Lazy (adj): not inclined to work or do any activity that needs effort; resistant to work or exertion; disposed to idleness.

Lazy: track 6 on Deep Purple’s 1972 LP Machine Head.

Lazy: description of VFTT editor over the past few months (OK, this year).

As Craig Benn had sent me his massive article on OBA before HEROES, all I had to do was edit it, put together the tournament report, get the latest news, and a new issue of VFTT would be ready. But when you have so much free time, it’s all to easy to think “I’ll do it later” :-(. And that in a nutshell explains the extreme lateness of this issue of VFTT. Hopefully the extra pages, thanks to an article by Chris Doary looking back on 25 years of ASL, will make up for it.

Fingers crossed the same problem won’t affect the next issue……

Which may also be a bit bigger than normal, thanks to an article by Ivor Gardiner on how the army plans operations, and how to adapt those techniques to ASL.

“Til next issue, roll Low and Prosper.

Pete Phillipps
INCOMING

MMP REPRINTS BEGIN

The reprints of For King and Country and ASLSK 2 are both underway, with work expected to be completed by late July/early August. Once the components are all in-house collation and shipping should begin soon after. Work is also due to begin on another reprint of the ASLRB at the start of June.

Work is proceeding on the laying out of the rules, player aids, and scenarios for Festung Budapest. Charlie Kibler has also made some small changes to the maps to clear up some building issues. FB will contain 4 historical maps, 9 counter sheets (including enough Hungarian and blue SS counters to allow play without ownership of AOO or ABTF being required), 2 campaign games, and 16 scenarios. A third CG is under development and may appear in a future ASL Journal. Once layout work is complete it will be placed on pre-order.

Final layout work has begun on the maps for Action Pack 8 (maps 4a/b, 5a/b, and 6a/b), which is due to be placed onto the production schedule once the current batch of Gamers projects has been printed and shipped.

Although the module is still some way in the future, a half sheet of counters for Hakkaa Päällä! is being be printed during the FKAC reprint run. A second sheet (Finnish MMC) has been laid out, while work on a third (Finnish vehicles/ordnance) is well underway. A fourth sheet will contain Russian and Lend-Lease vehicles and ordinance, and a fifth sheet will contain markers, including some new informational markers.

The next issue of MMP’s house magazine, Operations, will include two ASL scenarios, 2 ASLSK scenarios, and an article on the Singing Campaign Game which was featured in Operations Special Edition 1.

Rising Sun will reprint both Code of Bushido and Gung Ho! in one module, and thus will include counter sheets for the entire Japanese, Chinese and United States Marine orders of battle. There will also be a 2nd edition of Chapter G which covers the rules needed to

play ASL in the Pacific Theatre, and an updated Chapter H covering vehicles and ordnance. It will also includes 32 scenarios, combining the original scenarios with thirteen out-of-print PTO scenarios. The module will also include the Gavutu-Tanambogo scenarios and campaign game (Sand and Blood) from the ASL ‘93th Annual’, with the map being done as a single mapsheet rather than as a series of overlays. Layout work has finished on the new counter sheets, and the new versions of Chapter G, Japanese/Chinese Chapter H, and the Sand & Blood Gavutu-Tanambogo CG rules are currently being proofed. Work on the scenario layouts is ongoing. Rising Sun is expected to be placed on pre-order once FKAC has been released.

Plans are afoot for an Overlay Bundle to compliment the recently released Map Bundle. It will include all existing official overlays apart from the Gavutu-Tanambogo ones (which will be included as a single mapsheet in Rising Sun) and the DASL ones, produced by the same artist who did the Map Bundle. If there is enough demand, there is a possibility of producing a Deluxe pack which would reprint the DASL mapboards and overlays in ASLSK style, along with four new DASL mapboards. 24-32 scenarios would also be included, a mixture of existing scenarios and new ones.

In-house playtest of the Korean War scenarios is well underway. 16 were submitted with the module and several groups are running through them all.

Play-testing of the scenarios for ASL Journal 10 continues, with the issue likely to be released at Winter Offensive in January 2012. As well as several new articles and the scenarios, it is likely there will be some sort of insert also included, although the exact nature of this has yet to be decided upon.

FRENCH CELLAR

Le Franc Tireur have released From

The Cellar 6, the latest scenario pack, which contains ten new scenarios. Priced €20 it is available from http://www.lefranc tireur.org/.

Coming in July will be a new historical module, Kommandgruppe Scherer: The Shield of Cholm, which covers the battles from 21 January 1942 to May 5 when about 5,500 German defenders held the town of Cholm against over 100 major attacks launched by six infantry divisions supported by six independent infantry brigades and two tank brigades.

HEAT OF BATTLE

Steve Dethlefsen has announced that due to a lack of time he will be winding down Heat of Battle’s operations in the next year or so, with a module covering the battle of Kohima likely to be the final product.

Out now though is Special Forces II, the second instalment in a series which focuses on special forces from a variety of nations. SF II focuses on the German Kustenjagers and their battles against the British, Greeks, and Italians in the Mediterranean. It includes six tournament-sized half-size counter sheets with counters for the Kustenjager MMC, MMC, and Crews, and special MGIs; an overlay; and six pages of rules covering the Kustenjager and Motor Gun Boats (the latter a condensed version of the rules from the Le Franc Tireur module Raid on St. Nazaire).

BUNKER BUILDING

Play-testing of the scenarios for Dispatches from the Bunker 3.1, which is due out at the Bunker Bash in September, has begun. ‘Bedouin Blitz’ is a tournament-sized scenario set in Iraq in 1941 which sees Bedouin cavalry attack British troops supported by a couple of armoured cars, while ‘Atrocities Beget Atrocities’ is a Chinese-Japanese action set during the Jinan Incident in China in 1928. ‘The Streets of Kharkov’ is a mid-sized, combined arms scenario featuring a clash between SS and NKVD troops during the battle of Kharkov, and ‘Thunder From Heaven’ is

Continued on page 15, column 1
15 years ago, Trev Edwards and Steve Thomas went BERSERK in Blackpool. After seven successful years, they took a break, and Pete Phillipps became a HERO and stepped in to continue the work they had started.

Which is a round-about way to say that HEROES 2011 was the 15th year ASLers from around the UK (and even Europe for a couple of players this year) have gathered in Blackpool in March for a weekend of ASL action and drinking.

Arriving on Wednesday lunch-time (earlier than anticipated thanks to the M6 being trouble-free for the entire journey), me and Paul proceeded to the bar. When Ian Pollard arrived later that afternoon, we proceeded to set up the maps for the old SPI monster Campaign for North Africa on the pool table, along with the counters for the Bardia scenario, with the intention of making people think we were playing it as they arrived the next day :-) After that, we went down the pub in the evening for a meal and to watch the football on TV.

The following morning saw the first arrivals, and by the afternoon several friendly games were underway. Once Shaun Carter arrived I took down CNA as the pool table was the only table big enough for the Kohima HASL map, and Shaun was planning on play-testing one of the big scenarios with Ivor Gardiner.

Elsewhere, Ulric Schwela, Neil Brunger, Brian Hooper and Mike Standbridge began playing the monster scenario from the CH module Berlin: Tyrant’s Lair; after two days of fighting they moved on to playing Devil’s Domain (which covers the Ponyri battle during the Kursk offensive).

By the evening the majority of players were in attendance, with those who weren’t playing ASL at the bar talking about it and catching up with each other. Attendance this year was up on previous years, with 43 players around for the weekend. Quite a few of those were first-timers, and there were also a few returning to the game after several (or in one case, many) years away. Hopefully this bodes well for the future of both the UK tournament scenario and the game as a whole.

The tournament itself started on Friday morning, with 24 players entered. The tournament is run on a Swiss-style system, with players paired up against those with a similar win-lose record, but for the first round players are placed into two groups with the highest rated players in the top group and the lowest rated in the bottom group. The top players from each group are then paired against each, then the next two and so on. After the first round there were 12 players with a 1-0 record, who paired against each other, and 12 players with a 0-1 record. After the second round, there were six players with a 2-0 record, 12 players with a 1-1 record, and six players with a 0-2 record. Somewhat surprisingly, Tim Bunce, whose rating of 3550 made him the second highest rated player in attendance, was in the latter group.

The most important clash of the weekend took place on Saturday evening, when Manchester United played Arsenal in the FA Cup quarter-final. Several United fans (including your editor, and the hotelier) gathered around the TV, with Arse fan Paul Case in the middle of the group :-) Needless to say, Paul lost the HTH CC, being outnumbered 4-1 and being Lax due to the beer!

There were also quite a few players just playing friendly games throughout the week, particularly among the newcomers who felt they might not be good enough to play in the tournament. Special mention here must go to 17-year old James Short, not the youngest player to attend a UK ASL tournament (that honour goes to Derek Cox’s lad Elliot, who turned 11 the weekend he attended INTENSIVE FIRE 2006), but in his first appearance he managed to get in 11 games, winning three – only Ruarigh Dale has played more at a single tournament, managing 13 at INTENSIVE FIRE 2004. Martin Mayers, with 10 games, and Ian Willey, with 9, came close to matching James for sheer number of games played, while Paul Case, despite being at the tournament longer than anyone other than me managed to avoid playing any ASL, other than play-testing a Kohima scenario with me! Though my only competitive game was one of the small scenarios from the latest Break Contact pack Razorback Ridge, which took less than half an hour to play, and that included setting it up!

Campaign for North Africa - so big the map wouldn’t even fit on the hotel’s pool table!
By the end of round three there were three unbeaten players, so to balance up the numbers for round four, the highest rated player from the 2-1 group, in this case Mark Blackmore, was promoted to the 3-0 group. Mark was paired up against his regular opponent Craig Benn, leaving Dave Ramsey to take on George Tournemire.

Were Mark to beat Craig, then the winner of the other game would be the tournament champion, being the only undefeated player by the end of round 4. On the other hand, if Craig won, then he would play the winner of the other game in the final round on Sunday morning to determine the tournament champion.

As things turned out, Mark beat Craig, leaving all eyes on Dave and George fighting it out in ‘FrF40 Sporck’s Eleven’. Ultimately George’s Russians were too strong for Dave’s Germans, leaving George the only undefeated player at the end of round four.

With Dave leaving on Sunday morning, to watch West Ham lose their FA Cup quarter-final make at Stoke, a quick game between Craig and Dave was scheduled before breakfast to decide who would be the runner-up. In the end I believe they tossed a coin, which Craig won to take the runner-up prize!

At the opposite end a hard fought match between Nick Ranson and Steve Cook saw a rare win for Nick, leaving Steve with the wooden spoon (or in this case, a copy of the rare Battle for the Abbe des Ardennes scenario pack from Lone Canuck Publishing).

I’d like to thank Derek Tocher
**PLAYER RESULTS**

Here are the individual win/loss records.

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RND is the round in which the player first lost – if players have the same W-L result, the one losing in the later round places higher.

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

**THE SCENARIOS**

Here is the table of Scenario Win/Loss records:

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**TOTALS**

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HEROES 2011 was the 35th British ASL tournament and there are now over 3000 results recorded on the ladder and we now have 272 players who have participated at least once. At any one time there are about 80-90 ASL attendees playing tournaments on at least a semi-regular basis. The largest number of games played over the history of UK ASL tournaments has been racked up by Brian Hooper, 166, and there are nine players with over 100 games recorded, and another nineteen who have played 50+. The top 10% of players have ratings of 3280+ while the upper quartile are rated 3160+. Those in the lower quartile have ratings below 2810 while the bottom 10% of participants are rated 2665 or less. These numbers have remained essentially invariant over the last ten years and the distribution of results is essentially Gaussian above 3000. Georges Tournament was undefeated in the tournament (5-0) and is the new champion and now appears in ninth on the full ladder and fourth on the active players ladder after having picked up a record 525 pts. A second impressive performance was put in by Paul Jones who went 5-1 and gained 395 pts ending up on 3335 pts putting him 26th on the full list and 11th on the active players list. Other players with significant point gains were Nigel Blair (+220 pts) and David Blackwood (+205 pts).

