Rob's. A 12 Wind Change DR Gusts down the Smoke to nothing by the PFPh. I repair the .50 cal. This combination of events causes Rob to pause, but he gets several squads on the crest line by the end of his turn. I try to kill his Assault Engineers armed with Flamethrowers; the remaining half-squads become Berserk or Fanatic and generate a Hero. I get some units on the very top of the hill, and they provide essential covering fire. Tito weathers numerous 24FP attacks. Pins give Rob the usual ASL opening - but alas, no Breaks on Saddam's mentor. Some SS unit chucks a DC against the cave; it bounces and ends in the Thrower's hex. More breaking;

Tito and his 527 hold. The Berserkers charge and die after sucking up many shots, leaving a FT that is manned by my 9-1 on the hill itself, who eliminates the FT on a 12 DR in his attack.

4. The last turn of play sees me rolling very hot (balancing an earlier lousy streak), with every man and woman giving their best effort. An AA gun breaks a 9-2 stack and a dangerous 658; a lone 527 crept up and broke the squad under a 10-2 (on Hill 538), neutralizing that group; 127 partisan half-squads (created through ELR failures and double-breaks) held the line! Meanwhile, Rob saw his own luck change - capped by a 12 on his last mortar with Smoke, and a follow-up 6 Repair dr on that weapon in his last Player Turn. The SS fire slackened; they knew it was over.

It was wild, with extremes of luck going both ways at the best and worst of times. I couldn't have asked for a more climactic ending of a gruelling, epic scenario.

And who says big scenarios aren't fun?

Thank you, Rob, for ducking it out. As with our first scenario, “Clash Along the Psel,” I had a great time.

OK, so I got some good rolls when I needed it most. But still, I think the Germans need to come to grips with the cave as soon as possible.

Overall, the scenario gets a recommendation from me. I think Rob and I agreed that it still probably favours the Germans, despite my victory, though probably only by 55/45. In play, he

also granted what probably is a major concession: he ruled the cave an ineligible Sniper target. This was gentlemanly and makes a lot of sense. It would suck to play 10 turns (and like, a month and a half) to have Tito taken out by a Sniper. Without Tito, the game would be over, and having him taken out randomly like that would ruin the feel of having Tito directing fire between swigs of Stoli and puffs of his Cuban cigar, all while swearing at the SS. You know, in the style of his Sgt.-Rock-like post-war comic book, "Tito!". As it worked out, hex 2O5 did indeed become a target (taking out the 9-1 numbskull who fumbled the German FT in the hill above the cave), and we played on to the manly, gutsy finish that this scenario deserves. For the fun factor alone, I'd highly recommend this change, although how this may have affected the balance is obviously debatable.

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The 500th SS Parachute Battalion

Following the successful airborne raid to rescue Mussolini in September 1943, the 500th SS Parachute Battalion was formed to act as the Waffen SS's parachute unit. Half the force was composed of volunteers from regular Waffen SS units, while the remainder consisted of volunteers from SS disciplinary units.

The battalion was led by Hauptsturmführer Kurt Rybka for the raid on Tito's headquarters in May 1944. Tito evaded capture and the unit suffered heavy losses during the raid, with over 800 of the unit's 1000 personnel being killed or wounded.

Following a period of rest the unit was sent to the East Front in July, taking part in actions in the Baltic States. The survivors were returned to Austria in October and incorporated in to the 600th SS Parachute Battalion.



Here is my set up for the partisans. Note that some of the hexes in the village (especially) may be approximate, given the way the rubble fell.

One thing I might change is to put a trench in the cave hex at level 3. This would allow the partisans to sit up there, especially later as the Germans try to take the cave. However, my fear was that a 10-2 would get into such a trench (perhaps by an aggressive glider landing) and dominate the hill. Maybe this wasn't realistic tactically, as any Germans up there still need to worry about a safe rout path. Grinding up the hill, as Rob did, is one way to ensure some safe woods

to hide in (not that the Germans have to worry about breaking much).

Note, also, that per G11.4, Caves can be Overstacked -- doing so just reduces their TEM. I was gambling by having only one squad in there, and I could see having both HMGs there.

