
A Brief Examination Of Mandatory Fire Grouping

Description



MMP changed the Mandatory Fire Group rule (A7.55) in [ASL Journal 13](#). For ASL grognards, I doubt they even recognized the change since it codified the way we have been playing the game all along. Newer players probably didn't notice it much either since we grognards probably taught you the "correct" way to play. It took a new player to ask why the rule and how we played were not in agreement.

Looking back into the history of the rule book, the passage remained unchanged all the way back to the initial 1st Edition of the rule book. When I dug into it, I recognized the issue and submitted a question to MMP. MMP examined the rule and issued a response and then issued errata in ASL Journal 13. What follows is an examination of the change and how to correctly apply the rule in your own games.

Rules Dive

We are looking at A7.55. The original rule began "***If Good Order units/weapons in the same Location are going to fire at the same target (i.e., at both the same Location and the same unit and the same "simultaneous" [8.1] MF/MP expenditure; see D3.5) during the same phase they must form a FG ...***" We all looked at this for decades and played it how we played it, many of us never taking a moment to examine the rule. Had we done so, we would have probably noticed the problem sooner.

The Problem

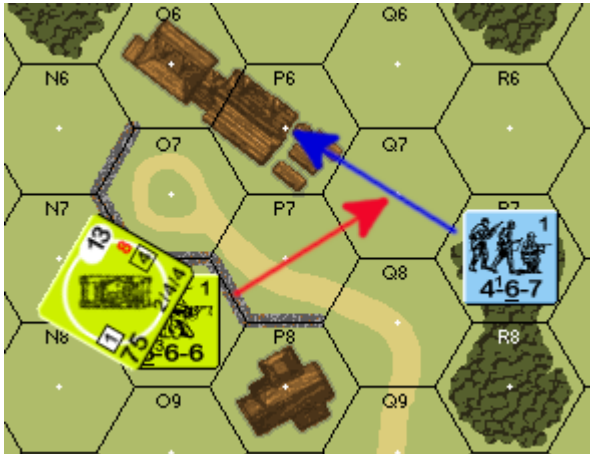


Figure 1

Referring to Figure 1, the German squad attempts to move via Q7, into P6. The American units in O8 wish to fire. In this example, it is important to note the German unit spends one MF in Q7. Could both units fire at the German movement in Q7? Before you decide; I encourage you to go back and read the original rule, especially you grognards out there.

Notice how the rule originally said “Good Order units/weapons firing at the same target (simultaneous MF/MP) must form a Fire Group”. I have condensed the language to make it easier to see but look for yourself before you go on. As originally written, one of the American units would have to forgo their shot.

We all played this wrong for decades. Perhaps the rule was wrong for decades, but as originally written, there was no exception to the rule just because the units couldn’t form a Fire Group. This is precisely what the errata fixed.

The New Rule

The rule now says **“If units/weapons capable of forming a FG with each other in the same Location are going to fire at the same target (i.e., at both the same Location and the same unit and the same “simultaneous” [8.1] MF/MP expenditure; see D3.5) during the same phase they must form a FG”**. Stated more succinctly as “if it can form a Fire Group, it must if it wants to fire”. I think this restatement makes the intent clear.



Referring to Figure 1, now the AFV and the squad can both fire at the German unit spending 1 MF in Q7. The errata now account for units incapable of forming a Fire Group where the original rule did not. I am sure this completely surprises some old hands out there. I know I was when I first recognized the problem.

What Does “Simultaneous” Mean

To understand this rule, you have to know what “simultaneous” means. It means MF spent at the same time. If a unit enters a building, the 2 MF spent to enter are spent “simultaneously”. If the same unit entered the same building and then attempted a Smoke grenade placement, the attempted Smoke dr would not be a “simultaneous” MF. Just because you can attack on each MF spent does not mean you can Fire Group on each MF spent. You will see where this is key in a moment.

Some Examples

What follows is not an exhaustive examination of every combination of Fire Grouping. For some of these examples, the number of options is lengthy. Nor is it intended to be an example of good play. I am trying to provide some good examples of Fire Grouping rules and not showing sound tactical advice.

Example 1

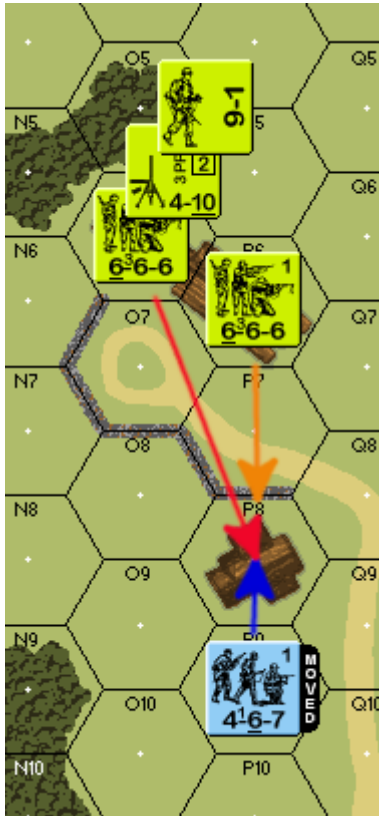


Figure 2

Refer to Figure 2. The German unit enters from off board, pushing into P8 for its last 2 MF. The American units elect to fire. What are their fire options?