Of course we also had a number of significant losers over the weekend. Most prominent among these were Steve Cook who lost all six games he played dropping 400 pts in the process, placing him to 240th on the full ladder. Newbie James Short played an impressive eleven games, with a 3-8 record but dropped 370 pts which means he enters the ladder in 248th position. The only other player to have lost over 200 points was Bill Sheriker dropped 255 points.

A final mention should go to Nigel Blair who has now played 137 games since his first outing at INTENSIVE FIRE 2002 only to find himself back on 3000 pts after HEROES 2011. Without further ado here is the full Crusaders Ladder as of April 2011
BIG BANG THEORIES

Using and Abusing OBA
Craig Benn

In the world before the flowchart, primal chaos reigned. MMP sought order, but the phoenix can fly only when its feathers are grown. Scenarios with OBA were played wrong again and again, as endless aeons wheeled and passed. Time and the pure essences of heaven, the moistures of Curt Schilling and the powers of the sun and moon worked upon an action pack until it became magically fertile. Elemental forces caused the action pack to hatch. From it came a stone diagram...the nature of OBA was irrepressible!

OBA is one of the least liked parts of the game. For the newbie or casual player, the rules are daunting, and something always seems to go wrong. For the veteran, the randomness offends his very soul – the fact that something so powerful can disappear with two red chits, or alternatively totally dominate a game upsets his OCD bump severely.

Never fear, Pigsy and Sandy, the path to enlightenment is long, but a journey of a thousand li starts with but a single step...well okay you need radio contact and battery access...look just shut up will you. Although there are many articles published on overruns, vehicle dances of death, sleaze freezing and other esoterica, there is very little on OBA, so feel honoured I’m benefitting you with my hard won wisdom.

What’s all the fuss about anyway Tripitaka?

Okay, leaving aside all the annoying times when you forget to do OBA first, it has to be said even when it works, it just isn’t that effective. If we do some basic number crunching for say a 100mm OBA against defenders in stone buildings, we’re looking at a 20FP+3 attack. The average result is a 1MC, and if they are in foxholes/ trenches or the ground floor of a multi-hex building that average is just a plain old MC. If you’re looking to kill the defenders by double-breaking them – (and barring fate MCs or critical hits, this is the only way you can) – the odds are not good...

For 7 morale troops, there’s a 45% chance of them failing a MC (yes I know that is not the odds for failing a 1MC but trust me). To get the double break is 45% x 45% = about 20%. For 8 morale troops the double break odds are even worse at about 12%, and if you plan on using your big guns against a killstack with a 9-2 leader and 8 morale dudes, then you’re looking at more like 5%. Whooppee do.

And getting two bites of the cherry is the exception rather than the rule. For a standard 7 hex FFE, most targets are going to be on the edges of the blast zone. After one attack these guys can move/rout/ advance away, so the most you can do is break them.

Plus to get the centre of the FFE on target needs an accuracy dr of 1 or 1-2, (possibly worse for hindrances) or a lucky deviation. You are much more likely to miss, and although there is a +1 hindrance for LOS traced into, through, within or from it's blast area hexes (C1.57), (which cancels FFMO - it’s not a LV hindrance) this works both ways. As well as putting that +1 onto your IFT attacks, it cancels interdiction, and makes it rather awkward to get into close combat or that failure to rout position. In fact you know what – lets just not bother with OBA at all....

Reaching Nirvana with the help of Trinitrotoluene

Tskk...Sandy, Sandy, Sandy. This is not the path to enlightenment. When considering your attack, is not the sum of its effect greater than any individual part? If this is all you use OBA for, then you are right, it will hardly be worth the effort. But three things cannot be hidden for long – the sun, moon and truth – lets look at some specific examples of using OBA more effectively.

VOTG Map K1-K21 and Z1-Z21

German set-up

| M8 Level one | 2x 2-4-8 w MMG | 2x 1-2-7 w HMG | 9-2 Ldr | 7-0 w radio |
| L7 Level one | 3x 1-2-7 w HMG | 2x 2-3-7 w MMG | 9-2 Ldr | 8-1 |
| P3 | 8-3-8 w DC | 5-4-8 w LMG | 4-6-7 | 4-6-7 | 4-6-7 | 4-6-7 | 5-4-8 | 5-4-8 |
| R9 cellar | 4-5-8 | ? |

Q10 cellar | 4-5-8 w LMG | ? |
Q11 cellar | 4-5-8 | ? |
R5 cellar | 2-2-8 HMG | 8-1 ldr | ? |
R5 ground level | 4-5-8 w MMG | ? | ? |
V3 | 2x 6-2-8, LMG | 8-1 ldr | ? |
U3 | 2x 6-2-8 | 8-0 | ? |
S5 cellar | 4-4-7 | ? |

The Germans are making a push for Pavlov’s House and the Volga beyond. Very little of the Russian defence is on view because of the lethality of the German MG killstacks. In the Voentorg, the cellar-dwellers behind walls have a LOS to adjacent hexes only, but may ascend to ground level if the killstacks get smoked in. Pavlov’s House itself appears lightly defended, but the 6-2-8’s in the Flour Mill are probably a counterattack force waiting for the right moment. No doubt there are plenty of HIP units waiting for the assault troops to give them -2 shots.

Conventional wisdom would be to centre the FFE on R5, which will also hit the back of Pavlov’s house at S5, and possibly detonate any mines in the shell holes and debris adjacent. Another alternative would be S6 - hitting Zabolonov’s House as well. Assuming a 100mm+ module, we are looking at 20FP+7 for units in a cellar, and 20+5/+6 for the ground floor (depending on it being fortified) due to the +1TEM for each non-roof level above you (B23.32). Hmmm, that’s fours to get a MC on anyone in the cellar, fives or sixes for the ground floor. Not fantastic. There’s always Smoke, but putting it on R5 is probably going to be counter-productive, as it’s just going to protect the Russians from the L7 and M8 killstacks.

So how do you get your money’s worth out of the module? The important thing to remember about OBA is that it is not (usually) about killing units, it’s a tool to help you meet the VC’s. It neutralizes part of the enemy defence allowing you to manoeuvre. So Smoke, where you automatically neutralize...
by giving +6 or more LOS hindrances, is usually preferable to HE where you have to rely on the vagaries of a dice roll. R5 though, is definitely the wrong place for Smoke.

The correct position is Q8. Under these particular circumstances, the Russians can’t have an upfront defence because even HIP units, once revealed, will quickly melt away to German HMG rate tears. It is much more likely (and sensible) that the open terrain in front of Pavlov’s House will be covered by units on level two of the Y17/Y18/Y19 building and/or waterworks. This might be a HIP kill stack or 82mm mortars (gutted buildings), probably getting long range and over 16 hex area fire protection from the German firebases. Or there might be a HIP half squad spotting for ground level mortars or a HIP observer with a field phone, in which case the German player might never even suspect they were there.

In this case Smoke in Q8 isolates Pavlov’s House from the supporting Russian positions in the Voentorg and Y17/waterworks allowing you to defeat the defence in detail, and without hindering your own firepower. Also if you haven’t managed to strip any concealment from the defenders by this point, placing it here won’t force an extra chit draw.

Now assume that this is a scenario not a CG, and only HE is available – is there a better spot than R5 or S6?

There are two points to consider here:

A2.3.3 …The act of Placing the DC is considered movement expended in the Placement Hex (the Location occupied by the Placing unit – not the Location in which the DC is actually Placed)…

Nice, heh? Put the FFE one hex back, so R5 is on the edge of the blast zone. That 8-3-8 with a demo charge in P3 can waltz over and place the DC on R5, without being attacked by the German OBA. Even if the OBA doesn’t break the defenders, then it will at least provide a +1 LV hindrance and cancel FFMO, but this won’t apply to the DC’s attack. In fact OBA and demo charges go together very nicely indeed.

20+1 attacks are more effective than 20+5/6/7 attacks. In other words dumping OBA directly on the defender’s heads is not always the most effective way to go. Putting FFE’s behind the defenders to interfere with routing, and to stop reinforcement of the defenders is usually better.

So S5 is good, it hits R5, but allows DC placement from Q5 and Q6, and covers all the potential rout/reinforcement hexes in S4/T4/T5/S6. Any defenders having to rout are going to take 20+1 attacks when leaving the building, or rout up or down stairs within Pavlov’s House (taking an extra attack if routing up a level C1.51).

However to break into Pavlov’s House and kill the brokies, you’ll want to shift the OBA back a hex, ideally to T4 so there are no easy rout paths, and no easy reinforcement from the lurking 6-2-8’s.

Oink oink –oi Sandsy! Master is playing a trick on you, what kind of nonsense is this - the observer can’t see S5 or T4 from where he is – how can the godsfire be brought down upon Pavlov’ s head?

Piggy, you must learn to look beyond the end of your nose and acquire foresight. Your observer has legs – he must learn the art of timing…

Time is the fire in which we burn, the eternally revolving wheel that brings both nirvana and the void…but in terms of the turn sequence, time encourages you to move…Consider, you place a Spotting Round in the Prep Fire Phase and convert it to a FFE:1 in the Defensive Fire Phase of the opponent turn. Doing it that way allows the defender an entire Movement Phase to spread out and get out of the LOS of the observer, once warned of the upcoming monkey magic from the skies. Far better to place the SR in the Defensive Fire Phase, and convert it in your Prep Fire Phase – this only allows an APh for the defenders to disperse a max of one hex. So you can and should move your observer in your turn – in

Pavlov’s House is likely to be covered by HIP Russian units on level two of the Y17/Y18/Y19 building.
this case the 7-0 should move to the first floor of N9 which gives a LOS to T4. (Note also Smoke placed in the Defensive Fire Phase by OBA will be dispersed (C8.51))

Timing is also crucial in another sense. You shouldn’t use OBA on its own – it has to complement the movement of your assault troops – and as every time you pick a chit it could be red, DON’T waste it until you need it.

Scatter the Russians are coming

Let’s consider using OBA on the defence now in the classic scenario, the Hedgehog of Piepsk. Here we have a very different situation with 32 Russian squads about to steamroller over a mere seven 4-6-7’s. If you use OBA should be tailored to the VC’s, what does a quick look at the scenario card tell us? Well firstly the Germans are under the cosh, and if the Russians get in close they are going to overwhelm the landsers through sheer force of numbers. Every weapon in the German arsenal is going to have to be used to full effect to keep them at a distance, and measured the number of hexes affected.

Targeting the few leaders to prevent rallying and human waves is also going to be very worthwhile.

What else? Well the situation seems perfect for harassing fire. The maths works like this – normal HE affects seven hexes at full strength, while harassing fire affects 19 hexes at one third strength. Because of the way the IFT* works, certain calibres get short changed: 120mm and 70mm divides neatly (24>8 and 12>4) but 150mm and 100mm do less well (30>8 and 20>6) while 80mm (16>4) comes off worst.

(* There is no such thing as the IFT. But if some mad scientist was to create one, in the brief period before the temporal paradoxes made it disappear, then it wouldn’t make much difference. Unless there was a very high SAN or booby traps in which case the extra PTCs might count for something.)

The general rule of thumb is not to use harassing fire except in 0 and -1 airburst TEM, and not always then. Most of the time a standard FFE is much more effective – as can be seen in the table below. Percentages are the effectiveness of harassing fire compared to a normal FFE concentration, taking a TEM modifier as equivalent to a column shift, and measuring the number of hexes affected.

So in theory you should never use harassing fire with 80mm OBA even in airburst terrain, but the table is a guide – it will depend on a number of things, like how many hexes of the blast zone contain targets and what are their vulnerabilities/values.