On board 3: 337 in the following hexes: I1, K1, M7, O10, P2, P5, T1, T3, T4, V1 527 in: L4, M1, M2, M5 (+ LMG), N1 (+ LMG, 6+1), N2 (+ LMG), O5 (+ LMG, 8+1), O10, P4, Q7 (+ LMG), R3 (+ 7-0), R5, R6, S3, T3 (+ LMG)

On board 2: Trenches: N0-N4, O4, M3 337: J1, K1 (+ Lt. Mtr), L2, L3, M3 (x2, + 8-0), M4, M7, S3, T1, S5 (x2 7-0), S6, U5 527: N2 (in Trench, w/ HMG + 9-1) In Cave: 10-3, 527, .50 cal HMG AA Gun + 127 crews: N4 (CA M5/N5), O4 (CA P3/P4), P4 (CA Q4/P5) 82 mm MTR + 127: N1 (CA M2/N2), P0 (CA P1/Q1) 127 + Lt. Mtr.: O1 Tank: K4 (CA K3/L3); roll for hull down

I may have made a mistake or two in transcribing, so use at your own risk, tweak as needed, and have fun!



ON THE CONVENTION TRAIL

There are more and more *ASL* tournaments cropping up all over the world. In fact, it is possible to be involved in an *ASL* tournament at least once a month, often more, if you were so inclined (and had the financial means to live such a life - I wish!).

If you plan on holding an *ASL* tournament, please let me know and I'll include the details here, space permitting.

If you contact anyone regarding these tournaments, please tell them that I sent you!

2018 MARCH HEROES 2018

When: 1 – 4 March.

Where: Colwyn Hotel, 569 New South Promenade, Blackpool, England, FY4 1NG. Tel 01253 341 024. Room rates start at £30.00 for a shared room or £42.50 for a single room and include breakfast. Bar meals and good beer are also available at the hotel.

Fee: £15.00 if registering with the organisers prior to 20 February, £20.00 thereafter and on the door (entry is free for those only able to attend for one day). In addition to a discount on the entry fee, players pre-registering will receive a tournament program in January.

Format: Four round tournament beginning Friday morning, with three scenarios to choose from

Frazer Greenshields, Coxland House, Huntworth, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA7 0AJ (23 Sep 2013)
Nick Carter, Burnette, New Works Lane, New Works, Telford, Shropshire, TF6 5BS (19 Sep 2016)
Mike Batley, 2 The Gables, Argos Hill, East Sussex, TN6 3QJ (29 Apr 2001)
Bill Eaton, Dart House, 20 Bridgetown, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5BA (02 Sep 2008)
Gerard Linehan, 8 Gander Green Crescent, Hampton, TW12 2FA (06 Oct 2017)
Mick Allen, 107 Gresham Road, Staines, TW18 2FB (02 Jul 2014)
Richard Dagnall, 480 Chertsey Road, Twickenham, Middlesex, TW2 6PS (08 Aug 2017)
Ivor Gardiner, 19 Gibson Road, Ickenham, London, Middlesex, UB10 6EW (03 Sep 2008)
christopher bourne, 52 horsenden lane north, greenford, middlesex, ub6 0pa (04 Dec 2014)
Aaron Patrick, 9 Arundel Gardens, London, W11 2LN (31 Dec 2004)
Nick Quinn, 7 Woodgrange Avenue, Ealing, London, W5 3NY (04 Mar 2002)
Alan Lynott, 34 Ollerbarrow Rd, Hale, Cheshire, WA15 9PP (18 Sep 2016)
John Kennedy, 2 Hawthorn Road, Hale, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA15 9RG (22 Oct 2013)
Dave Booth, 47 Duncock Grove, Oakwood, Warrington, Cheshire, WA3 6NW (07 Oct 1996)
Paul Ryde-Weller, 44 Farm Way, Watford, Herts., WD2 3SY (30 Oct 1998)
Matt Blackman, 10 Alfred St, Wigan, Lancs., WN1 2HL (14 Mar 2008)
Ian Parkes, 45 School Lane, Standish, Wigan, Lancs., WN6 0TG (23 Sep 2008)
Michael Murray, 34 Bell Road, Walsall, West Mids., WS5 3JW (30 Mar 1999)
Andy Evans, 232 Bushbury Road, Wolverhampton., West Midlands, WV10 0NT (27 Apr 2010)
Ian Price, 19 Upper Green, Yettenhall, Wolverhampton, W. Mids., WV6 8QN (31 Dec 1995)
Michael Clark, Wold View, East Heslerton, Malton, N. Yorks, YO17 8RN (12 Feb 2002)
David Murray, 29 Middle Street, Nafferton, Driffield, S. Yorks, YO25 4JS (02 Sep 2008)