The unit in P6 is the most straightforward. It could opt not to fire, waiting for a better target. Alternatively, it may Defensive First Fire (D1F) on the 3rd MF at 6 Fire Power (FP) with a +1 DRM (+2 TEM, -1 FFNAM). If the player wants, it could then Subsequent First Fire (SFF) on the 4th MF for a 2 +1. Of course, it could opt to forgo a SFF shot against this unit hoping for a better shot elsewhere.

The units in O6 are more complicated. Of course, they could opt not to fire and hope for a better shot later. They could opt to fire the MG on the 3rd MF. This prevents the squad from shooting since Mandatory Fire Grouping applies. The MG could shoot again on the 4th MF if it maintained Rate of Fire (ROF). If it did not get ROF, it could fire on the 4th MF as Sustained Fire. If fired as Sustained Fire, the possessing squad and the MMG are marked with a Final Fire counter (A8.3).

Simultaneous

The squad could opt to form a Fire Group with the MG or fire on its own. If it opts to fire



with the MG on the 3rd MF, it could SFF on the 4th (again with the MG [but as Sustained Fire, regardless of whether ROF was retained or not]). Doing so would mark both the squad and the MG with a Final Fire counter (A8.3). Remember the discussion on “simultaneous” expenditure? If the squad chose to fire without the MG on the 3rd MF, it could not include the MG for a SFF attack on the 4th MF, since that would violate the Mandatory Fire Group rule’s “simultaneous” MF portion.

Both squads could opt to form a multi-Location Fire Group. They can mix D1F and SFF options between the units, including splitting their SFF shots between two IFT DR since they are not in the same Location. They can include the MG fire as long as it abides by the “simultaneous” expenditure rules. Keep in mind the Sustained Fire penalties if the possessing squad is already marked First Fire.

Per A7.53, a single leader cannot direct more than one weapon/unit per phase unless they are part of the same FG. Per A7.531, a leader may only direct fire from units in his Location. Other than these limits, the American 9-1 can direct any Fire Group in his Location. If he directs the MG, the leader can direct any subsequent ROF attacks. The leader’s direction can only apply to any FG-or sub-group of the original FG-he directed.

Example 2



Figure 3

Refer to Figure 3. The Germans enter from off board. The first German squad entered P8. Subsequently, the American fires two separate Fire Groups with the MMG maintaining ROF. The stacks are marked with First Fire counters.

Now the second German unit enters the board and moves to N7. What are the American firing options? The unit in P6 could SFF alone. One or two of the squads in O6 could SFF alone. One or both squads in O6 could form a multi-Location Fire Group with P6 and fire together. Mark all firing units with Final Fire counters. Mark the MMG Final Fire if the squad possessing the MMG opts to fire, even if it does not fire the MMG.

Since the MMG maintained ROF, the leader could direct the ROF shot at N7 using his -1 DRM. But since the German unit only used a single MF entering N7, the squad possessing the MMG could not SFF at the same unit. The 9-1 could direct the shot of the possessing squad, or the other O6 squad since he was part of the initial Fire Group. If the American player opts to fire both squads and the MMG, the 9-1's leadership would apply. The downside of this is that we treat the MMG's fire as SFF (Sustained Fire) making the final shot 8 Fire Power. The important thing to note is the 9-1 continues to direct fire only for

units/weapons which were part of the original group he directed.

Additional Examples

Imagine a scenario where the German unit moves into P8. The American squad with its MMG and the 9-1 opt to shoot on the 1st MF to no end. The other squad in O6 could not fire at the German unit as it entered P8—even on the second MF—since the Mandatory Fire Group rule applies per ‘the same “simultaneous” MF expenditure’—not per each individual MF spent. Now the second German unit moves into N7. The American 9-1 cannot direct a Fire Group comprising both squads in O6 since that would be a new Fire Group not made up of only units which he directed earlier. The leader can only direct fire of the squad possessing the MMG and the MMG from this point on.

Suppose both squads in O6 D1F on the 1st MF of the unit entering P8. Imagine they then elect to SFF. Since the 9-1 hasn’t been part of any Fire Group to this point, he could direct this SFF shot by joining the Fire Group. Mark the squads with a Final Fire counter and mark the leader with a First Fire counter.

Soap Box Moment



As an aside (looking at you David Garvin): don’t put your leaders in the middle of your stack like this. It just slows down play. Leaders belong on top of the stack. This is the way.