But harassing fire does have a few specific advantages all of it’s own –

Firstly it is not a HE concentration so does not give a LOS hindrance (C1.72 & C1.72) which means it does not hinder your fire into it, and does not prevent interdiction – Russians caught in the open will have to rout away normally and may take additional attacks whereas with normal OBA they could stay where they were (not necessarily the best option, but…).

Secondly critical hits are resolved with double the normal FP (not double 1/3rd) – (C3.75), so where a normal FFE is going to have little or no effect except with a critical hit, it can be better to treble the area affected. This will usually apply to well protected vehicles, but also to low calibre OBA in the 60-80mm range against things like pillboxes, caves and cellars.

Thirdly if you have Wire or Mines and there are targets on top of them, a normal FFE might have the unfortunate effect of clearing your own fortifications, but harassing fire can’t (B26.52 and B28.62) as it is not a HE concentration (neither are barrages).

And as a rule of thumb, more lower FP attacks are a much better proposition against six morale troops than eight morale types.

Going back to Piepsk, the OBA’s job in this scenario is to keep the Russians at arms length rather than to necessarily hurt them. But on it’s own it has too small an effect – there are too many Russians, and too large an area for them to move through. It has to complement the German machineguns. Where to put the observer then?

The obvious place is in level two of 3N2. As the scenario is ten turns long, the Russians have the option of making some wide out flanking moves, and have so many troops that there is likely to be more than one avenue of approach. From here an

<table>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>150mm</td>
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<td>72.38%</td>
<td>67.86%</td>
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TABLE 1: % Effectiveness of FFE Concentration vs Harrasing Fire
observer can bring down fire on 4J8, 4G5, 3AA1, sneakily to 3FF6, 2I7, 2F7, 2J4, and 2N6 (possibly 2V2 for the really wide outflank).

Although this covers a fairly wide chunk of the board, it is essential to stack the HMG in the same location for a number of reasons. Firstly some of the LOS’s are narrow lines to individual hexes with blind zones around them. To avoid the extra chit draw, which you really really don’t want in this scenario, it would help if there’s a nice visible broken or pinned unit from the HMG, instead of the Russian infantry waltzing through the hex in the Movement Phase and leaving nothing to see in the DFPh.

Secondly OBA is a fickle beast – how fickle? – well on any one turn, keeping radio contact (5 in 6) times not drawing a red (2 in 3) gives you only a 56% chance of being able to call OBA down. Or in other words a 44% chance of just watching the Russians come closer. You should never rely solely on OBA to cover an avenue of approach on its own.

Why yes Pigsy, when attacking:

Use Smoke instead of HE unless the defenders are in very low TEM.

Use the Smoke to isolate the defenders, instead of masking your own firepower.

Don’t be afraid to move your observer in the Movement Phase, the turn sequence encourages it.

Don’t use OBA just for the sake of using it, or indeed on its own. Time its use to benefit the movement of your assault troops, and combine it with other weapons EG DCs.

HE can often be better used behind a defenders position to interfere with rout paths if they are well dug in, or to block the movement of reserves.

When defending:

1) A good defence is flexible and does not rely solely on one weapon. OBA complements infantry weapons and SW, but is too fickle to cover an avenue of approach on its own.

2) Use harassing fire or barrages to cover mines and wire, or if you don’t want the +1 hindrance to affect interdiction.

3) Breaking attackers is often of less value than breaking defenders – it is usually harder to get into a failure to rout position. Therefore Smoke in attacker firebases, and:

4) Put HE in open ground in front of attackers, not on top of them. Either channel their approach to somewhere you want them to go, or put it somewhere they have to move through. (EG put down harassing fire on the VC building you occupy in the last turn – you should be okay against 6-4 or whatever attacks, but crossing the street into 6-2 attacks is a different story.) On the same principle there is no point placing OBA where it can be easily bypassed.

5) HE should only be put down behind attackers when they are moving through several hexes of open ground. That way their firebases further back are masked with the +1 hindrance, while the defenders can shoot normally - and broken attackers have to rout back into the OBA.

Campaign Games

If you just play tourney sized scenarios, with a bit of effort you can avoid OBA completely. But not in CGs most allow 2+ modules per date (offhand Pegasus Bridge is the only CG I can think of that has no artillery), with a range of additional HIP, and using a radio is not a concealment loss activity so you will retain HIP here).

Nice Master

Ah nice master, this enlightenment business is difficult for a poor pig demon’s brain...is there any simple principles to remember?

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Campaign Games

If you just play tourney sized scenarios, with a bit of effort you can avoid OBA completely. But not in CGs most allow 2+ modules per date (offhand Pegasus Bridge is the only CG I can think of that has no artillery), with a range of additional...)
extras. From my own experience, you don’t really grokk OBA, until you use it date after date in a CG. It’s only then that you remember the correct order – OBA Smoke, then normal Smoke, then normal OBA… and only then you can truly be philosophical over two red chits, or a broken radio. (By the way it’s quite acceptable to have a piece of paper pinned to your head saying “OBA first numbunts!” – if that’s what it takes).

Purchasing OBA in a campaign is a struggle between the yin and yang of two opposing forces. On the one hand Confucius says - Infamy wins campaign games, for only a fool spends CPPs on toys – but on the other hand Confucius also says OBA is not a toy, but as essential as air itself.

Because those purchase points disappear after one CG date, as opposed to an infantry company where you expect some survivors to carry on in future days – you must get your moneys worth from an OBA module. So the first thing to ask yourself is why am I buying this instead of infantry? And the answer should be – because it can do things infantry can’t. If you need to block a particular part of the map – here is a defender that doesn’t break and rout. If you need to blind kill stacks that your infantry weapons can’t reach or protect an advance over open ground that would otherwise be suicide, then OBA is what you need. Let’s consider all the bells and whistles.

1) Pre-registered hexes. In VOTG the Russian shopping list is 70/80mm-1, 120mm-3, 150mm-5 and each pre-reg hex costs 1 (with a maximum of two per module). Although the accuracy of 1-4 is nice*, you might think this is a bit extravagant as you have to guess the right hex after all. Wrong. Get them, possibly not for the 70/80mm, but certainly for the other two modules. Due to the small Russian draw piles, the extra black chit is not to be sniffed at – it increases the average number of fire missions before two reds are drawn from 3.33 to 4.00, (two increases it to 4.67), although the effect is less marked for larger draw piles (U.S 5 to 5.50, German 4 to 4.50 – see VFTT 12).

The main advantage though is the lack of warning to the enemy. A spotting round will always give the defenders time to disperse, (even if only an advance), but it’s quite possible that deviation will put the SR base and blast height out of LOS in a city fight meaning you have to start over. Also having the OBA cycle complete in two player turns instead of three (or more), means much more chance of getting a respectable number of missions down before the CG date ends. With an average CG date at 6 or 7 game turns, or 12/14 player turns, this gives a maximum of four cycles. Of course assuming no lost radio contact, red chits, mandatory SR corrections and targets appearing from the get-go instead of the more usual half squad reconnaissance may be optimistic. However it is the reduced chance of drawing two red chits (or worse one black and two reds) that make it worthwhile. If you spend the CPP’s, reduce the chance of getting very little in return. A pre-reg hex also allows barrages in most CG’s…

* No hindrances apply to the dr as long as the observer’s LOS is not blocked.

2) Barrages There has been some debate on GameSquad over whether a pre-reg hex automatically allows you to use a barrage. Although E12.1 says “a barrage is a type of OBA Fire Mission (C1.7), and is available to a player if he is allowed one or more Pre-Registered hexes.”…sayayers quote E.1 that “Chapter E is composed entirely of Optional rules and SSR. Therefore there must be a specific SSR or agreement between the players prior to play…”. So sadly, best to agree in advance with your opponent, while waiting for a MMP clarification. You will generally get to play with them in CG’s though. Barrages are similar to harassing fire in some respects – as they are not a HE concentration (C1.7) they do not cause a +1 hindrance, and cannot clear wire and mines, and affect more hexes (nine) at the cost of reduced FP. Unlike harassing fire the reduced FP is only one column shift, and the difference with a normal FFE in terms of firepower times hexes is minimal.

Generally speaking barrages are much more useful on defence than attack, although you can put down a Smoke barrage affecting nine hexes instead of seven. Because you have to put the barrage in a straight line, instead of capping a factory, which will only block LOS through the smaller area of a normal FFE, you may end up giving +3 hindrances over a wider area. In a mild breeze though, the Smoke barrage is far more effective.

Defensively a HE barrage is ideal for city fights particularly factories. Provided the factory and barrage align (in RB & VOTG there are restrictions to the axis of the barrage, basically North/South but not East/ West, in normal scenarios any (alternative) hex grain is allowed.), the pre registered hex should be in the open ground adjacent to the factory. You should wait until the first assault wave comes in, then drop the barrage behind them. After defensive fire breaks them they only get the +1 interior factory TEM, they will then have to rout back through the OBA in open ground. This is much better than hitting them before they get into the factory, which will only break them instead of casualty reducing them. And as it is often better to put OBA into open ground instead of on top of well dug in defenders (or attackers), the barrage following a street line will usually be able to get nine hexes in open ground, whereas the shape of a standard FFE will have some firepower ‘wasted’ on high TEM hexes.

Is it worth it? Well you don’t pay extra for a barrage per se, it comes automatically with a pre-registered hex. If you are not using it to hit a single specific target – in which case why take the column shift – and you don’t mind losing the +1 hindrance (which has advantages and disadvantages), it does affect a much wider area.

3) Creeping Barrages Although not a HE concentration, the FFE does provide a +2 hindrance (E12.75 – note this is for the entire blast zone not per hex.) Like a barrage, the blast hex is nine hexes long and there is a column shift downwards, but this particular beast advances 1-3 hexes each player or game turn, and has a chance of going off 1-3 turns early. (Pick a chit – if the chit is red it goes off early). Although great fun in scenarios, the cost in campaign games is usually fearsome – typically you pay for a pre-reg hex plus 50% of the module cost (FRU). For Russians in VOTG this means 3 points for 80mm, 6 for 120mm (more than a rifle company) and 9 for 150mm (the same as a Guards Rifle Company). All accountants should stop reading at this point.

Creeping barrages do have a number of advantages though – there are no chit draws after the first one. There is no radio contact, no AR or SR to be placed and unlimited ammunition – it lasts as long as you tell it to last. If you can keep up with the barrage, it nicely isolates the front line defenders from reinforcements, makes it difficult for them to run away, and provides essential cover when crossing large chunks of open ground. Of course the barrage does trundle on regardless of how the infantry battle is going on, and the unlimited ammo is meaningless if the barrage only hits the defenders for one turn, then runs behind them.

From a tactical point of view, infantry can only keep up with the barrage when it is slow (advances 1-3 hexes per game turn), but any kind of resistance will cause them to fall behind a fast barrage (advances each player turn). Fast barrages are for mechs and tanks. Creeping barrages also don’t go well against wire/mines – there is no chance of clearing obstacles as it is not a HE concentration, and they will separate the assault troops from the barrage. You also need to think carefully about when to lift the barrage – as a rule of thumb, plot where the barrage will be if it advances one hex a turn, then calculate how many Movement Phase it will take infantry to get to the victory area. Then add at least one turns grace.

Paradoxically creeping barrages that go off early can be more effective – the
“pre-game” turns don’t have Rout or Rally phases so it is possible to get double breaks, or have broken defenders with the barrage behind them. Overall the verdict has to be too expensive for CG unless the defenders are echeloned in some depth.

**Offboard Observers**

Only one purchase point but are they worth it? Well, the automatic radio contact is nice, but their key advantage is immunity from opposing fire. If the number of level two buildings with good LOS is limited because the other guy drops nebelswerfers on top of them, or shoots at empty hexes with -3 leader directed kill stacks then it’s probably time to give it some consideration.