Scotland

Steven Trease, 2 Charlestown Circle, Cove, Aberdeen, AB12 3EY (17 Jun 1999)
Paul Saunders, 2 Devenick Way, Portlethen, Aberdeen, AB12 4PP (07 Jan 2014)
Tony Gibson, 107 Queen's Drive, Hazelhead, Aberdeen, AB15 8BN (24 Jan 2012)
Steve Cook, 159 Lee Crescent, Aberdeen, AB22 8FH (16 Feb 2013)
Martin Vicca, 14 Leslie Crescent, Westhill, Aberdeen, AB32 6UZ (09 Mar 2016)
Michael Green, 27 Rotchell Park, Dumfries, DG2 7RH (12 Sep 2002)
Alan Hume, 62/2 Bryson Road, Edinburgh, Midlothian, EH11 1DR (10 Feb 2017)
Mark Chapman, Flat 7, 265 Gorgie Road, Edinburgh, EH11 1TX (01 Dec 2005)
Garry Ferguson, 30E Forrester Park Avenue, Edinburgh, EH12 9AW (07 Dec 1998)
Pete Philipps, 19 Main Street, Kirkcaldy, Midlothian, EH29 9AE (11 Nov 2017)
Darren Kilfara, 68 Wilson Place, Dunbar, East Lothian, EH42 1GG (09 May 2017)
Alan Sheffield, 1 Barns Ness Terrace, Innerwick, Dunbar, East Lothian, EH42 1SF (09 Sep 2011)
Lauchlan Brown, 20 Union Road, Broxburn, West Lothian, EH52 6hr (03 Feb 2013)
John Martin, 85 Pyothall Road, Broxburn, West Lothian, EH52 6HW (17 Feb 2017)
Stewart Thain, 77 Birrell Gardens, Murieston, Livingston, West Lothian, EH54 9LF (25 Oct 2007)
Bill Finlayson, 19 Taymouth Road, Polmont, Falkirk, Stirlingshire, FK2 0PF (16 Jun 2001)
John McLintock, B25 434 St Georges Rd, Woodside, Glasgow, G3 6JW (30 May 2012)
Andrew Kassian, 7 Burnbrae Road, Auchinloch, Glasgow, G66 5DQ (06 Oct 2016)
Hamish Hughson, 15 Esmonde Gardens, Elgin, Moray, IV30 4LB (21 Mar 2010)
Steve Mackintosh, 54 Firthview Drive, Inverness, IV38QE (27 Jan 2013)
Oliver Gray, 117 Upper Dalgairn, Cupar, Fife, KY15 4JQ (04 Feb 2009)
Garry Marshall, 24 Allardice Crescent, Kirkcaldy, Fife, KY2 5TY (21 May 2001)
Hugh O'Donnell, 11 Rossbank Road, PORT GLASGOW, Renfrewshire, PA14 5AD (28 Dec 2016)
Neil Stevens, Linton Mill Farmhouse, Morebattle, Kelso, Roxburghshire, TD5 8AE (08 Jan 2015)
Jonathan Swilliamson, Da Croft, Bridge End, Burra, Shetland Islands, ZE2 9LE (01 May 1998)