Example 3

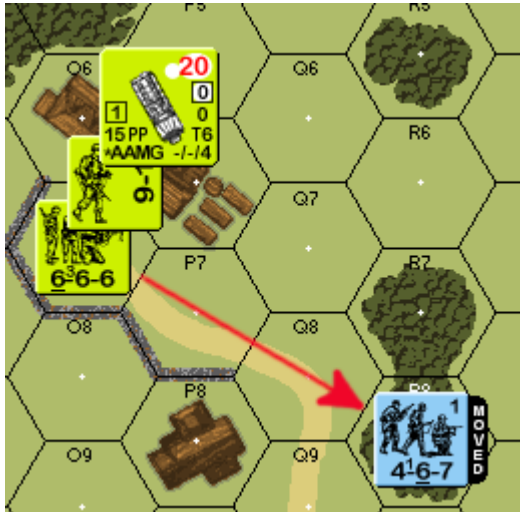


Figure 4

Refer to Figure 4. The German unit enters R8 for 2 MF. The Americans wish to fire on the 1st MF. The 9-1 and squad fire for no effect. Frustrated, the Americans now want to fire the halftrack (ht) on the 1st MF too. Is this allowed?

This is where the mantra “If it can form a Fire Group, it must” helps to clarify the situation. Per D6.64, Carriers and halftracks can Fire Group with Infantry and other Carriers and halftracks. Here, the ht could not fire due to Mandatory Fire Group limitations. We have seen this already, once this decision has been made, other units in the same Location cannot attack on the same “simultaneous” MF.

Now, imagine the German squad attempts to place a Smoke Grenade. This time, a new MF has been spent that was not part of the “simultaneous” expenditure on entry. Now the Americans could opt to fire the ht alone or in a Fire Group with the squad. Note the leader could not direct this second, new Fire Group since the ht was not part of the original Fire Group he directed. If the ht fires alone, the 9-1/squad combo could not fire due to Mandatory Fire Group limitations.

What Is Now Prevented

The original rule referred to “Good Order” units. This meant Berserk units and SW subject to Ammunition Shortage were not subject to Mandatory Fire Group limits. Now, if they can Fire Group, they must (if they want to fire). The old tactic of taking an initial shot with negative modifiers and waiting to see the outcome before applying a second shot with negative modifiers is now illegal.

An Odd Occurrence

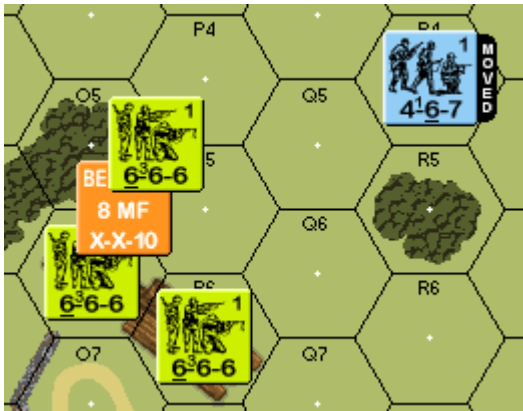


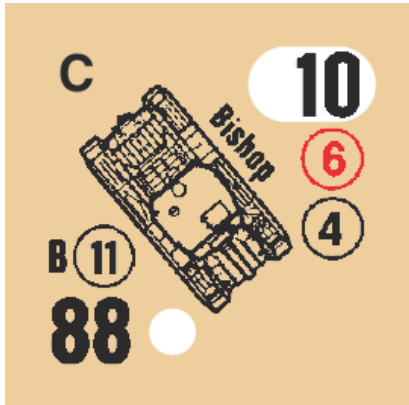
Figure 5

Another odd situation occurs when using a multi-Location Fire Group. Refer to Figure 5. The American units wish to fire on the German squad. If the units in O6 fire, they must form a Fire Group or forgo firepower from one of the American squads (if it can, it must).

Imagine instead, the Americans form a multi-Location Fire Group. Now, per A7.54, the Berserk unit cannot take part in a multi-Location Fire Group. Here, the Berserk unit cannot, but it COULD form a Fire Group with the other squad in its Location. As such, the Berserk unit would have to forgo its shot if the Americans form a multi-Location Fire Group.

The astute amongst you may already see this is practically a difference without distinction since all units are equal in this example. Other examples may be less balanced. Imagine if the Berserk unit possessed a .50 HMG for instance.

Conclusion



I have a confession to make. The first draft of this article was much different than its current appearance. I did not appreciate the meaning of “simultaneous” in the context of A7.55. As such, the article looked very different in this form. To be fair, I am still not convinced I am wrong but there is a Q&A supporting the interpretation presented in this article. I have included it as a footnote below. But this misunderstanding on my part is why I repeatedly hammer the “simultaneous” MF expenditure throughout this article.

There is much I have missed in this article. I was not attempting to be exhaustive in this examination. If you have additional questions, please leave a note in the discussion below. I will try to address your questions there. I will also pay attention to the discussion to see if there is a need for a further clarifying article so participation may generate more articles. Have a great week everyone.