Otherwise OBA is expensive enough, and if you’re in a campaign with overcast weather, your observer may have his LOS completely blocked from a board edge. Accuracy is also only on a 1, which will upset Germans, British and Americans but not anyone else.

5) Aerial Observers

Although the theory is nice, being able to function as an offboard observer from any hex on a friendly board edge and change that hex at will, the disadvantages are too great. The need for a sighting TC before beginning the OBA cycle, which typically for RB/VOTG will be 7’s or 6’s (-2 not concealed, +3 building, possibly +1 friendlies within 4 hexes) means a good chance of an extra player turn per cycle, compounded by the inherent radio which will lose the odd turn or so.

In comparison a normal observer can swap for a field phone in most CG which is much more reliable, and an offboard observer doesn’t have to bother with radio contact at all. If you spend an extra point you want to increase rather than reduce the number of missions you get.

**Anti-OBA tactics**

Okay we have some ideas on how to use OBA effectively, but what’s a poor pig demon to do when on the receiving end? Most of the sacred texts in existence offer fairly banal advice like not stacking and trying to keep concealment to force an extra chit draw. Neither of these are completely true though – the universe is a complicated place. Here are seven sacred principles of safety…

Stacking with a good leader in good TEM can be better than spreading out. It reduces the chances of a critical hit, and ensures everyone gets the morale bonus. (Although you are more vulnerable to getting smoked in.)

Look at the map differently. There is no height advantage. Walls and bocage are +1 TEM, Hedges are 0 TEM, and open ground is safer than woods. Foxholes and Trenches are equivalent to fortified buildings.

Instead of trying to force an extra chit draw – (it is difficult to keep concealment when on the attack after all) – get the other guy to burn through black chits by offering low value targets, preferably on one flank, then making your main effort somewhere else. Once a FFE is down it can only be shifted 3 hexes, and an existing SR suffers accuracy drm if shifted more than 6 hexes, and can deviate larger distances, making the other guy less likely to risk conversion.

Look for avenues of approach on the attack that are in dead ground to the observer – behind in season orchards, or buildings. When defending put your troops in areas with short LOS so the observer has to move up to you, then skulk and fall back.

If the enemy observer is HIP, scope out the best positions, and then watch where AR are placed, so you can cross them off mentally. When the number of positions is manageable low, start firing at the empty hexes or smoke them in. The observer can’t do anything if he has 6+ LOS hindrances.

On the attack, move fast and close in. OBA works best against fairly static targets, where the delay of a turn or two to red chits or loss of radio contact won’t matter much. Get through the observed zone while this kind of faffing about is going on and drive your enemy before you while the womenfolk lament.

You’re moving through woods when suddenly hot metal is flying about and you’re in the middle of an FFE. Move and take an attack, or stay still and take an attack…mmmm…dig! It’s a Prep Fire Phase action that makes you TI but a foxhole is placed immediately (B27.11).

**Enlightenment for Deviants – PTO, DTO and Night**

In the Pacific, paradoxically, OBA is more powerful but harder to use effectively. The normal ETO rule that a break on its own isn’t enough, doesn’t apply when fighting
the Japanese – step reductions are. Stopping the attacking sons of Nippon generally requires lots of low-medium FP attacks to grind their squads down by attrition. So for OBA harassing fire over the generally low TEM, with plenty of airburst terrain, is a good way to do this – without risking the usually high Japanese SAN.

From the Japanese perspective, breaks on their own are enough too – because they are uniquely suited to getting behind a defensive line and into failure to rout positions - but often lack the raw FP to break defenders in the first place. The fact OBA attacks don’t activate snipers, but PTCs and MCs from OBA attacks do can often benefit the high Japanese SAN.

However the limited LOS in most PTO battlefields means you will only have a short time to bring down fire before the Japanese will be on top of you with a banzai or infiltrating behind you. The +1 radio contact advantage (G.7) also has quite a big effect, because the contact numbers are in the middle of the DR bell curve, and increase the chance of your observer faffing about until its too late. You should therefore get a SR down early before the Japanese are close enough to force the extra chit draw, and convert to a FFE:1 as soon as they move into their final attack positions – risking the extra draw then. (If it fails it fails-which is no worse than being too late). If you are defending a foxhole line, harassing fire on your own position with +4 TEM is not a bad option. White Phosphorous on your own position is particularly good, as it will strip any adjacent stacks of concealment, but as long as you are in foxholes you should pass the minus 4MC, but any banzaiing or advancing Japanese will take the MC based on the surrounding terrain (see C.7 and A24.31).

When attacking the Japanese the situation is somewhat different, but high odds FP attacks from a normal FFE may be the only way to chip away at defenders in cave and pillbox TEM. For Japanese defenders OBA is one of the few ways to strike back without revealing a target to the awesome U.S late war FP.

On the other hand DTO is the yin to the PTO’s yang – completely different. In the desert, barring overlays LOS will be clear to board edges, TEM will usually be zero, there’s only a little scrub for concealment terrain and foxholes are hard to dig, so OBA is potentially king. On the other hand it’s a very mobile war and calling down artillery on a fast moving column of tanks and halftracks presents a few challenges of its own.

Putting the SR down in the Defensive Fire Phase (in the right place) instead of in the Prep Fire Phase is important. Any concentration of vehicles can easily disperse 13-16 hexes (or more) if forewarned by a SR. When shifting a SR and converting it to a FFE, the accuracy dr gets a +1 mod for 7-12 hexes and a +2 mod for 13-18 hexes (C.13). So it is almost certain to deviate and can deviate virtually full distance (max 1 hex for every 3 hexes or fraction thereof).

Note also F11.75 where EC are dry or very dry and one or more desert boards are in play, OBA dust takes effect. This bumps up normal hindrances from FFE’s and creeping barrages to +1/2 per hex, and gives harassing fire and barrages a hindrance. Again this will have advantages and disadvantages depending on what you want to do.

There are mysteries. There are differences. In this world, these must be reconciled in time. Some differences are as wide as those between night and day….

Most players would not think of using OBA at night, figuring it’s too hard for observers to get a decent LOS, Plus in a campaign, this might translate into only one or two FFES appearing in an entire CG date – which just isn’t value for money. And although this line of thought is true to an extent, enlightenment requires that to function, minds, like parachutes, must be open. Night OBA has a few special gifts to give.

In the dark broken units are especially vulnerable. Not only do they keep the +4 DM modifier unless they roll = current printed morale when rallying, but they only rout one hex (E1.54). You probably don’t fully appreciate the implications of that.

If you are the Scenario Attacker at night, then the defenders will initially be under No Move counters. OBA attacks do not give freedom of movement (E1.21) so defenders cannot move or advance away from the OBA. They have to sit there and take it like schmusks. The only way they can get away from it is to rout one hex away. Because FFES count as gunflashes to an observer (E1.87), you can always put a fresh AR down on the edges of the blast zone and creep the OBA one hex at a time after them regardless of the randomness of star shells. In a city fight that one hex at a time won’t be enough to cross a street, and even if the brokies rally – the No Move counter is still in play.

Say you are in a campaign date where you are desperately outnumbered and can’t afford to take casualties or the bulk of your troops are purchased as reserves. (The night of 14th September in VOTG after a bad day scenario springs to mind). You can make a night counterattack without risking a proper fight but still cause a few casualties from OBA.

However like in the daytime, OBA is much more effective as part of a whole rather than on its own. You rack up the big kills at night by running cloaked/concealed units up to brokies and jumping on them in CC. OBA is unaffected by concealment or the +1 Night LV hindrance, and may pick out those 25% HIP defenders. For the Russians counterattacking at night in RB/VOTG it’s also nice to know units in sewers are unaffected by OBA.

See also E1.93 about Illumination Rounds for OBA. In most campaign games you lose a module after you’ve placed a FFE on board, but you never do that at night, and any black chits drawn are shuffled back into the pile. So you get to use it at night for IR, then normally the following day.

The characters Monkey, Tripitaka, Pigsy and Sandy appear by kind permission of Wu Cheng’en. No Bhuddists were harmed in the writing of this article.

INCOMING
Continued from page 3

a late war scenario featuring a US para-drop and British glider landing against a mixed company of German troops supported by 3 20L AA guns, and variable reinforcements.

There will also be an analysis of the VolG scenario ‘Raid on Rodtmintsev’, the latest part of Carl Nogueira’s article on the Japanese and a report on the local tournament scene.

Four issue subscriptions (starting with the current issue, number 32, which contains four scenarios (‘Lack of Communication’, ‘Jumonji Pass’, ‘Get Tito’, and ‘No Rest for the Weary’) as well as an analysis of the HAZL version of the scenario ‘In Sight of the Volga’) are available for $15.00 ($18.00 outside the USA). Issues 1 to 20 are now out of print but PDF versions are available for free from www.aslbunker.com (note that the site is currently down after being hacked but should be up soon). Other back issues are $4.00 ($4.50 outside the USA) or $35.00 ($45.00 outside the USA) for a complete set of issues 21-32. A complete set of issues 21-31 and a subscription for issues 32-35 is available for $45.00 ($55.00 outside the USA). Cheques should be made payable to Vic Provost and sent to Dispatches from the Bunker, P.O. Box 2024, Hinsdale MA 01235, or you can pay by PayPal to PinkFloydFan1954@aol.com. You can email them at aslbunker@aol.com.
Double One 2011

Friday June 24th to Sunday June 26th

The London ASL tournament “Double One” returns in 2011, over the weekend of June 24th to 26th, with the same venue and continued support from its main sponsor, Leisure Games - www.leisuregames.com.

The Writtle College offers excellent value for money bed and breakfast accommodation, a large gaming room, open for extended gaming times, 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 gaming room opens at 9am on Friday 24th June for a couple of one day 8 man mini tourneys. Last man standing after 3 rounds wins! Early arrivals may instead wish to tackle one of those monster scenarios that you never normally get 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 this will be entered according to their "UK Crusaders" ASL ladder rating. Subject to demand, we will also be running a Starter Kit mini tournament.

Each mini tournament will have capacity for up to 8 players, and will consist of 3 rounds, with round 1 commencing at 9.30am, round 2 at 3.30pm, and round 3 on Sunday morning at 9.30am. Details of the tournament scenarios will be released in December 2010 and will be sent to all those pre-registered at the time.

Mini-tournament sponsors last year included MMP, East Side Gamers and Le Franc Tireur. Like Leisure Games, they kindly agreed to provide prizes for mini tournament winners.

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 9am – 11pm Friday, 8am-11pm Saturday, and 8am-1pm Sunday (prize giving circa 2pm)

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 (£30.00 plus VAT per person per night). Contact the organisers for a booking form and T&Cs, or Jenny Phillips at the college (phone +44 (0) 1245 424200 ext 25645 or e-mail jenny.phillips@writtle.ac.uk).

The college has a licensed bar which will be open during the weekend. Sandwiches and snacks will also be available at certain times. 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 if paid before 30th April 2011, or £20.00 if booked after that date. 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, 25 Cramphorn Walk, Chelmsford, Essex. CM1 2RD. United Kingdom. derek.cox@dsl.pipex.com
Brendan Clark brendan.clark@virgin.net

We look forward to welcoming you to Double One in 2011!
Steel Master is a series of model-based turret counters in supplementing ASL system counters. Its first module, Steel Master Module A, contains 3 double-side color counter sheets depicting the full set of 1/2” turret counters for official German & Russian AFV plus their variants, some previously omitted. It functions as an all-embracing marker for skilled players, reminding all once-forgotten or overlooked turret factors in your next fierce ASL battle. Victory is always on the side of forward-thinking commander.

**DC0039 - Steel Master, Module A (German/Russian)**

Product info:
- 3 die cut double-side color turret counter sheets (780 turret counters)
- A turret counter feature menu
- Individual plastic package

Regular price: $39.50

**COMING SOON!**

**DC0040 - SteelMaster, Module B (US/BR) - June**

**DC0041- SteelMaster, Module C (Italian/French/Axis minor) - September**

**DC0042- SteelMaster, Module D (Chinese/Japanese/Allied minor) - November**

**DC0043- SteelMaster, Module E (Finnish) - To be confirmed**

Our Contact: countersmith@gmail.com
http://countersmith.blogspot.com/
Happy (Belated) Birthday!