Wales

Andrew Whimmett, 6 Aquilla Court, Conway Road, Cardiff, CF11 9PA (03 Sep 2008)
Paul Jones, 9 Cwm Nofydd, Rhiwbina, Cardiff, CF14 6JX (22 Nov 2002)
Chris Dalgety, 4 Library Street, Canton, Cardiff, Cardiff, CF5 1QD (30 Dec 2014)
Martin Castrey, 1, Thomas Cottages, The Highway, Hawarden, Flintshire, CH5 3DY (03 Sep 2008)
Key Sutton, 1 Gorphwysfa, Windsor Road, New Broughton, Wrexham, LL11 6SP (25 Feb 1999)
Nick Rijke, Aneddifa, Cellan, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 8HY (06 Sep 2010)
C. Jones, Deer Park Lodge, Stepside, Narbeth, Pembrokeshire, SA67 8JL (31 Dec 1995)
Emyr Phillips, 2 Cysgod Y Bryn, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 4LR (27 Aug 2002)

If there are any mistakes, please let me know so I can correct them for the next edition. If you have Internet access you can also correct your details on the *VFTT* web site at www.vfft.co.uk/my-account.asp.

in each round. There will be an additional round on Friday after if the number of participants warrants it. Players will be expected to have knowledge of the first half of the Chapter G rules to play in the tournament. CG and friendly games can also be found throughout the weekend. There will also be opportunities for new players to learn the game and friendly games available.

Contact: For more details or to register contact Pete Philipps, 19 Main Street, Kirkcaldy, Scotland, EH29 9AE. Phone (1031) 629 1260 (evenings only) or email if@vfft.co.uk. For up to date information check out the UK *ASL* tournament web site at www.vfft.co.uk.

SCANDANAVIAN ASL OPEN

When: 1 – 4 March.

Where: Danhostel Copenhagen Amager, Vejlands Allé 200, 2300København S, Denmark. Accommodation is available at a cost of 1500 Danish Kroner (about €200) per person sharing a four person bedroom including breakfast, lunch and dinner. Other room options are available – contact the organisers for a price.

Fee: Similar to 2017, which was 200 Danish Kroner (about €27).

Format: The tournament will be a five round Swiss style affair.

Contact: Michael Hastrup-Leth, Favrholtvej 15, 3400 Hillerød, Denmark, or email at hastrupleth@gmail.com. For the latest information visit the website at <http://www.asl-so.dk/>.

JUNE DOUBLE ONE 2018

When: 21 – 24 June.

Where: Writtle College, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 3RR. On-site facilities include en-suite and standard bedrooms, free car parking on application, mini market, cash points, a self-service cafeteria and licensed bars. Bedroom rates start at £39.60 for a single room and breakfast.

Fee: £15.00 if paid before 30 April, £20.00 thereafter.

Format: A two day tournament with two rounds on Saturday and one on Sunday offering a choice of scenarios. A number of mini-tournaments will be run on Friday, and friendly games will also be available throughout the weekend.

Contact: For a booking form contact Derek Cox, Whiteways, 77a St Nicholas Road, Witham, Essex, CM8 2JE or by email at derek@doubleone-online.net. Check out the web site at <http://www.doubleone-online.net/1.html> for the latest details.

OCTOBER ASLOK XXXIII

When: 30 September – 7 October.

Where: Four Points by Sheraton, 4181 W. 150th St., Cleveland, Ohio 44135, phone 216-252-7700, fax 216-252-3850 or visit <https://www.starwoodmeeting.com/Book/aslok2018>. Room rates are \$85 until the start of September. Note that this is the same hotel as in previous years but with a new name.

Fee: \$30.00 before 28 September, \$40.00 thereafter and on the door.

Format: Same as always. Weekend tournament plus numerous mini-tournaments. There is also an informal USA vs. World Cup where everyone keeps track of their games and a plaque is presented to the winning side.

Notes: T-shirts are \$10.00 ea (XXL \$13.00, XXXL \$15.00, 4XL \$18.00)

Contact: Bret Hildebran, 17810 Geauga Lake Rd, Chagrin Falls, OH 44023-2208 or by email dama@alltel.net. Check out the web site at www.aslok.org for the latest details.

NOVEMBER BOUNDING FIRST FIRE 2018

When: 25 – 25 November.

Where: Headlands Hotel, 611 New South Promenade, Blackpool, England, FY4 1NJ. Tel 01253 341 179. Room rates start at £30.00 for a shared room or £42.50 for a single room and include breakfast. Bar meals and good beer are also available at the hotel.

Fee: £10.00 if paid by the end of August, £15.00 thereafter.