ASL at 25

Chris Doary

Advanced Squad Leader turned 25 in 2010. In honour of this milestone, BattleSchool — a recent startup — sponsored a contest on the GameSquad ASL Forums. The aim of the contest was to identify individuals who have helped further our hobby in the past 25 years. Based upon arguments presented by forum members, three individuals would receive a set of precision, ASL Anniversary BattleDice, compliments of BattleSchool.

Background

On 15 November 2010, I asked forum members to identify people whom they felt had done the most for the ASL hobby in the past 25 years and/or who were worthy of special recognition for their efforts in promoting The Game. Regrettably, the thread title emphasized the superlative, namely those who had made the most significant contributions. This led some posters to create a list of hallowed names suitable for induction into a notional ASL Hall of Fame. Creating a Hall of Fame short list was not the intent of the thread. (I take full responsibility for the poor wording of the thread title and the contest description.) In spite of these missteps, the thread produced some interesting responses and over 50 candidates for special recognition. The responses also produced a partial overview of where ASL has been, and perhaps, an indication of where the hobby may be headed. At the request of the editor, I have attempted to incorporate some of these responses into an imperfect narrative. The sum is neither a history of ASL, nor a biographical dictionary of its leading figures. It is merely a fragmented reminiscence of an ASL past, and my hopes for our hobby. I claim no special knowledge of ASL or its history. Pete nonetheless thought that his readers might find my ramblings of interest.

In the Beginning

The list of candidates included a veritable who’s who of the ASL world. Included were designers, artists, tournament directors, third-party producers, rules gurus, and long-time ASL opponents. However, the names of those who fathered ASL figured prominently. Some posts were simple lists of names. Some were thought provoking. Others were witty. And still others were plain silly. The more interesting posts contained succinct supporting arguments for each name nominated. Among these posts, one — from a gent in the United Kingdom — caught my attention. Gavin claimed to be poorly qualified to judge, but he nevertheless produced a catchy and worthy list of candidates. Here is his list:

Don Greenwood for starting it.
Brian Youse for continuing it.
Perry Cocke for ruling it.
Curt Schilling for paying for it.
Chas Argent for restarting it.
Mark Pitcavage for his webpage.
Gary Fortenberry for his scenarios and passion.
Klas Malmström for his sensible answers to rules questions.
Charlie Kibler for his maps.

Ole Bøe for the IIFT with CTC.

All of these names would appear in other posts. As Tony Newman of the UK asked, “How can you go past the designer?” In addition to Don Greenwood, Tony made a case for Bob McNamara, without whom, the ASL system may have lacked North African and Pacific Theatre expansions. In Tony’s view, no one could come close to these foundation builders. His only concession was to Charlie Kibler for his groundbreaking design: Red Barricades. There is no question that this first Historical ASL (HASL) module elevated ASL to a new level of play. Mark Hatfield from Ohio had similar sentiments. He praised Greenwood’s authorship of the original ASL Rule Book:

The rulebook is, quite simply, a wonder of rules-writing. It is a masterpiece [the] clarity, precision, and tremendous scope [of which] has yet to be equalled in wargaming, and may never be. Greenwood understood that rules-writing is technical writing. Although some find the language and density of the rules off-putting, those [who] stick with it for the long haul will inevitably come to appreciate Don’s work. It set the tone for the many rules chapters that have followed. It is the best wargame rulebook ever written.

Mark had similar praise for Charles Kibler, who worked in the Monarch/ Avalon Hill art department from 1981 until 1995:

Avalon Hill’s advert for the release of the ASL Rulebook, and Beyond Valor, from The General Vol 22 No 3 (1985).
Charlie Kibler defined the look of *ASL*. From the original counters, to the geoboards, to the Chapter B terrain drawings, to his revolutionary *Red Barricades* map, Charlie’s art set the stage for all that followed. The realistic look of his mapboard paintings is still relevant today, and he understood that form and beauty should complement functionality, not replace it (a lesson that some current wargame artists seem to have forgotten). His art alone would qualify Charlie for an inaugural脑 childhood. The concepts of historical modules, campaign games, and *Solitaire ASL*, which have become staples of the game, were all Charlie’s brainchildren.

I cannot argue with these appraisals. Don and Charlie undoubtedly laid the foundations of *ASL*, and as Mark Hatfield underlined, they “did it competently and professionally.” Like Tony, Mark also credited Bob McNamara, along with Rex Martin, with the creation of a dynamic game system. And Steve Pleva reminded us that we would not have *ASL* without John Hill’s *Squad Leader*.

I have fond memories of playing *Squad Leader* during the late 70s and early 80s. However, I was immediately taken with the *ASL Rule Book* and the modular nature of the new system, and never looked back. I recall thinking how great it was to finally receive replacement pages for the *ASL Rule Book* (1st edition), when my copy of the French *ASL* module *Croix de Guerre* arrived in the mail six years later. Regrettably, I never got a chance to play Le Harrison, or most of the other scenarios in this module before heading overseas to Somalia. When I returned to Canada in 1993, my life took a different path. I met my wife to be, and enrolled in university studies. My *ASL* play declined and virtually stopped. I lost touch with the wider hobby.

Multi-Man Publishing

Consequently, I was oblivious to the crisis that developed when Hasbro purchased Avalon Hill (AH) in 1998. (I had completed my undergraduate degree the year before and was neck-deep in graduate studies at the Royal Military College.) Fortunately Multi-Man Publishing (MMP), and Curt Schilling in particular, stepped up to the plate and gave *ASL* a future. Curt was an *ASL* fanatic. His enthusiasm for *ASL* — not just his monetary investment — rescued the game from the Dark Age of *ASL*. When not playing professional baseball, Curt was playing *ASL*, and researching, designing, and writing about it too. Some of his former business partners at MMP have since left. However, two gentlemen have kept the home fires burning for almost 15 years. We all owe Brian Youse and Perry Cocke a huge debt of gratitude. They have taken a lot of grief for their efforts. But in spite of all the flak that has been thrown their way, they have stuck with us. Nay, they have done more than that. The creation of an *ASL Starter Kit* and the hiring of a full-time *ASL* developer (Chas Argent) are but two tangible signs that Brian and Perry are committed to the future of *ASL*. As Roger Whelan of Erie, Pennsylvania noted, “without [Brian and Perry] there would be no *ASL*.”

Volunteers

Now while the principals at MMP have done much good for our hobby, they have not done it alone. Well before *ASL* was released in 1985 squads of enthusiasts were busy behind the scenes play testing, proof reading and putting together the most impressive game system in the history of board gaming. Some were paid employees; most were not. The truly remarkable thing is that many of those *ASL* pioneers are still with us today. Some, such as Jim Stahler, continue to contribute to MMP. Take, for example, Jim’s recent conversion of *Squad Leader* scenarios and the release of the *Turning the Tide* scenario pack. Others such as Steve Swann have lent their expertise to third-party publishers (TPP). Moreover, virtually all of these people continue to support MMP, and thus our hobby, by their voluntary contributions. As Swedish *ASL* player Ola Nygårds pointed out, the rule book would not be what it is today without the contributions of people like Norwegian Ole Bøe. In fact, the core and historical modules, the *ASL Journal*, the Action Packs and so forth, would never have seen the light of day were it not for the commitment of these unsung *ASL* heroes [A15.25]. Their work continues.

Clubs, Fanzines and Tournaments

The popularity of *ASL* saw the emergence of specialized *ASL* clubs, amateur fanzines, and tournaments devoted to the game system. The people who organized these clubs, published the fanzines, and ran the tournaments, supported the hobby in a number of important ways. Clubs provided a rally point where players could get together and play *ASL*. Players could discuss and debate their interpretations of the rules, experiment with different tactics, and teach new players how to play. Occasionally, some clubs — the *Southern California ASL Club* is a prime example — morphed into something beyond the traditional notion of a club. The SoCal club not only has its own website, but it also runs an annual tournament and publishes it own scenarios. But I am getting ahead of myself. Suffice it to say that *ASL* clubs have sometimes been the genesis of other *ASL* endeavours, but for the most part remain local entities with primarily local influence.

Fanzines, such as *At the Point*, published by North Carolinian Marc Hanna took the process a step further by sharing local knowledge with a wider audience. These amateur magazines also provided a medium for budding designers to introduce new *ASL* scenarios to the gaming public. *Tactiques*, an ambitious French enterprise begun in 1991 by Parisian duo Théophile Monnier and Jean-Luc Bechennec, was a trailblazer in this regard. By the time it had ceased publication in 1995, it had bequeathed 75 *ASL* scenarios to the hobby. Some of these scenarios were subsequently republished in the *ASL Annual*.

Tournaments were the natural place to put your *ASL* knowledge, skills, and possibly scenario designs to the test. It was one thing to be top pooch of your local *ASL* club, quite another to be a tournament champion, and quite another again to match wits with *über* players the likes of Mike McGrath, Steve Pleva and Gary Fortenberry. Only a dozen players have been crowned Gröfaz in the 24-year history of the annual *ASL Oktoberfest* (ASLOK) tournament in Ohio. Together, Mike, Steve, Gary, and Bob Bendis have won top honours an astounding 18 times, leading Mark Hatfield to contend that “despite the massive amount of die-rolling and incredible swings of fortune, [ASL] really is a game of skill — not luck.”

*ASLOK* began life as a modest event only a year after the release of the first *ASL* module Beyond Valor. The organizers of ASLOK were the legendary Bill “Fish” Connor — a top player in his day — and Daryl “Action Burke” Burke. These gentlemen were heavily involved with play testing for Avalon Hill during the late 1980s, and their Series Replay articles — essentially scenario play-by-play narratives — became a staple of Avalon Hill’s *The General* magazine. Bill and Daryl are also credited with the creation of *In Contact*. Although this fanzine later grew to encompass articles and scenarios, its original intent was simply to put *ASL* players in contact with each other. It is difficult to assess how well their magazine accomplished this goal. However, there is no question that by kick-starting ASLOK, Bill and Daryl have helped thousands of *ASL* players make contacts that have flourished in the decades since ASLOK began.

The pair ran their tournament in Youngstown, Ohio for 10 years. Mark Nixon — an early Gröfaz and author of numerous *ASL* articles in *The General* magazine

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The Charter of the CASLA is a noteworthy document, and its tournament format has withstood the test of time. Alas the CASLA, like the Winnipeg ASL Club, has seen brighter days. A review of the player directory on the CASLA website is nevertheless instructive. There are over 200 names in the directory. Having played ASL since 1986 (and Squad Leader before that), I was surprised to learn in 2006 that so many Canadians still played The Game. Today, the Canadian ASL scene is showing signs of a revival. CASLO 2010, held in Ottawa, was probably the best-attended Canadian ASL event in the past five years. Despite having a population less than a third of Canada’s, a similar process is underway in Sweden. This process is greatly aided by advances in technology, especially the Internet and desktop publishing software.

A Canadian Case Study

The historical sketch that follows charts the evolution of a small but ultimately influential ASL club. The sketch illustrates how a local interest in ASL can frequently give rise to a club, a fanzine, a tournament, new ASL products, or some combination of these. The Winnipeg ASL Club is an interesting case study. Although a relative late comer to the ASL scene and modest in size — with perhaps a baker’s dozen of players at its peak — this club has nonetheless had a significant impact on the development and spread of ASL in Canada. The late Jim McLeod (designer of the forthcoming Ortonia HasL) is likely the best-known member of this cabal. However, a number of other former club members have been prominent in the ASL scene (EX: George Kells of Lone Canuck Publishing, and scenario designer Ray Kruger). Granted individual members of this club have accomplished much, but the impact that this group has had on ASL in Canada is arguably greater.

The Winnipeg group was especially active in the 1990s, so much so that it began running a local ASL tournament. However, the club, and its passionate President Jim McLeod, had grander ideas. In the latter half of the 90s, they founded the Canadian ASL Association (CASLA). (Dave Olie, author of “A Place for Your Stuff” in CASLA). The CASLA published a newsletter, The Maple Leaf Route which initially contained only articles and information on upcoming ASL events. The Association — in reality, the Winnipeg ASL Club — later published its own scenarios in The Maple Leaf Route. Drawing upon their tournament experience, these Winnipeggers established the annual Canadian ASL Open (CASLO) in 2003, as the premier ASL tournament in Canada. The tournament drew 29 players in 2004, four from the USA.

The Rise of ASL Websites, Third-Party Publishers, and Virtual ASL

There was a time when placing an advert in The General was one of the better ways to find an ASL opponent. The advent of the Internet not only made it easier to lasso an unsuspecting player, but it also (eventually) made it easier to play this newfound opponent — but I am getting ahead of myself again.

The Internet has arguably done more to put ASL on the world map than anything else. Websites created by ASL enthusiasts deserve much of the credit for the recent rise in the popularity of ASL, especially outside of North America and the United Kingdom. A single industrious ASL player can create an impressive website dedicated to the hobby, as Mark Pitcavage of Columbus, Ohio has done. His Desperation Morale site truly is a “compendium” of things ASL. Some ASL websites are geared toward new players. Some target a specific aspect of ASL — witness the oxymoronic Group Solitaire ASL website. And still others offer a specialized service, such as Dave Ramsay’s searchable ASL Scenario Archive. Online ASL forums such as those found on GameSquad, BoardGameGeek, and Consimworld have allowed players around the world to “meet” and interact. ASL clubs have also capitalized on this medium. The Texas ASL Club website is a prime example. The Texas site not only connects players across the Lone Star state, but also crosses state lines into Oklahoma and New Mexico. The site is home to the well-received fanzine Bongos and a host of other useful information. In addition to linking players to each other, Texas ASL links visitors to other ASL sites. One of these links leads to Bouncing Fire Productions (BFP), a prominent third-party producer (TPP) of material designed for the ASL system.

Like many aftermarket producers, BFP owes part of its success to the development of desktop-publishing software. This software has allowed “amateurs” to produce material that, in some cases, rivals the quality of Avalon Hill and MMP products. In terms of material quality, the French magazine Le Franc Tirez (LFT) has set a high standard with 80 full-colour pages, striking original cover art, entertaining cartoons, and smart layout.

Granted abundant enthusiasm can go a long way to creating a vibrant homegrown ASL community. However, technological advances deserve some credit too. How else could a small country like Sweden hold two major ASL tournaments each year, support a domestic TPP — Friendly Fire, and publish an ASL magazine in Swedish? Okay, I will admit that there has only ever been one issue to date, but this in no way diminishes the accomplishment. Friendly Fire, in contrast, has been producing scenario packs for its annual tournament in Linkoping six years running. Affordable desktop publishing software, domestic online forums, and email are just a few of the technological advances that have allowed Swedish fans of ASL to collaborate with each other and the wider ASL community. And while the Internet has helped bring Swedish players together, it has also helped the Linkoping and Stockholm tournaments attract players from across Europe and beyond. But to be fair, there is another catalyst that has done a great deal to make ASL accessible to more and more people. No, as entertaining and congenial as Jeff and Dave are, I am not hinting at The 2 Half-Squad's ASL podcast — another example of technology helping to spread the good word.

The ASL Starter Kit line notwithstanding, the birth and growth of Virtual ASL (VASL) has probably done more for the hobby than anything else in the past decade. Rodney Kinney is a physicist turned software engineer. Rodney was inspired by the Internet Go Server (for the ancient board game Go), which allowed Go players to play each other remotely. Rodney desired a similar open-source interface for ASL. He got his wish in 1995 with the debut of Java. As Rodney noted in a 1999 interview, this “write-once-run-anywhere” software lived up to its promise. Java allowed him to develop a game platform that would run on Unix, Mac and Windows. (Being a born-again Mac user, I certainly appreciate that VASL is not a Windows-only program.) Rodney did the initial programming and continues to refine his product. However, as with most open-source projects, a host of developers, tinkerers, and “map elves” share the credit for making VASL (and VASSAL — the underlying board-game engine) what it is today.

The original intent of VASL was
to bring players together by allowing them to play ASL by email (PBEM), or in real time, regardless of their real-world locations. While this continues to be the primary attraction of VASL, the interface has proven to be a valuable tool for teaching ASL as well as testing new ASL material. In this latter regard, VASL has facilitated the development of new ASL products by allowing MMP and TPPs to coordinate play testing and development like never before. VASL has also proven to be a cost-effective and eminently accessible tournament “venue.” Alan of sunny Seattle had this to say on the matter:

I must whole-heartedly nominate Rodney Kinney as the most important person in the ASL world of the past 10 years. Publishers come and go and hit stumbling blocks which delay their products but Rodney (and his many helpers!) have a record of non-stop improvement for the worldwide phenomenon that is ASL. …without VASL many people would either be stuck playing solo or with the same 2-3 guys for decades. It’s a lot easier to keep up interest with new opponents, watch games and learn and ‘meet’ people with VASL. The VASSAL platform supports 100s of games but ASL was the seed that started it all.

In my view, there is no question that VASL has helped fuel a resurgence of interest in our hobby. I have great hopes that the continued evolution of VASL (and VASSAL) will do even more for ASL in the years to come.

Air-miles and the ASL Renaissance

Gone are the days when an ASL Annual or a subscription to The General was the average player’s only contact with the wider ASL community. Technological advances have done much to make ASL more accessible to newcomers, as well as crusty Grognards. Kenn Dunn and Brian Youse undoubtedly rekindled interest in ASL with the development of the ASL Starter Kit line. A maturing demographic has helped to keep returning players stabilised and children, grown, some older players are returning to the hobby. This cohort appears to have more free time and more money to devote to ASL. Having accrued air miles over the years, a few lucky souls are tempted to attend tournaments in distant and exotic cities like Melbourne, Verona (see photo), or Albany, NY — all right, maybe not Albany.10

The resurgance of interest in our hobby may also be due to a more generalized return to board gaming and face-to-face social interaction — a growing disenchantment with video games, perhaps.

“National” websites, such as the Finnish Self-Rally site, also suggest that ASL is rapidly expanding beyond its traditional, primarily English-speaking, base. Self-Rally lists some 80 players on its site. If all are active players, then ASL has surely arrived in Soumi.

Admittedly some of the enthusiasm for ASL in Finland is attributable to the development of the forthcoming Finnish core module Hakka Palle (HP). Nevertheless, the spread of ASL across Finland is a remarkable development that Tuomo Lukkari and Lars Thuring (the developers of HP) can take some credit for facilitating. To put the Finnish numbers in perspective, let’s assume that all of the players on the Self-Rally site are active. Based on a per capita ratio, this would translate into roughly 300 Australians, about 500 Canadians, around 1200 in the UK, and almost 5000 in the United States, all of who would be active in the hobby! Now I am almost certain that these numbers are an exaggeration, but they do highlight what can be accomplished when a gaming community is as highly motivated as the Finnish one appears to be. Regardless of the actual numbers involved, I still believe that we are witnessing something of an ASL renaissance. This rebirth is a direct consequence of the legions of ASL players worldwide who have contributed, and who continue to contribute, so much to our hobby in the past decade. Let’s take a look at some of the people who were nominated on the basis of these contributions.

The Nominations

The GameSquad thread produced over 50 nominations. The list included a host of ASL luminaries dating back to the time when ASL was still under development in the mid 1980s. More players nominated designer Don Greenwood than anyone else. Regrettably he is no longer active in the ASL community, although he remains a force in the wider gaming world.11 There are nevertheless many names that never made the list. Where, for instance, are the keepers of the ASL Scenario Archive and the Remote On-line Automated Record (ROAR)?12 Where is the intrepid man behind the Australian Balance System (ABS)?13 How about the fellow who gave us the only two-part historical module Kampgruppe Peiper (KGP), barbed wire fences and slopes?14 Or how about that English man of letters and scenario designs, the chap behind Action Pack 4.15 And what of the man who has kept the ASL Mailing List (ASLML) running for all these years?16 Surely the folks behind the ASL Starter Kits deserve a nod too.17 The truth is that we have all helped to foster a vibrant ASL community. Even those of us who have done nothing more than continue to play ASL have helped keep ASL alive — apparently no one more so than Brian Lazewski of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who nominated himself:

After all, I’m the one that has to punch a gazillion counter chits, store in specific Planos, search for specific cardboard chits, search for specific maps, setup those specific chits and maps in a specific order, read a rulebook that earns a PhD, look for a specific rule in a specific chapter for the specific scenario that I and my opponent specified to play, play the thing, roll lots of dice, moan about outcomes of said dice, conclude the specific scenario, search for all the right places to put away all those specific chits, maps, charts and finally fight off my annoyed wife, complaining children and screaming granddaughter… That’s a typical Saturday and I think I’ve contributed

[Image 221x105 to 561x292]

ITASLIA 2009: Standing L-R, Federico Corso, Andrea Pagni (winner VASLeague 2007), Mario Naldini, Fabrizio Da Pra (winner ITASLIA 2008), Nicola Muragong, Leonardo Conforti, Paolo Mengoli, Rich Domovic (Majordomo), Marco Merli, Massimiliano Tuzzi, Daniel Kalman, Arnaud Sanchez, Miguel Guerrero (winner ITASLIA 2010). Seated L-R Andrea Oliveri, Paolo Carlotolo, Manlio Massini, Alessandro Caneseve..
more than anyone!

Brian’s tongue-in-cheek tirade underlines the effort and dedication required of ASL players. What is surprising is not that so many people have taken the time to learn ASL, but rather that they have managed to stick with the hobby in spite of what life has thrown in the way.

Before I announce the finalists, it is worth mentioning a few of the other names that made the list of nominees. Far and away the largest proportion of nominees may be characterized as innovators and producers. I have mentioned a few of these movers and shakers already. But as Roger Whelan and Scott Holst reminded us, there are plenty of others who have left their mark on our hobby. Take for instance Mark Neukom, founder, along with co-founder John Knowles (Mike Reed), of Kinetic Energy Productions (1994-1999). In less than three years, Kinetic Energy earned a place in ASL history with its landmark newsletter (later magazine) Time on Target (TOT). The publication was memorable not so much for its articles or even the scenario inserts. Rather TOT rose to fame by virtue of its impressive physical quality, not least the components that came with later issues.18

Another pair of SoCal ASL players were responsible for founding what to date is the longest, continuously running TTP: Heat of Battle (HOB). Front men Eddie Zeman and Steve Dethlefsen wanted to do something unique, at least for a TTP. Their debut publication was God Save the King (1994), a full-blown historical module. It was the first of its kind to be published outside the hall-and-halls of ASL. The pair would publish additional historical modules, and eventually their own magazine: Recon by Fire. Eddie’s departure from HOB in 1997 may have spelt doom for the company, but an injection of new blood — in the form of veteran designers, developers and artists (e.g. Andy Hershey, Bruce Rinehart, Burnie Hegdahl, Derek Spurlock, Eric Morton, Jeff Newell, Klaus Fischer, Sam Tyson, and Steve Swann) — reenergized the company.19 But it was perhaps the addition of Chas Smith, a serving US Army artillery officer, that pushed HOB to the fore. Chas had run a small company briefly in 1999, but opted to “mothball” Bounding Fire Productions after producing a well-received scenario pack (Hell on Wheels) the same year.20 The influence of Chas (and noted game artist Klaus Fischer) was readily apparent with the publication of Onslaught to Orsha in 2002. According to Roger Whelan and others on GameSquad, this historical module — depicting part of Operation Bagnation in June 1944 — is “one of the best HASLs out there, official or not.”