Format: Five round tournament beginning Friday morning, with an unpublished scenario from Bounding Fire Productions in use in each round. Players will be expected to have knowledge of the first half of the Chapter G rules to play in the tournament. CG and friendly games can also be found throughout the weekend. There will also be opportunities for new players to learn the game and friendly games available.

Contact: For more details or to register contact Martin Mayers or Simon Staniforth by email at boundingfirstfire@gmail.com. For up to date information check out the web site at <https://boundingfireblackpool.co.uk/>.

NEW YORK STATE ASL CHAMPIONSHIP

When: 29 November – 2 December.

Where: The Best Western Albany Airport Hotel, 200 Wolf Road, Albany, NY 12205, phone 518-458-1000. Room rates are \$80 per night including breakfast. The hotel has a free shuttle to and from the airport (5 minute ride). The shuttle also picks up at Amtrak station (10-15 minute ride).

Fee: \$50 for the weekend or \$30 for a single day.

Format: Six round tournament beginning Thursday morning, with three scenarios to choose from in each round. All scenarios will make use of the Pleva Bidding System. There will also be a three player mini tournament on Saturday and Sunday.

Contact: For more details or to register contact Joe Leoce, 39 Ashton Drive, Staten Island, NY 10312 or email asl726@aol.com. For up to date information check out the web site at <http://nys-asl.com/>.

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Double One 2019



Thursday June 20th to Sunday June 23rd

The London ASL tournament "Double One" is set for the weekend of June 20th to 23rd, returning to the regular venue, Writtle College.

Double One's college venue offers excellent value for money bed and breakfast accommodation, large gaming rooms, open for extended gaming times across the whole weekend, and is located close to Chelmsford, Essex, with easy access to London via a 40 minute main rail link, the M25, and Stansted international airport.

The weekend

The tournament starts on the Thursday evening with a curry evening at the college.

The gaming room opens at 8.30am on Friday 21st June. We will be running several one day minis (consisting of 4 participants, straight knock out) but players might like to consider tackling one of those big monster scenarios that you never get chance to play in a morning or afternoon.

On Saturday morning, players will have the option to continue open gaming or enter the main tournament. Participants that want to take part in the latter will be entered approximately according to their ASL ladder rating.

Players will be organised into groups of 4, and will play each other on a round robin basis. Round 1 commences at 9.00am, round 2 by 2.30pm, and round 3 on Sunday morning at 9.00am. Details of the tournament scenarios will be released in published on the website in early 2019.

The venue

The tournament's venue will be the Writtle Room, Writtle College, Lordships Road, Writtle, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 3RR - www.writtle.ac.uk. Room opening times are 8.30am - midnight Friday, 8am-midnight Saturday, and 8am-3.00pm Sunday (prize giving circa 2.30pm)

The venue is less than 2 miles outside Chelmsford and is easily accessible:

- By car - the college is less than 15 miles from both junction 28 of the M25 and junction 7 of the M11.
- By train - Chelmsford station has a regular direct service on the London Liverpool Street line. Free pick ups and travel between the station and college can be arranged with the organisers
- By plane - London Stansted airport is less than 30 minutes from the venue, and for those flying into Stansted, free pick ups and transportation can again be arranged with the organisers.

Participants intending to stay overnight should book their B&B accommodation directly with the college (£34.00 plus VAT per person per night). Contact the organisers for a booking form and T&Cs. Further information can be obtained by contacting the college (phone +44 (0) 1245 424200 ext 25645)

The college has a licensed bar which will be open during the weekend. Sandwiches and snacks will also be available. Writtle village is a very short walk from the college, with a varied selection of pubs, restaurants and a mid-sized supermarket.

Attendance fees

The attendance fee for the weekend is £15.00. Payment can be made by either Paypal or cheque.

For further details, please either visit the tournament's website at www.doubleone-online.net or contact the organisers as follows:

Derek Cox, Whiteways, 77a St Nicholas Road, Witham, Essex, CM8 2JE

derek.cox@dsl.pipex.com

You can also keep up to date with developments by joining the London ASL Yahoo Group - <http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/LASL>

We look forward to welcoming you to Double One in 2019