Not surprisingly, Chas Smith received a good number of nominations. However, I suspect that these nominations were not based solely on a single publication. Indeed, after leaving HOB and reviving Bounding Fire Productions (BFP) in 2007, he gained additional kudos for his work on BFP publications, especially the massive Blood and Jungle scenario pack released in 2010. I suspect that it was consistency of effort that led many people to nominate other designers such as Evan Sherry of Tampa, Florida.

Evan is the owner of Schwerpunkt, a small TPP that has published scenario packs exclusively for more than 15 years. To paraphrase Roger Whelan, Schwerpunkt deserves mention due to its impressive body of work, and Evan in particular for revolutionizing scenario design. As anyone who has played Schwerpunkt scenarios can attest, they are often tense tactical situations with little room for error. Dull they are not; popular with tournament directors they are.

Pete Shelling’s designs tend to be more substantial affairs. Pete is based in Willoughby, an eastern suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. His designs have been featured in MMP and TTP publications, including Schwerpunkt. Pete’s work includes some novel linked scenarios — such as the Nuremberg trio featured in ASL Journal 9 — that offers a mini “campaign game” experience.

Another pair of designers who received special mention was Vic Provost and Tom Morin. These New Englanders are two of the better-known members of the “Bunker Crew,” after the newsletter Dispatches from the Bunker. Vic has edited Dispatches since its inception in 1997. Tom came to prominence with his much anticipated HASL design: Valor of the Guards.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the important contributions of Ray Tapio and his upstart, but invariably creative publishing company Critical Hit. Scott Holst (a prolific Chicago-based scenario designer) was correct in noting Ray’s penchant for esoteric subject matter, something that defunct Time on Target hoped to specialize in. Be that as it may, Critical Hit has continued to expand our ASL horizons and imaginations.21

Finally, there are what may be referred to as the facilitators, those individuals who have promoted the hobby at a more personal level. Alan Bills nominated Glenn Housemann because of the wit he brings to the ASL Forum on GameSquad, and because, as he put it, Glenn is “trying to survive in Detroit so I figure he could use some BattleDice.” Truth be told, Glenn is not your average ASL player, and by all accounts is thriving in Royal Oak, a suburb of Detroit. Along with his brother Scott, and fellow Detroit denizen Eric Safran, Glenn is the centrepiece of the “In Four Months” team. To East Side Gamers (ESG). Although ESG has published six ASL scenario packs since 2005 — including tournament favourite ESG12 Road Kill — ESG, and Glenn in particular, has become known for its eccentric brand of ASL humour. Suffice it to say that ESG’s zombie rules for ASL have added a novel and entertaining dimension to our hobby. In doing so, Glenn and his undead partners have reminded us that ASL is really about socializing and having fun.

I imagine that Doug Bleyaert of Monroe Michigan would agree with this assessment. Doug credited three gentlemen with doing the most to keep him in the hobby. For years, Patrick J Norton has been running Office Fest, so called, because it takes place in his back office in Wayne, Michigan every third Saturday of the month. To date, there have been more than 25 of these gatherings. “Without Office Fest (and all the guys there) I would have never had the joy of face-to-face ASL,” Doug confessed. Doug praised another Michigan player, Chris Garrett, for having the patience over a three- or four-year period to teach him the finer points of ASL via VASL. One of Doug’s goals in life is to eventually win a game against Chris. It is good to have goals. But perhaps the best ASL pal to have is one who shares your level of ability. I have a friend like that; and we have been playing on and off since the early 80s. In Doug’s case, it is Toby Fall of Toledo, Ohio. “Having an equal player to learn with is a blast,” Doug said, “we have messed up more rules and had more fun doing it.” And that is a sentiment that I wholeheartedly share, having played ASL for years oblivious to the finer points of target selection limits and skulking! Without these three gents, Doug reflected, “I would probably not be playing.” I think we can all name a few people who have done the same for us. Now, perhaps, is the time for us to do the same for others, as Don Lazov of Chicago is doing. For him, the greatest satisfaction comes from seeing his 14-year-old son learn the old man’s favourite game. It does not get much better than that — although watching my wife chalk up a win while “teaching” a newbie to play is always a treat.

The Tough Part

In the course of narrowing down the list of nominees, I made several arbitrary decisions. First, I discounted those who were no longer active ASL players. This should not be taken as a slight toward the significant contributions of these individuals. Don Greenwood is a case in point. Rather I thought that an active player might find more use for a set of ASL Anniversary BattleDice than an inactive...
player. Second, I decided to exclude anyone who was a paid employee of AH/MMP, or a TPP. I then immediately made an exception to this criterion, but I believe a justifiable one. Third, I excluded anyone who already owned one of these BattleDices. I did this, not because they did not deserve more dice, but simply because it made the list of nominees shorter. Therefore one should not think that Bill Connor, Bret Hildebrand, Daryl Burke, or Mark Nixon — to name a few — were not worthy of consideration, far from it. Fourth, I decided not to adhere to specific categories, as most nominees have contributed to the longevity of ASL on several fronts. And fifth, I included four people who never made the list of nominees. So in the end, instead of three finalists, we had seven, all of who received a complimentary set of Anniversary BattleDices as a token of our appreciation.

The People’s Picks

1. Apart from Don Greenwood, one of the names that appeared more frequently in the Game Squad thread was Charlie Kible. Charlie is a special case. Although he has long been a hired gun — first as an employee of AH, and later as a contractor for MMP — he is the only remaining member of the AH faction that gave us ASL. He worked alongside the likes of Don Greenwood, Rex Martin, and Bob McNamara. Many are familiar with his artistic talents, but fewer realize that he was the lead developer of the first (and the most popular) HASL module: Red Barricades. I am indebted to Mark Hatfield for the succinct case he made for Charlie’s nomination. His arguments in favour of Charlie made ignoring my criteria easier. Charlie, from everyone who has ever played ASL, a heartfelt thanks.

2. Rodney Kinney was a no-brainer; a hands-down winner due to the impact of his VASL program that has done so much to reinvigorate the hobby. Keep on programming Rodney!

3. Klas Malmström made the short list for several reasons. Many on the GameSquad ASL forum know him for his measured and invariably correct responses to their rule conundrums. But Klas is also a long-time proofreader for MMP and TPP. He is a prominent member of the Swedish ASL community, and active in the international tournament scene. He is also a gentleman to play. Thank Klas!

4. Tom Repetti, the Grand Spudster, tireless map elf, and ASL humourist was a shoe-in for my short list. Tom’s website is check-a-block with useful — and delightfully frivolous — ASL stuff. Tom has supported our hobby in many ways, not least by his sportsmanship and good nature. (Losing to Tom is painless, his humour a superb anachronism.) He has written numerous ASL articles, assisted MMP behind the scenes, and supplied us with an ASL website that takes neither itself nor us too seriously. Tuomalanc is seriously good fun. But lately what probably warms the hearts of most ASL players is Tom’s devotion to VASL, and more specifically, his talent in converting game maps into their VASL format. (Apparently there is not much to do in Colorado after the sun sets.) Thanks to Tom, I was able to play a new scenario with a European player over Christmas. Kiitos Tuomo!

5. To those not in the know, Jay Richardson has become something of a patron saint to ASL Starter Kit (ASLSK) players. Adrift in Lindsborg, Kansas — his nearest face-to-face opponent some 500 miles away — Jay has devoted a great deal of his spare time to creating tutorials that are immensely popular with new players. His tutorials include step-by-step explanations, coupled with VASL screen shots, which allow beginners to grasp the mechanics of ASL more readily. One of these tutorials — on Defensive Fire mechanics — was published in MMP’s Operations magazine (Issue 49, Spring 2006). Jay regularly answers questions posed by newbies on BoardGameGeek and in the Starter Kit sub-forum on GameSquad. He also proofread the updated rule booklet that came with the ASLSK Expansion Pack (2011). Like Texan Patrick Ireland, who has schooled many new players using VASL, Jay is to be commended for his commitment to the future of ASL.

6. Pete Phillips, full-time Manchester United fan, Newcastle Brown Ale poster boy, and ASL devotee has been publishing an ASL ‘zine since 1995. This is a huge accomplishment. Many amateur publications never see their second anniversary. The fact that Pete has kept View From The Trenches going after all these years surely is a testament to his dedication and love of our hobby (and desire to get a free beer at tournaments :-) - Pete). On top of this, Pete remains a driving force in the UK tournament scene, especially Intensive Fire and Heroes. Like his signature brew, which incidentally survived the closing of its Tyneside brewery, Pete keeps chugging along. Here is to another 15 years of View From The Trenches… bottoms up!

7. Bruce Probst was a latecomer to my short list, not because he has been inactive, on the contrary. Despite living in the ‘burbs of Melbourne, Australia, Bruce has long been at the centre of the Australian ASL scene, and the Army Group South ASL club in particular. He is also the ASL FAQ guy. But what I did not know was how important his contributions as a proofreader have been to the publication of “official” ASL product, I only learned of this when listening to an interview with Perry Cocks on a recent podcast “aired” on The 2 Half-Squads. Normally, Bruce does not stray far from his home for tournaments — Sydney is a 900 kilometre drive one way — but in 2009 he made his first trip to Cleveland for Oktoberfest. His registration is already paid for the 25th anniversary of ASLOK later this year. Bruce will have some shiny new dice to try out. And I will shamelessly try to get in a game with him.

Congratulations to the finalists. A big thanks to all who shared their thoughts in the thread. And to you, the reader, remember that we are all responsible in some way for the current state of our hobby. Our enthusiasm and interest is ultimately why the hobby continues to thrive. Play fast, play often, and play for the fun of it!

Acknowledgements

I do not profess to be a historian of The Game. I just play it, and not particularly well. So please feel free to bombard Pete with corrections, clarifications, and elaborations. I figure Pete is pretty safe from bombardingm ([1.8] in his Command Bunker [T6.1]. I also must confess to purloining much from Mark Pitcavage’s Desperation Morale website. It is a treasure-trove of ASL history, among other things. Italian Enrico Catanzerò, who runs the VASLeague, identified the participants in the Verona photograph. (I have been in the League for three years now and strongly recommend that players join. It commits you to playing at least one game every couple of months, and is a great way to meet and play new people.) Steve Deitlhesen provided valuable insight on HOB and more. Lastly, I would like to thank Andy Hershey and Rob MacDonald for their comments and editorial expertise. All verbal diarrhea and errors — in other words, where I failed to heed their advice — are mine.

Footnotes

1. Chas Argent, a former volunteer by the way, is always looking for play testers and proofreaders. If you are not already involved somehow, then why not lend a hand. You will help the hobby, meet some new people and invariably improve your game. You can contact MMP directly through their website, or check the MMP sub-forum on the GameSquad ASL forums.

2. After a five-year hiatus from ASL, Marc Hanna was in Blackpool for the annual Heroes tournament in 2009. Mare wrote about...
5. The list includes the usual suspects. The event organizers also raffle off an impressive通常是topsomewhat dated, explanation of its features andhave not triedthe hobby as a whole.

8. It should be noted that althoughthat we obtain a single-malt whisky for theopening ceremonies. Should you be in Ottawa on

13. The ABS is a variant of the standardbalance provision found on ASL scenario cards. But rather than the customary provision, the ABS employs a tiered system that provides three grades of balance under the side. The system is ideal for tournaments because it allows players greater latitude when bidding for sides. Australian David Longworth is credited with developing ABS for use in Australian tournaments. The first official

14. The designer of the KGP historical modules is Belgian Philippe Léonard. The rest of the credits for these modules reads like a veritablewho’s who of ASL: Bob McNamara, Charles Kibler, Brian Yousse, Chuck Goetz, Perry Cook, and Steve Peterson. The latter four were founding members of MMP.

15. Ian Daglish is a prolific author ofASL articles, a noted scenario designer, and apublishedhistorian.


17. In my view, Ken Dunn remains the driving force behind the Starter Kit line. However, as Ken commented somewhere recent ASL game, the project would never have gotten off the ground were it not for the foresight and support of MMP. As he reiterated in a later email, “Both Perry Cocke and Brian Yousse provide invaluable support for the series. While they provide guidance and feedback for series, without them the series would not exist today and I can’t thank them enough for their generosity. I’m sure that there are also about a hundred others who need to be thanked as well as proofers to play testers, and I’m sorry that I can’t name them all. However, it is really the market that is the driving force behind the series.” Perhaps, but if Ken did not develop the Starter Kit line, I doubt very much that we would have seen so many new and former players enter the hobby in the past decade.

18. The quality of the counter sheetsequaled that of the Starter Kit line. TOT-45 Dogs of War (1996), wherein each side is competing with the others for victory. It would be more than two decades before we would see a similar three-player scenario published (Robert

19. God Save the King (GSTK) focuses on the battle for the Arnhem Bridge in September 1944. The module was released on the 50th anniversary of Operation Market-Garden. HOB was at the forefront of HASL design at time when the release of GSTK material from AH had slowed to a trickle. HOB would go on to produce more historical modules: King of the Hill, Fortress Cassino, and Blood Reef Tarawa (BRT). BRT was eventually sold, along with the rights toGSTK, to MMP. MMP revamped, expanded and subsequently republished BRT, and a renamed and expanded GSTK (A Bridge Too Far), as “official”HASL modules.

20. Many of the better scenarios in the Hell on Wheels scenario pack were later published in theASL Journal: 19 Merzenhausen Zoo, 320 Guns of Naro, J28 Inhumane, and J62 Lee's Charge. There were other mitigating factors that led to Chas suspending production. See View From The Trenches Issues 24,29-30, and 34-35for a bit of background on the so-called confrontation wars of the late 1990s when Hasbro threatened legal action against HOB and in one case, actually issued a court order against another TPP (see note 21 below). Curt Schilling’s candid letter to theASL Mailing List in November 1999 provides a good overview from MMP’s perspective. A transcript of this email can be found in View From The Trenches Issues 29-30, pp. 5-6.

21. Critical Hit began life asCritical Hit Magazine in 1994. Robert Wolkey (and co-editorCurt Schilling) had been producing theASL newsletterFire for Effect for a couple years when he decided to join forces with New Yorker Ray Tapio. Ray’s only experience was in helping to publish the only issue of another ASL newsletterTrailbreak. What Ray lacked in experience, he made up for in vision and ambition. According to Mark Pitzcavage, if we exclude MMP — which acquired a license from Hasbro to produce ASL material in 1998, was deemed risky business for TPP to make a “serious business” of its efforts. Unfortunately, the reputation of Critical Hit and its mercurial owner has been marred by controversy and lacklustre customer service. This reputation may have its roots in the late 1990s when AH threatened legal action for copyright infringement. Mr. Tapio has also been criticized for appropriating the intellectual property of other producers (official or otherwise). See View From The Trenches Issue 16, p. 3 for more background.
What’s so special about precision dice anyway? Precision dice are manufactured as “precise” cubes, equally weighted on all sides. Admittedly, there is no way that dice can be perfectly square. Instead, precision dice are manufactured to strict tolerances. The most notable of these is that each measurement must be true to within 5/1000” of an inch—measured with a micrometer.

Precision dice are manufactured this way in order to ensure as much randomness as possible each time they are rolled. Because each side of a die is the same size and weight as another side, a die will not favour any particular face over another. All this is to say that these dice are not unintentionally “loaded,” as some standard dice are—due to poor quality control. Precision dice will not yield more “snake eyes” than standard dice. At the same time, they will not yield more “boxcars” either. Simply put, precision dice are designed to provide for fair play.

Apart from providing you with a reliable game accessory, we hope that our BattleDices will add some fun to your gaming experience.

Manufacturing Process
The dice are cut from a block of cellulose acetate. Holes for the pips are milled out and later backfilled with paint the same density as the cellulose removed. The paint for each pip is applied with a syringe. The dice go through several polishing and measuring steps.

All designs are foil. The foil is applied with a hot-stamp process, at the end of production. The dice are not engraved.

Characteristics
Ball-cornered dice are ideal for ASL because they:
1. provide more rolling “action” in dice cups, dicetowers and trays;
2. are less likely to chip with prolonged use; and
3. are less likely to damage leather cups, or wooden towers and trays.

Precision dice have a couple other advantages over regular dice:
1. the flush surface reduces sliding and last-second flipping; and
2. the pips are almost ⅛” thick and are therefore less prone to wear.

Sizes and Designs
Bigger dice not only provide a bigger canvas for designs, but also offer an increase in visibility, as the photograph below illustrates. We plan to release dice in each of these sizes. The largest size is reserved for special dice such as our anniversary dice. Our main line will continue to be same size as our BattleSchool dice. We are currently working on a ½” “nationality” line that will feature simple graphics on the “ace” of the white die. However, the matching coloured die will not feature a design. This will reduce the cost of this large set. We are also working on a Rate of Fire die. It can be used either in lieu of the coloured die, or as a third, ROF-only die.

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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!

JUNE DOUBLE ONE 2012
Where: Whittle College, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 3RR.
On-site facilities include en-suite and standard bedrooms, free parking on application, mini market, cash points, a self-service cafeteria and licensed bars. Breakfasts rates start at £30.00 for a single room and breakfast.
Fee: £15.00 if paid before 30 April, £20.00 thereafter.
Format: A 2-day tournament with two rounds on Saturday and one on Sunday offering a choice of scenarios. A number of mini-tournaments are also planned for Friday, and friendly games will also be available.
Contact: For a booking form contact Derek Cox, 25 Crampnhorn Walk, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 2RD or by email at derek.cox@dsl.pipex.com, or Brendan Clark by email at brendan.clark@virgin.net.
Check out the web site at http://www.doubleoneweb.net for the latest details.

OCTOBER ASLOK XXVI
Where: 2 - 9 October
Where: Holiday Inn Airpark, 4181 W 1500th St., Cleveland, Ohio 44135, phone 216-252-7700, fax 216-252-3850 or visit www.holidayinn.com/cle-airport. Rooms are $75.00 plus tax if reservations are made by 21 Sep - request "ASL Oktoberfest" to receive this discounted rate. Check the ASLOK web page for the hotel discount code to book on-line.
Fee: $25.00 in advance, $30.00 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 game 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: Brett Hildebrand, 17810 Grauga Lake Rd, Chaprin Falls, OH 44023-2208 or by email damyra@object.net. Check out the web site at www.aslokk.org for the latest details.

INTENSIVE FIRE 2011
Where: 22 - 28 October
Where: The Kiwi Hotel, West Hill Road, Bournemouth, England, BH2 5EIQ. Telephone (01202) 555 000 or visit www.the-kiwi.co.uk. Rooms are £90.00 per night, double rooms £35.00 per night per person if booked prior to 1 October – thereafter normal rates apply. Remember to mention INTENSIVE FIRE when reserving to qualify for the special rates. You can also book online at www.the-kiwi.co.uk.
Fee: £10.00 for registering with the organisers before 15 October, £15.00 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 September.
Notes: There were three round Fire Tournament three rounds on Saturday on one day. There will also be some single day mini-tournaments on the Friday. Open gaming is available for those who do not wish to take part in the tournament.
Contact: For more details or to register contact Pete Phillips, 9 Pier Road, Kilchoan, Acharacle, Argyll, Scotland, PH36 4LJ. Phone (01972) 510 350 (evenings only) or email lasl@vftt.co.uk. For up to date information check out the UK ASL tournament web site at www.asltourneys.co.uk.

NOVEMBER Grenadier 2011
Where: 10 - 13 November
Where: "Gästehaus Heimbach", Schulstraße 6, Hergarten, Germany. It is a little town in the German part of the Edif. It is 10 Km to Zürich and around 40 Km to Cologne. There is a railway station in Heimbach which is the neighboring town and you can reach it from Cologne by train, which goes every hour. From Heimbach you need to take a taxi to Hergarten which is about 6 Kilometers. The location offers sleeping rooms nearly 60 persons, a huge kitchen (where our Marketenderin Andrea will continue her cooking business for us), a big playing area and an additional separate big room which we will use for eating. Rooms are mostly three and four bed rooms with shower (you will need to bring a sleeping bag or blanket and pillows). Bed and breakfast is €45 per night – single rooms are €60.50 extra.
For: €5 per day.
Format: The tournament will be again a Swiss style five Round tournament. We will offer again an event for players who don’t want to participate in the tournament.
Contact: Christian Koppmeyer, Hagebuttenweg 9, 41564 Knaer, Germany. You can email him at Christian.Koppmeyer@grenadier.de. Check out the Grenadier web site at www.asl-grenadier.de for up to date information.

2012 MARCH HEROES 2012
Where: 8 – 11 March
Where: Culwya Hotel, 569 New South Promenade, Blackpool, England, FY4 1NG. Tel (01253) 341 024. Room rates to be confirmed, in 2011 they were £25.00 for a shared room or £30.00 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 1 March, £15.00 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 February.
Format: Five round tournament beginning Friday morning (arrangements will be made for those unable to arrive until Friday afternoon), with three scenarios to choose from in each round. Players will be expected to have knowledge of the first half of the Chapter 6 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 Phillips, 9 Pier Road, Kilchoan, Acharacle, Argyll, Scotland, PH36 4LJ. Phone (01972) 510 350 (evenings only) or email lasl@vftt.co.uk. For up to date information check out the UK ASL tournament web site at www.asltourneys.co.uk.

JUNE DOUBLE ONE 2012
Where: 22 - 24 June
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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 are also planned for Friday and friendly games will also be available.
Contact: For a booking form contact Derek Cox, 25 Crampnhorn Walk, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 2RD or by email at derek.cox@dsl.pipex.com, or Brendan Clark by email at brendan.clark@virgin.net.
Check out the web site at http://www.doubleoneweb.net for the latest details.
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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.vftt.co.uk/aslers.asp - contact me if you need your user name and password to do so.

Page - View From The Trenches 82 - May - Aug 2011
INTENSIVE FIRE is the UK’s longest running tournament dedicated to the play of Advanced Squad Leader. 2011 sees us well into our second decade and players of all standards are invited to attend.

**Format**
The well-established Fire Team Tournament is the main event and offers the chance for competitive play on the Saturday and Sunday. In addition, the Friday mini-tourneys offer the chance for glory in more specialised fields of warfare. There will also be a Training Camp for inexperienced players. For those not interested in tournament play, or not able to make it for the whole weekend, there is always room for pick-up games and friendly play.

**Venue**
The Kiwi Hotel, centrally located in Bournemouth, offers both excellent gaming facilities and reduced accommodation rates (£40 per night for a single room or £33 for a double room). The hotel is within a short taxi-ride of Bournemouth rail station and ample parking is available. To book contact the hotel on (01202) 555 889 (+44 1202 555 889 from outside the UK). You can also book online at www.kiwhotel.co.uk. For foreign visitors, lifts can often be pre-arranged to and from major airports. For those contemplating an extended stay, Bournemouth offers an excellent base for the military historian, being within easy reach of important military museums at Bovington Camp, Winchester, Portsmouth and Aldershot.

**Cost**
Weekend registration for the tournament costs just £15, or just £10 if you register before 1st October. The tournament program listing the weekend’s scenarios and events is available from late September to anyone registering in advance.

**Further Details / Registration**
Contact Pete Phillipps, 9 Pier Road, Kilchoan, Acharacle, Argyll, Scotland, PH36 4LJ. Telephone (01972) 510 350 (+44 1972 510 350 from outside the UK) or email if@vftt.co.uk.